

CHIN P'ING MEI



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE FOLLOWING list includes all characters who appear in the novel, listed alphabetically by surname. All characters with dates in parentheses after their names are historical figures from the Sung dynasty. Characters who bear the names of historical figures from the Ming dynasty are identified in the notes.

An Ch'en, winner of first place in the *chin-shih* examinations but displaced in favor of Ts'ai Yün because he is the younger brother of the proscribed figure, An Tun; becomes a protégé of Ts'ai Ching and is patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, later rising to the rank of secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works; rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

An Ch'en's second wife.

An, Consort. See Liu, Consort.

An Tun (1042–1104), elder brother of An Ch'en, a high official whose name has been proscribed for his role in the partisan political conflicts of the late eleventh century.

An-t'ung, page boy of Aunt Yang.

An-t'ung, page boy of Miao T'ien-hsiu who is rescued by a fisherman and does his utmost to see justice done for the murder of his master.

An-t'ung, page boy of Wang Hsüan.

Apricot Hermitage, Layman of. See Wang Hsüan.

Autumn Chrysanthemum. See Ch'iu-chü.

Barefaced Adept, Taoist master from the Fire Dragon Monastery in the Obdurate Grotto of the Vacuous Mountains from whom Yang Kuang-yen acquires the art of lying.

Bean curd-selling crone who identifies the home of Commander Yüan in Potter's Alley to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Beanpole, The." See Hui-ch'ing.

Black-robed lictor on the staff of Ho Hsin.

Black-robed lictor who announces the arrival of Chang Pang-ch'ang and Ts'ai Yu to congratulate Chu Mien.

Black Whirlwind. See Li K'uei.

Brocade Tiger. See Yen Shun.

Busybody who directs Ch'iao Yün-ko to Dame Wang's teashop when he is looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Cassia. See Li Kuei-chieh.

Chai Ch'ien, majordomo of Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital.

Chai Ch'ien's wife.

Chai Ching-erh, Sutra Chai, proprietor of a sutra printing shop in Ch'ing-ho.

Chai, Sutra. See Chai Ching-erh.

Ch'ai Chin, Little Whirlwind, Little Lord Meng-ch'ang, direct descendant of Ch'in Jung (921–59), emperor Shih-tsung (r. 954–59) of the Later Chou dynasty (951–60).

Ch'ai Huang-ch'eng, paternal uncle of Ch'ai Chin.

Ch'an Master Snow Cave. See P'u-ching.

Chang An, caretaker of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ancestral graveyard outside Ch'ing-ho.

Chang, Auntie, go-between who helps arrange Ch'en Ching-chi's marriage to Ko Ts'ui-p'ing.

Chang Ch'eng, a neighborhood head in Ch'ing-ho.

Chang Ch'ing, a criminal innkeeper with whom Wu Sung seeks refuge after the murder of P'an Chin-lien.

Chang Ch'ing's wife.

Chang Ch'uan-erh, a garrulous chair-bearer in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Wei Ts'ung-erh.

Chang the Fourth. See Chang Ju-i.

Chang the Fourth. See Chang Lung.

Chang Hao-wen, Chang the Importunate, Chang the Second, proprietor of a paper shop in Ch'ing-ho, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo.

Chang Hsi-ch'un, a ballad singer maintained at one time as a mistress by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Chang Hsi-ts'un, an acquaintance of Hsi-men Ch'ing's who invites him to his home for a birthday party.

Chang Hsiao-hsien, Hsiao Chang-hsien, Trifler Chang, "ball clubber" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.

Chang the Importunate. See Chang Hao-wen.

Chang Ju-i, Chang the Fourth, wife of Hsiung Wang, employed in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household as a wet nurse for Kuan-ko and later for Hsiao-ko, sexual partner of Hsi-men Ch'ing after the death of Li P'ing-erh, finally married to Lai-hsing.

Chang Ju-i's mother.

Chang Ko (1068–1113), promoted to the post of vice-minister of the Ministry of Works for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Chang Kuan, brother-in-law of Ch'en Hung and maternal uncle of Ch'en Ching-chi, militia commander of Ch'ing-ho.

Chang Kuan's sister. See Ch'en Hung's wife, née Chang.

Chang Kuan's wife.

Chang Lung, Chang the Fourth, maternal uncle of Meng Yü-lou's first husband Yang Tsung-hsi who unsuccessfully proposes that she remarry Shang Hsiao-t'ang and quarrels with Aunt Yang when she decides to marry Hsi-men Ch'ing instead.

Chang Lung, judicial commissioner of the Liang-Huai region.

Chang Lung's elder sister (Chang the Fourth's elder sister), mother of Yang Tsung-hsi and Yang Tsung-pao.

Chang Lung's wife (Chang the Fourth's wife).

Chang Mao-te, Chang the Second, nephew of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant who first seduces P'an Chin-lien; a major rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in the social world of Ch'ing-ho who, immediately after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, bribes Cheng Chü-chung to intervene with Chu Mien and have him appointed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's former position as judicial commissioner so he can take over where Hsi-men Ch'ing left off.

Chang Mao-te's son, marries Eunuch Director Hsü's niece.

Chang Mei, professional actor of Hai-yen style drama.

Chang, Military Director-in-chief, official in Meng-chou.

Chang, Mr., a well-to-do merchant in Ch'ing-ho who first seduces P'an Chin-lien.

Chang, Mrs., wife of Mr. Chang, née Yü.

Chang, Old Mother, go-between who tries to sell two inexperienced country girls, Sheng-chin and Huo-pao, to P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Chang, Old Mother, proprietress of an inn next door to Auntie Hsüeh's residence.

Chang Pang-ch'ang (1081–1127), minister of rites, promoted to the position of grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, puppet emperor of the short-lived state of Ch'u for thirty-two days in 1127.

Chang the Second. See Chang Hao-wen.

Chang the Second. See Chang Mao-te.

Chang Sheng, Street-skulking Rat, "knockabout" who, along with Lu Hua, shakes down Dr. Chiang Chu-shan at the behest of Hsi-men Ch'ing; later a servant in the household of Chou Hsiu, brother-in-law of Liu the Second; murders Ch'en Ching-chi when he overhears him plotting against him and is beaten to death by Chou Hsiu at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Chang Sheng's reincarnation. See Kao family of the Ta-hsing Guard.

Chang Sheng's wife, née Liu, sister of Liu the Second.

Chang Shih-lien, Ch'en Hung's brother-in-law, related to Yang Chien by marriage, an official in the Eastern Capital.

Chang Shih-lien's wife, née Ch'en, Ch'en Hung's elder sister.

Chang Shu-yeh (1065–1127), prefect of Chi-chou in Shantung, later pacification commissioner of Shantung, responsible for the defeat of Sung Chiang and his acceptance of a government amnesty.

Chang Sung, Little. See Shu-t'ung.

Chang Ta (d. 1126), official who dies in the defense of T'ai-yüan against the invading Chin army.

Chang, Trifler. See Chang Hsiao-hsien.

Ch'ang, Cadger. See Ch'ang Shih-chieh.

Ch'ang the Second. See Ch'ang Shih-chieh.

Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Cadger Ch'ang, Ch'ang the Second, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.

Ch'ang Shih-chieh's wife.

Ch'ang Shih-chieh's wife's younger brother.

Ch'ang Yü, Commandant, officer rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Chao, Auntie, go-between who sells Chin-erh to Wang Liu-erh.

Chao Chiao-erh, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Chao, Dr. See Chao Lung-kang.

Chao Hung-tao, domestic clerk on the staff of Yang Chien.

Chao I (fl. early 12th century), Duke of Chia, twenty-sixth son of Emperor Hui-tsung by Consort Liu.

Chao K'ai (d. c. 1129), Prince of Yün, third son of emperor Hui-tsung by Consort Wang.

Chao, Lama, head priest of the Pao-ch'ing Lamasery outside the west gate of Ch'ing-ho.

Chao Lung-kang, Dr. Chao, Chao the Quack, incompetent specialist in female disorders called in to diagnose Li P'ing-erh's fatal illness.

Chao Lung-kang's grandfather.

Chao Lung-kang's father.

Chao No, investigation commissioner for Shantung.

Chao the Quack. See Chao Lung-kang.

Chao, Tailor, artisan patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Chao-ti, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.

Chao T'ing (fl. early 12th century), prefect of Hang-chou, promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Judicial Review.

Chao, Widow, wealthy landowner from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing buys a country estate adjacent to his ancestral graveyard.

Chao Yu-lan, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Ch'e, Hogwash. See Ch'e Tan.

Ch'e Tan, Hogwash Ch'e, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.

Ch'e Tan's father, proprietor of a wineshop in Ch'ing-ho.

Ch'en An, servant in Ch'en Ching-chi's household.

Ch'en, Battalion Commander, resident on Main Street in Ch'ing-ho from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing declines to buy a coffin after the death of Li P'ing-erh.

Ch'en Cheng-hui (fl. early 12th century), son of Ch'en Kuan, surveillance vice-commissioner of education for Shantung.

Ch'en Ching-chi, secondary male protagonist of the novel, son of Ch'en Hung, husband of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, son-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing who carries on a running pseudo-incestuous affair with P'an Chin-lien that is consummated after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; falls out with Wu Yüeh-niang and is evicted from the household; drives Hsi-men Ta-chieh to suicide; attempts unsuccessfully to shake down Meng Yü-lou in Yen-chou; squanders his patrimony and is reduced to beggary; accepts charity from his father's friend the philanthropist Wang Hsüan, who induces him to become a monk with the Taoist appellation Tsung-mei, the junior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing; is admitted to the household of Chou Hsiu as a pretended cousin of P'ang Ch'un-mei who carries on an affair with him under her husband's nose; also has affairs with Feng Chin-pao and Han Ai-chieh, marries Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, and is murdered by Chang Sheng when he is overheard plotting against him.

Ch'en Ching-chi's grandfather, a salt merchant.

Ch'en Ching-chi's reincarnation. See Wang family of the Eastern Capital.

Ch'en, Dr., resident of Ch'ing-ho.

Ch'en, Dr.'s son, conceived as a result of a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh.

Ch'en, Dr.'s wife, conceives a son in middle age after taking a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh.

Ch'en Hung, wealthy dealer in pine resin, father of Ch'en Ching-chi, related by marriage to Yang Chien.

Ch'en Hung's elder sister, wife of Chang Shih-lien.

Ch'en Hung's wife, née Chang, sister of Chang Kuan, mother of Ch'en Ching-chi.

Ch'en Kuan (1057-1122), a prominent remonstrance official, father of Ch'en Cheng-hui.

Ch'en Liang-huai, national university student, son of Vice-Commissioner Ch'en, friend of Ting the Second.

Ch'en, Master, legal scribe who assists Wu Sung in drafting a formal complaint against Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ch'en, Miss, daughter of the deceased Vice-Commissioner Ch'en whose assignation with Juan the Third results in his death.

Ch'en, Miss's maidservant.

Ch'en, Mistress. See Hsi-men Ta-chieh.

Ch'en the Second, proprietor of an inn at Ch'ing-chiang P'u at which Ch'en Ching-chi puts up on his way to Yen-chou.

Ch'en Ssu-chen, right provincial administration commissioner of Shantung.

Ch'en the Third, "cribber" in the licensed quarter of Lin-ch'ing.

Ch'en the Third, criminal boatman who, along with his partner Weng the Eighth, murders Miao T'ien-hsiu.

Ch'en Ting, servant in Ch'en Hung's household.

Ch'en Ting's wife.

Ch'en Tsung-mei. See Ch'en Ching-chi.

Ch'en Tsung-shan, ward-inspecting commandant of the Eastern Capital.

Ch'en Tung (1086-1127), national university student who submits a memorial to the throne impeaching the Six Traitors.

Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner, deceased father of Miss Ch'en.

Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner, father of Ch'en Liang-huai.

Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner's wife, née Chang, mother of Miss Ch'en.

Ch'en Wen-chao, prefect of Tung-p'ing.

Cheng Ai-hsiang, Cheng Kuan-yin, Goddess of Mercy Cheng, singing girl from the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hua Tzu-hsü, elder sister of Cheng Ai-yüeh.

Cheng Ai-yüeh, singing girl from the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai and Hsi-men Ch'ing, younger sister of Cheng Ai-hsiang.

Cheng, Auntie, madam of the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho.

Cheng, Battalion Commander's family in the Eastern Capital into which Hua Tzu-hsü is reincarnated as a son.

Cheng Chi, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

Cheng Chiao-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, niece of Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh.

Cheng Chin-pao. See Feng Chin-pao.

Cheng Ch'un, professional actor in Ch'ing-ho, younger brother of Cheng Feng, Cheng Ai-hsiang, and Cheng Ai-yüeh.

Cheng Chü-chung (1059–1123), military affairs commissioner, cousin of Consort Cheng, granted the title of grand guardian for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, accepts a bribe of a thousand taels of silver from Chang Mao-te to intervene with Chu Mien and have him appointed to the position of judicial commissioner left vacant by the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Cheng, Consort, (1081–1132), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, niece of Madame Ch'iao.

Cheng Feng, professional actor in Ch'ing-ho, elder brother of Cheng Ai Hsiang, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Cheng Ch'un.

Cheng the Fifth, Auntie, madam of the Cheng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing.

Cheng the Fifth, Auntie's husband.

Cheng, Goddess of Mercy. See Cheng Ai-hsiang.

Cheng Kuan-yin. See Cheng Ai-hsiang.

Cheng, Third Sister, niece of Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng, marries Wu K'ai's son Wu Shun-ch'en.

Cheng T'ien-shou, Palefaced Gentleman, third outlaw leader of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain.

Cheng Wang. See Lai-wang.

Ch'eng-erh, younger daughter of Lai-hsing by Hui-hsiu.

Chi K'an, right administration vice commissioner of Shantung.

Chi-nan, old man from, who directs Wu Yüeh-ning to the Ling-pi Stockade in her dream.

Ch'i family brothel in Ch'ing-ho, madam of.

Ch'i Hsiang-erh, singing girl from the Ch'i family brothel in Ch'ing-ho.

Ch'i-t'ung, page boy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

Chia, Duke of. See Chao I.

Chia Hsiang (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Chia Hsiang's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Chia Jen-ch'ing, False Feelings, neighbor of Hsi-men Ch'ing who intercedes unsuccessfully on Lai-wang's behalf.

Chia Lien, name to which Li Pang-yen alters Hsi-men Ch'ing's name on a bill of impeachment in return for a handsome bribe.

Chiang Chu-shan, Chiang Wen-hui, doctor who Li P'ing-erh marries on the rebound only to drive away ignominiously as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing becomes available again.

Chiang Chu-shan's deceased first wife.

Chiang, Gate God. See Chiang Men-shen.

Chiang, Little, servant of Ch'en Ching-chi.

Chiang Men-shen, Gate God Chiang, elder brother of Chiang Yü-lan, gangster whose struggle with Shih En for control of the Happy Forest Tavern in Meng-chou results in his murder by Wu Sung.

Chiang Ts'ung, Sauce and Scallions, former husband of Sung Hui-lien, a cook in Ch'ing-ho who is stabbed to death in a brawl with a fellow cook over the division of their pay.

Chiang Ts'ung's assailant, convicted of a capital crime and executed as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's intervention.

Chiang Wen-hui. See Chiang Chu-shan.

Chiang Yü-lan, younger sister of Chiang Men-shen, concubine of Military Director-in-chief Chang of Meng-chou who assists her husband and brother in framing Wu Sung.

Ch'iao, distaff relative of the imperial family whose garden abuts on the back wall of Li P'ing-erh's house on Lion Street, assumes hereditary title of commander when Ch'iao the Fifth dies without issue.

Ch'iao Chang-chieh, infant daughter of Ch'iao Hung betrothed to Hsi-men Kuan-ko while both of them are still babes in arms.

Ch'iao, Consort (fl. early 12th century), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, related to Ch'iao the Fifth.

Ch'iao the Fifth, deceased distaff relative of the imperial family through Consort Ch'iao whose hereditary title of commander passes to another branch of the family when he dies without issue.

Ch'iao the Fifth's widow. See Ch'iao, Madame.

Ch'iao Hung, uncle of Ts'ui Pen, wealthy neighbor and business partner of Hsi-men Ch'ing whose daughter, Ch'iao Chang-chieh, is betrothed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's son Kuan-ko while they are still babes in arms.

Ch'iao Hung's concubine, mother of Ch'iao Chang-chieh.

Ch'iao Hung's elder sister, Ts'ui Pen's mother.

Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng.

Ch'iao, Madame, Ch'iao the Fifth's widow, née Cheng, aunt of Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng, and of Consort Cheng.

Ch'iao T'ung, servant in Ch'iao Hung's household.

Ch'iao T'ung's wife.

Ch'iao Yün-ko, Little Yün, young fruit peddler in Ch'ing-ho who helps Wu Chih catch Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien in adultery.

Ch'iao Yün-ko's father, retired soldier dependent on his son.

Ch'ien Ch'eng, vice-magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district.

Ch'ien Ch'ing-ch'uan, traveling merchant entertained by Han Tao-kuo in Yang-chou.

Ch'ien Lao, clerk of the office of punishment in Ch'ing-ho.

Ch'ien Lung-yeh, secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of collecting transit duties on shipping at the Lin-ch'ing customs house.

Ch'ien, Phlegm-fire. See Ch'ien T'an-huo.

Ch'ien T'an-huo, Phlegm-fire Ch'ien, Taoist healer called in to treat Hsi-men Kuan-ko.

Chih-yün, Abbot, head priest of Hsiang-kuo Temple in K'ai-feng visited by Hsi-men Ch'ing on his trip to the Eastern Capital.

Chin, Abbot, Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Eastern Peak on Mount T'ai.

Chin Ch'ien-erh, former maidservant in the household of Huang the Fourth's son purchased by P'ang Ch'un-mei as a servant for Ko Ts'ui-p'ing when she marries Ch'en Ching-chi.

Chin-erh, maidservant of Wang Liu-erh.

Chin-erh, singing girl in Longleg Lu's brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho.

Chin-erh, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Chin-erh's father, military patrolman whose horse is fatally injured in a fall and, for lack of replacement money, is forced to sell his daughter into domestic service.

Chin-kuei, employed in Chou Hsiu's household as a wet nurse for Chou Chin-ko.

Chin-lien. See P'an Chin-lien.

Chin-lien. See Sung Hui-lien.

Chin Ta-chieh, wife of Auntie Hsüeh's son Hsüeh Chi.

Chin-ts'ai, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.

Chin Tsung-ming, senior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.

Ch'in-tsung, Emperor of the Sung dynasty (r. 1125–27), son of Emperor Hui-tsung who abdicated in his favor in 1125, taken into captivity together with his father by the Chin dynasty invaders in 1127.

Ch'in-t'ung, junior page boy in the household of Hua Tzu-hsü and Li P'ing-erh, originally named T'ien-fu but renamed when she marries into the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ch'in-t'ung, page boy of Meng Yü-lou who is seduced by P'an Chin-lien and driven out of the household when the affair is discovered.

Ch'in Yü-chih, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai.

Ching-chi. See Ch'en Ching-chi.

Ching Chung, commander of the left battalion of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, later promoted to the post of military director-in-chief of Chi-chou, and finally to commander-general of the southeast and concurrently grain transport commander.

Ching Chung's daughter for whom he seeks a marriage alliance with Hsi-men Kuan-ko but is refused by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ching Chung's mother.

Ching Chung's wife.

Ch'iu-chü, Autumn Chrysanthemum, much abused junior maidservant of P'an Chin-lien.

Cho the Second. See Cho Tiu-erh.

Cho Tiu-erh, Cho the second, Toss-off Cho, unlicensed prostitute in Ch'ing-ho maintained as a mistress by Hsi-men Ch'ing and subsequently brought into his household as his Third Lady only to sicken and die soon thereafter.

Cho, Toss-off. See Cho Tiu-erh.

Chou, Censor, neighbor of Wu Yüeh-niang's when she was growing up, father of Miss Chou.

Chou Chin-ko, son of Chou Hsiu by P'ang Ch'un-mei the real father of which may have been Ch'en Ching-chi.

Chou Chung, senior servant in the household of Chou Hsiu, father of Chou Jen and Chou I.

Chou, Eunuch Director, resident of Ch'ing-ho whose invitation to a party Hsi-men Ch'ing declines not long before his death.

Chou Hsiao-erh, patron of Li Kuei-ch'ing and probably of Li Kuei-chieh also.

Chou Hsiu, commandant of the Regional Military Command, later appointed to other high military posts, colleague of Hsi-men Ch'ing after whose death he buys P'ang Ch'un-mei as a concubine and later promotes her to the position of principle wife when she bears him a son; commander-general of the Shantung region who leads the forces of Ch'ing-yen against the Chin invaders and dies at Kao-yang Pass of an arrow wound inflicted by the Chin commander Wan-yen Tsung-wang.

Chou Hsiu's first wife, blind in one eye, who dies not long after P'ang Ch'un-mei enters his household as a concubine.

Chou Hsiu's reincarnation, see Shen Shou-shan.

Chou Hsüan, cousin of Chou Hsiu's who looks after his affairs while he is at the front.

Chou I, servant in Chou Hsiu's household, son of Chou Chung and younger brother of Chou Jen, clandestine lover of P'ang Ch'un-mei who dies in the act of intercourse with him.

Chou I's paternal aunt with whom he seeks refuge after the death of P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Chou I's reincarnation. See Kao Liu-chu.

Chou Jen, servant in Chou Hsiu's household, son of Chou Chung and elder brother of Chou I.

Chou, Little, itinerant barber and masseur in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Chou, Miss, daughter of Censor Chou, neighbor of Wu Yüeh-niang's when she was growing up who broke her hymen by falling from a standing position onto the seat of a swing.

Chou, Ms., widowed second wife of Sung Te's father-in-law who commits adultery with him after her husband's death, for which Hsi-men Ch'ing sentences them both to death by strangulation.

Chou, Ms.'s maidservant.

Chou, Ms.'s mother.

Chou the Second, friend of Juan the Third.

Chou Shun, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing female lead parts.

Chou Ts'ai, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Chou Yü-chieh, daughter of Chou Hsiu by his concubine Sun Erh-niang.

Chu Ai-ai, Love, singing girl from Greenhorn Chu's brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, daughter of Greenhorn Chu.

Chu, Battalion Commander, resident of Ch'ing-ho, father of Miss Chu.

Chu, Battalion Commander's deceased wife, mother of Miss Chu.

Chu, Censor, resident of Ch'ing-ho, neighbor of Ch'iao Hung.

Chu, Censor's wife.

Chu family of the Eastern Capital, family into which Sung Hui-lien is reincarnated as a daughter.

Chu, Greenhorn, proprietor of a brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho situated next door to the Verdant Spring Bordello of Auntie Li the Third.

Chu Jih-nien, Sticky Chu, Pockmarked Chu, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter.

Chu Mien (1075-1126), defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, an elite unit of the Imperial Bodyguard that performed secret police functions; relative of Li Ta-t'ien, the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho; chief mover behind the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, for which service to the throne he is promoted to a series of high posts; one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

Chu Mien's majordomo.

Chu Mien's son, granted the post of battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Chu, Miss, daughter of Battalion Commander Chu.

Chu, Pockmarked. See Chu Jih-nien.

Chu, Sticky. See Chu Jih-nien.

Ch'u-yün, daughter of a battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard purchased by Miao Ch'ing to send as a gift to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ch'u-yün's father, battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard.

Ch'un-hsiang, maidservant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.

Ch'un-hua, concubine of Ying Po-chüeh and mother of his younger son.

Ch'un-hung, page boy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

Ch'un-mei. See P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Chung-ch'iu, junior maidservant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household serving at various times Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Wu Yüeh-niang.

Chung Kuei, policeman from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital into whose family Hsi-men Ta-chieh is reincarnated as a daughter.

Ch'ung-hsi, maidservant purchased by Ch'en Ching-chi to serve Feng Chin-pao.

Ch'ung Shih-tao (1051-1126), general-in-chief of the Sung armies defending against the Chin invaders.

Ch'ü, Midwife, maternal aunt of Lai-wang in whose house on Polished Rice Lane outside the east gate of Ch'ing-ho Lai-wang and Sun Hsüeh-o seek refuge after absconding from the Hsi-men household.

Ch'ü T'ang, son of Midwife Ch'ü, cousin of Lai-wang.

Coal in the Snow. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.

Died-of-fright, Miss, wife of Yang Kuang-yen.

False Feelings. See Chia Jen-ch'ing.

Fan family of Hsü-chou, peasant family into which Wu Chih is reincarnated as a son.

Fan Hsün, battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard.

Fan, Hundred Customers. See Fan Pai-chia-nu.

Fan Kang, next-door neighbor of Ch'en Ching-chi in Ch'ing-ho.

Fan, Old Man, neighbor of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Fan Pai-chia-nu, Hundred Customers Fan, singing girl from the Fan Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.

Fang Chen (fl. early 12th century), erudite of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices who reports that a brick in the Imperial Ancestral Temple is oozing blood.

Fang La (d. 1121), rebel who set up an independent regime in the Southeast that was suppressed by government troops in 1121.

Feng Chin-pao, Cheng Chin-pao, singing girl from the Feng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing purchased as a concubine by Ch'en Ching-chi, later resold to the brothel of Auntie Cheng the Fifth who changes her name to Cheng Chin-pao.

Feng Chin-pao's mother, madam of the Feng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing.

Feng, Consort (fl. mid 11th-early 12th centuries), Consort Tuan, consort of Emperor Jen-tsung (r. 1022-63) who resided in the palace for five reigns.

Feng Family Brothel's servant.

Feng Huai, son of Feng the Second, son-in-law of Pai the Fifth, dies of injuries sustained in an affray with Sun Wen-hsiang.

Feng, Old Mother, waiting woman in Li P'ing-erh's family since she was a child, continues in her service when she is a concubine of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh, wife of Hua Tzu-hsi, wife of Chiang Chu-shan, and after she marries Hsi-men Ch'ing, supplementing her income by working as a go-between on the side.

Feng the Second, employee of Sun Ch'ing, father of Feng Huai.

Feng T'ing-hu, left assistant administration commissioner of Shantung.

Fifth Lady. See P'an Chin-lien.

First Lady. See Wu Yüeh-niang.

Fisherman who rescues An-t'ung and helps him to locate the boatmen who had murdered his master.

Flying Demon. See Hou Lin.

Fourth Lady. See Sun Hsüeh-o.

Fu-jung, maidservant of Lady Lin.

Fu, Manager. See Fu Ming.

Fu Ming, Fu the Second, Manager Fu, manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's pharmaceutical shop, pawnshop, and other businesses.

Fu Ming's wife.

Fu the Second. See Fu Ming.

Fu T'ien-tse, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Golden Lotus. See P'an Chin-lien.

Good Deed. See Yin Chih.

Hai-t'ang, concubine of Chou Hsiu much abused by P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Han Ai-chieh, daughter of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh, niece of Han the Second, concubine of Chai Ch'ien, mistress of Ch'en Ching-chi to whom she remains faithful after his death, ending her life as a Buddhist nun.

Han, Auntie, wife of Mohammedan Han, mother of Han Hsiao-yü.

Han, Baldy, father of Han Tao-kuo and Han the Second.

Han, Brother-in-law. See Han Ming-ch'uan.

Han Chin-ch'uan, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, elder sister of Han Yü-ch'uan, younger sister of Han Pi.

Han Hsiao-ch'ou, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, niece of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan.

Han Hsiao-yü, son of Mohammedan Han and Auntie Han.

Han Lü (fl. early 12th century), vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel, brother-in-law of Ts'ai Ching's youngest son, Ts'ai T'ao, grants Hsi-men Ch'ing favorable treatment for his speculations in the salt trade.

Han, Master, formerly a court painter attached to the Hsüan-ho Academy, called upon by Hsi-men Ch'ing to paint two posthumous portraits of Li P'ing-erh.

Han Ming-ch'uan, Brother-in-law Han, husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister who lives outside the city gate of Ch'ing-ho; friend of Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i.

Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng, Mrs. Han, elder sister of Meng Yü-lou.

Han, Mohammedan, husband of Auntie Han, father of Han Hsiao-yü, renter of a room on the street front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property next door to that of Pen Ti-ch'uan and his wife, employed on the staff of the eunuch director in charge of the local Imperial Stables.

Han, Mrs. See Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng.

Han Pang-ch'i, prefect of Hsü-chou.

Han Pi, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho, elder brother of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan.

Han, Posturer. See Han Tao-kuo.

Han the Second, Trickster Han, younger brother of Han Tao-kuo, "knockabout" and gambler in Ch'ing-ho who carries on

an intermittent affair with his sister-in-law, Wang Liu-erh, whom he marries after the death of Han Tao-kuo.

Han Tao-kuo, Posturer Han, husband of Wang Liu-erh, son of Baldy Han, elder brother of Han the Second, father of Han Ai-chieh, manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk store on Lion Street who absconds with a thousand taels of his property on hearing of his death, content to live off the sexual earnings of his wife and daughter.

Han Tao-kuo's paternal uncle, elder brother of Baldy Han.

Han, Trickster. See Han the Second.

Han Tso, boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Han Tsung-jen, domestic clerk on the staff of Yang Chien.

Han Wen-kuang, investigation commissioner for Shantung.

Han Yü-ch'uan, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, younger sister of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Pi.

Hao Hsien, Idler Hao, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.

Hao, Idler. See Hao Hsien.

Ho Ch'i-kao, left administration vice-commissioner of Shantung.

Ho Chin, assistant judicial commissioner of the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, promoted to the post of commander of Hsin-p'ing Stockade and later to the post of judicial commissioner in the Huai-an office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, thereby creating the vacancy filled by Hsi-men Ch'ing in return for the lavishness of his birthday presents to Ts'ai Ching.

Ho Chin-ch'an, singing girl from the Ho Family Bordello on Fourth Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

Ho Ch'in, son of Ho the Ninth who succeeds to his position as head coroner's assistant of Ch'ing-ho.

Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, Dr. Ho, son of Old Man Ho, physician in Ch'ing-ho.

Ho, Dr. See Ho Ch'un-ch'üan.

Ho, Eunuch Director. See Ho Hsin.

Ho Hsin (fl. early 12th century), Eunuch Director Ho, attendant in the Yen-ning Palace, residence of Consort Feng, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Ho Yung-shou, entertains Hsi-men Ch'ing on his visit to the Eastern Capital.

Ho-hua, maidservant of Chou Hsiu's concubine Sun Erh-niang.

Ho Liang-feng, younger brother of Magnate Ho.

Ho, Magnate, wealthy silk merchant from Hu-chou, elder brother of Ho Liang-feng, tries to buy P'an Chin-lien after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, patronizes Wang Liu-erh in Lin-ch'ing and takes her and Han Tao-kuo back to Hu-chou where they inherit his property.

Ho, Magnate's daughter.

Ho the Ninth, elder brother of Ho the Tenth, head coroner's assistant of Ch'ing-ho who accepts a bribe from Hsi-men Ch'ing to cover up the murder of Wu Chih.

Ho, Old Man, father of Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, aged physician in Ch'ing-ho.

Ho Pu-wei, clerk on the staff of the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who assists his son Li Kung-pi in his courtship of Meng Yü-lou.

Ho the Tenth, younger brother of Ho the Ninth, let off the hook by Hsi-men Ch'ing when he is accused of fencing stolen goods.

Ho Yung-fu, nephew of Ho Hsin, younger brother of Ho Yung-shou.

Ho Yung-shou, nephew of Ho Hsin, elder brother of Ho Yung-fu, appointed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's former post as assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission as a reward for Ho Hsin's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, niece of Lan Ts'ung-hsi.

Hou Lin, Flying Demon, beggar boss in Ch'ing-ho who helps out Ch'en Ching-chi when he is reduced to beggary in return for his sexual favors.

Hou Meng (1054-1121), grand coordinator of Shantung, promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Hsi-erh, page boy in the household of Chou Hsiu.

Hsi-men An. See Tai-an.

Hsi-men Ching-liang, Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandfather.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, principal male protagonist of the novel, father of Hsi-men Ta-chieh by his deceased first wife, née Ch'en, father of Hsi-men Kuan-ko by Li P'ing-erh, father of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko by Wu Yüeh-niang, decadent scion of a merchant family of some wealth from which he inherits a wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen of Ch'ing-ho, climbs in social status by means of a succession of corrupt sexual, economic, and political conquests only to die of sexual excess at the age of thirty-three.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter. See Hsi-men Ta-chieh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's first wife, née Ch'en, deceased mother of Hsi-men Ta-chieh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's father. See Hsi-men Ta.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandfather. See Hsi-men Ching-liang.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandmother, née Li.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's mother, née Hsia.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's reincarnation. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko and Shen Yüeh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's sons. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko and Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, posthumous son of Hsi-men Ch'ing by Wu Yüeh-niang, born at the very moment of his death, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Yün Li-shou's daughter, claimed by the Buddhist monk P'u-ching to be the reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and spirited away by him at the end of the novel to become a celibate monk with the religious name Ming-wu.

Hsi-men Kuan-ko, son of Hsi-men Ch'ing by Li P'ing-erh, given the religious name Wu Ying-yüan by the Taoist priest Wu Tsung-che, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Ch'iao Chang-chieh, murdered by P'an Chin-lien out of jealousy of Li P'ing-erh.

Hsi-men Kuan-ko's reincarnation. See Wang family of Cheng-chou.

Hsi-men Ta, deceased father of Hsi-men Ch'ing whose business took him to many parts of China.

Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Mistress Ch'en, Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter by his deceased first wife, née Ch'en, wife of Ch'en Ching-chi, so neglected and abused by her husband that she commits suicide.

Hsi-men Ta-chieh's reincarnation. See Chung Kuei.

Hsi-t'ung, page boy in the household of Wang Hsüan.

Hsiao-ko. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Hsia Ch'eng-en, son of Hsia Yen-ling, achieves status of military selectee by hiring a standin to take the qualifying examination for him.

Hsia-hua, junior maidservant of Li Chiao-erh who is caught trying to steal a gold bracelet.

Hsia Kung-chi, docket officer on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.

Hsia Shou, servant in the household of Hsia Yen-ling.

Hsia Yen-ling, judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, colleague, superior, and rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in his official career.

Hsia Yen-ling's son. See Hsia Ch'eng-en.

Hsia Yen-ling's wife.

Hsiang the Elder, deceased distaff relative of the imperial family through Empress Hsiang, consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85), elder brother of Hsiang the fifth.

Hsiang, Empress, (1046–1101), consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85).

Hsiang the Fifth, distaff relative of the imperial family through Empress Hsiang, consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85), younger brother of Hsiang the Elder, sells part of his country estate outside Ch'ing-ho to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsiao Chang-hsien. See Chang Hsiao-hsien.

Hsiao Ch'eng, resident of Oxhide Street and neighborhood head of the fourth neighborhood of the first subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho.

Hsiao-ko. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Hsiao-luan, junior maidservant of Meng Yü-lou.

Hsiao-yü, Little Jade, junior maidservant of Wu Yüeh-niang, married to Tai-an after Wu Yüeh-niang discovers them in flagrante delicto.

Hsiao-yüeh, Abbot, head priest of the Water Moon Monastery outside the south gate of Ch'ing-ho.

Hsieh En, assistant judicial commissioner of the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.

Hsieh, Fatty. See Hsieh the Third.

Hsieh Hsi-ta, Tagalong Hsieh, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.

Hsieh Hsi-ta's father, deceased hereditary battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard.

Hsieh Hsi-ta's mother.

Hsieh Hsi-ta's wife, née Liu.

Hsieh Ju-huang, What a Whopper, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo who punctures his balloon when he inflates his own importance.

Hsieh, Tagalong. See Hsieh Hsi-ta.

Hsieh the Third, Fatty Hsieh, manager of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Hsin Hsing-tsung (fl. early 12th century), commander-general of the Honan region who leads the forces of Chang-te against the Chin invaders.

Hsiu-ch'un, junior maidservant of Li P'ing-erh and later of Li Chiao-erh, finally becoming a novice nun under the tutelage of Nun Wang.

Hsiung Wang, husband of Chang Ju-i, soldier forced by his lack of means to sell his wife to Hsi-men Ch'ing as a wet nurse for Kuan-ko.

Hsiung Wang's son by Chang Ju-i.

Hsü, Assistant Administration Commissioner, of Yen-chou in Shantung.

Hsü-chou, old woman from, in whose house Han Ai-chieh encounters Han the Second.

Hsü, Eunuch Director, wealthy eunuch speculator and moneylender, resident of Halfside Street in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho, landlord of Crooked-head Sun and Aunt Yang, patron of Li Ming, original owner of Hsia Yen-ling's residential compound, major rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in the social world of Ch'ing-ho whose niece marries Chang Mao-te's son.

Hsü, Eunuch Director's niece, marries Chang Mao-te's son.

Hsü Feng, prefect of Yen-chou in Chekiang who exposes Meng Yü-lou's and Li Kung-pi's attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi.

Hsü Feng's trusted henchman who disguises himself as a convict in order to elicit information from Ch'en Ching-chi.

Hsü Feng-hsiang, supervisor of the State Farm Battalion of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, one of the officials who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.

Hsü the Fourth, shopkeeper outside the city wall of Ch'ing-ho who borrows money from Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsü Hsiang, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Hsü, Master, yin-yang master of Ch'ing-ho.

Hsü Nan-ch'i, military officer in Ch'ing-ho promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade.

Hsü, Prefect, prefect of Ch'ing-chou, patron of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mout T'ai.

Hsü, Prefect's daughter.

Hsü, Prefect's son.

Hsü, Prefect's wife.

Hsü Pu-yü, Reneger Hsü, moneylender in Ch'ing-ho from whom Wang Ts'ai tries to borrow three hundred taels of silver in order to purchase a position in the Military School.

Hsü, Reneger. See Hsü Pu-yü.

Hsü Shun, professional actor of Hai-yen style drama.

Hsü Sung, prefect of Tung-ch'ang in Shantung.

Hsü Sung's concubine.

Hsü Sung's concubine's father.

Hsü, Tailor, artisan with a shop across the street from Han Tao-kuo residence on Lion Street in Ch'ing-ho.

Hsü the Third, seller of date cakes in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.

Hsü Tsung-shun, junior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.

Hsüeh, Auntie, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who also peddles costume jewelry, mother of Hsüeh Chi, sells P'ang Ch'un-mei into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, represents Hsi-men Ch'ing in the betrothal of his daughter Hsi-men Ta-chieh to Ch'en Ching-chi, proposes his match with Meng Yü-lou, arranges resale of P'ang Ch'un-mei to Chou Hsiu after she is forced to leave the Hsi-men household by Wu Yüeh-niang, arranges match between Ch'en Ching-chi and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing after Hsi-men Ta-chieh's suicide.

Hsüeh, Auntie's husband.

Hsüeh Chi, son of Auntie Hsüeh, husband of Chin ta-chieh.

Hsüeh Chi's son by Chin Ta-chieh.

Hsüeh, Eunuch Director, supervisor of the imperial estates in the Ch'ing-ho region, despite his castration given to fondling and pinching the singing girls with whom he comes in contact.

Hsüeh Hsien-chung, official rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Hsüeh, Nun, widow of a peddler of steamed wheat cakes living across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery in Ch'ing-ho who takes the ton-sure after the death of her husband and becomes abbess of the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, defrocked for her complicity in the death of Juan the Third, later rector of the Lotus Blossom Nunnery in the southern quarter of Ch'ing-ho who provides first Wu Yüeh-niang and then P'an Chin-lien with fertility potions, frequently invited to recite Buddhist "precious scrolls" to Wu Yüeh-niang and her guests.

Hsüeh, Nun's deceased husband, peddler of steamed wheat cakes living across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery in Ch'ing-ho.

Hsüeh-o. See Sun Hsüeh-o.

Hsüeh Ts'un-erh, unlicensed prostitute in Longfoot Wu's brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.

Hu, Dr., Old Man Hu, Hu the Quack, physician who lives in Eunuch Director Liu's house on East Street in Ch'ing-ho in the rear courtyard of which Hsi-men Ch'ing hides in order to evade Wu Sung, treats Hua Tzu-hsü, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ch'ing without success, prescribes abortifacient for P'an Chin-lien when she becomes pregnant by Ch'en Ching-chi.

Hu, Dr.'s maidservant.

Hu the Fourth, impeached as a relative or adherent of Yang Chien.

Hu Hsiu, employee of Han Tao-kuo who spies on Hsi-men Ch'ing's love-making with Wang Liu-erh, accompanies his employer on his buying expeditions to the south, and tells him what he thinks about his private life in a drunken tirade in Yang-chou.

Hu, Old Man. See Hu, Dr.

Hu the Quack. See Hu, Dr.

Hu Shih-wen (fl. early 12th century), related to Ts'ai Ching by marriage, corrupt prefect of Tung-p'ing in Shantung who participates with Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling in getting Miao Ch'ing off the hook for murdering his master Miao T'ien-hsiu.

Hu Ts'ao, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing young male lead roles.

Hua the Elder. See Hua Tzu-yu.

Hua, Eunuch Director, uncle of Hua Tzu-yu, Hua Tzu-hsü, Hua Tzu-kuang, and Hua Tzu-hua and adoptive father of Hua Tzu-hsü, member of the Imperial Bodyguard and director of the Firewood Office in the Imperial Palace, later promoted to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan from which post he retires on account of illness to take up residence in his native place, Ch'ing-ho; despite his castration engaged in pseudo-incestuous hanky-panky with his daughter-in-law, Li P'ing-erh.

Hua the Fourth. See Hua Tzu-hua.

Hua Ho-lu, assistant magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.

Hua, Mistress. See Li P'ing-erh.

Hua, Mrs. See Li P'ing-erh.

Hua, Nobody. See Hua Tzu-hsü.

Hua the Second. See Hua Tzu-hsü.

Hua the Third. See Hua Tzu-kuang.

Hua-t'ung, page boy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household sodomized by Wen Pi-ku.

Hua Tzu-hsü, Hua the Second, Nobody Hua, nephew and adopted son of Eunuch Director Hua, husband of Li P'ing-erh, next-door neighbor of Hsi-men Ch'ing and member of the brotherhood of ten, patron of Wu Yin-erh and Cheng Ai-hsiang; cuckolded by Li P'ing-erh, who turns over much of his property to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he loses the rest in a lawsuit and dies of chagrin.

Hua Tzu-hsü's reincarnation. See Cheng, Battalion Commander's family in the Eastern Capital.

Hua Tzu-hua, Hua the Fourth, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.

Hua Tzu-hua's wife.

Hua Tzu-kuang, Hua the Third, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.

Hua Tzu-kuang's wife.

Hua Tzu-yu, Hua the Elder, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.

Hua Tzu-yu's wife.

Huai River region, merchant from, who employs Wang Ch'ao.

Huai River region, merchant from, who patronizes Li Kuei-ch'ing.

Huang An, military commander involved with T'an Chen in defense of the northern frontier against the Chin army.

Huang, Buddhist Superior, monk of the Pao-en Temple in Ch'ing-ho.

Huang Chia, prefect of Teng-chou in Shantung.

Huang Ching-ch'en (d. 1126), defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Wang Ts'ai's wife, née Huang, lavishly entertained by Hsi-men Ch'ing at the request of Sung Ch'iao-nien.

Huang Ching-ch'en's adopted son, granted the post of battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Huang the Fourth, merchant contractor in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Li Chih, ends up in prison for misappropriation of funds.

Huang the Fourth's son.

Huang the Fourth's wife, née Sun, daughter of Sun Ch'ing.

Huang-lung Temple, abbot of, entertains Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou en route to Ch'ing-ho from the Eastern Capital.

Huang, Master, fortune teller residing outside the Chen-wu Temple in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

Huang Mei, assistant prefect of K'ai-feng, maternal cousin of Miao T'ien-hsiu who invites him to visit him in the capital and appeals to Tseng Hsiao-hsü on his behalf after his murder.

Huang Ning, page boy in the household of Huang the Fourth.

Huang Pao-kuang (fl. early 12th century), secretary of the Ministry of Works in charge of the Imperial Brickyard in Ch'ing-ho, provincial graduate of the same year as Shang Hsiao-t'ang.

Huang, Perfect Man. See Huang Yüan-pai.

Huang Yü, foreman on the staff of Wang Fu.

Huang Yüan-pai, Perfect Man Huang, Taoist priest sent by the court to officiate at a seven-day rite of cosmic renewal on Mount T'ai, also officiates at a rite of purification for the salvation of the soul of Li P'ing-erh.

Hui-ch'ing, "The Beanpole," wife of Lai-chao, mother of Little Iron Rod.

Hui-hsiang, wife of Lai-pao, née Liu, mother of Seng-pao.

Hui-hsiang's elder sister.

Hui-hsiang's mother.

Hui-hsiang's younger brother. See Liu Ts'ang.

Hui-hsiu, wife of Lai-hsing, mother of Nien-erh and Ch'eng-erh.

Hui-lien. See Sung Hui-lien.

Hui-tsung, Emperor of the Sung dynasty (r. 1100–25), father of Emperor Ch'in-tsung in whose favor he abdicates in 1125, taken into captivity together with his son by the Chin invaders in 1127.

Hui-yüan, wife of Lai-chüeh.

Hung, Auntie, madam of the Hung Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.

Hung the Fourth, singing girl from the Hung Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.

Hung-hua Temple in Ch'ing-ho, monk from, whom Hsi-men Ch'ing frames and executes in place of Ho the Tenth.

Huo-pao, eleven-year-old country girl offered to P'ang Ch'un-mei as a maidservant but rejected for wetting her bed.

Huo-pao's parents.

Huo Ta-li, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho who accepts Ch'en Ching-chi's bribe and lets him off the hook when accused of driving his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to suicide.

I Mien-tz'u, Ostensibly Benign, neighbor of Hsi-men Ch'ing who intercedes unsuccessfully on Lai-wang's behalf.

Imperial stables in Ch'ing-ho, eunuch director of, employer of Mohammedan Han.

Indian monk. See Monk, Indian.

Iron Fingernail. See Yang Kuang-yen.

Iron Rod. See Little Iron Rod.

Itinerant acrobat called in by Chou Hsiu to distract P'ang Ch'un-mei from her grief over the death of P'an Chin-lien.

Jade Flute. See Yü-hsiao.

Jade Lotus. See Pai Yü-lien.

Jen, Abbot, Taoist priest of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing to whom Wang Hsüan recommends Ch'en Ching-chi as a disciple; dies of shock when threatened with arrest in connection with the latter's whoremongering.

Jen, Abbot's acolyte.

Jen, Dr. See Jen Hou-ch'i.

Jen Hou-ch'i, Dr. Jen, physician in Ch'ing-ho who treats Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing without success, friend of Han Ming-ch'uan.

Jen T'ing-kuei, assistant magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.

Ju-i. See Chang Ju-i.

Juan the Third, dies of excitement in the act of making love to Miss Ch'en in the Ksitigarbha Nunnery during an assignation arranged by Nun Hsüeh.

Juan the Third's parents.

Jui-yün. See Pen Chang-chieh.

Jung Chiao-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai.

Jung Hai, employee of Hsi-men Ch'ing who accompanies Ts'ui Pen on a buying trip to Hu-chou.

Kan Jun, resident of Stonebridge Alley in Ch'ing-ho, partner and manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk dry goods store.

Kan Jun's wife.

Kan Lai-hsing. See Lai-hsing.

K'ang, Prince of. See Kao-tsung, Emperor.

Kao An, secondary majordomo of Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital through whom Lai-pao gains access to Ts'ai Yu.

Kao Ch'iu (d. 1126), defender-in-chief of the Imperial Bodyguard, granted the title of grand guardian for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park; one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

Kao family from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital, family into which Chou I is reincarnated as a son named Kao Liu-chu.

Kao family of the Ta-hsing Guard, family into which Chang Sheng is reincarnated as a son.

Kao Lien, cousin of Kao Ch'iu, prefect of T'ai-an, brother-in-law of Yin T'ien-hsi.

Kao Lien's wife, née Yin, elder sister of Yin T'ien-hsi.

Kao Liu-chu, son of the Kao family from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital, reincarnation of Chou I.

Kao-tsung, emperor of the Southern Sung dynasty (r. 1127–62), ninth son of Emperor Hui-tsung, Prince of K'ang; declares himself emperor in 1127 when the Chin invaders take emperors Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung into captivity; abdicates in favor of Emperor Hsiao-tsung in 1162.

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, wife of Ch'en Ching-chi in a marriage arranged by P'ang Ch'un-mei with whom he continues to carry on an intermittent affair; returns to her parents' family after Ch'en Ching-chi's death and the invasion by the Chin armies.

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's father, wealthy silk dry goods dealer in Ch'ing-ho.

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's mother.

Kou Tzu-hsiao, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing male lead roles.

Ku, Silversmith, jeweler in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing, employer of Lai-wang after he

returns to Ch'ing-ho from exile in Hsü-chou.

Kuan, Busybody. See Kuan Shih-k'uan.

Kuan-ko. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko.

Kuan Shih-k'uan, Busybody Kuan, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.

Kuan-yin Nunnery, abbess of, superior of Nun Wang, frequent visitor in the Hsi-men household.

Kuang-yang, Commandery Prince of. See T'ung Kuan.

Kuei-chieh. See Li Kuei-chieh.

Kuei-ch'ing. See Li Kuei-ch'ing.

Kung Kuai (1057-1111), left provincial administration commissioner of Shantung.

K'ung, Auntie, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Ch'iao Hung's family in arranging the betrothal of Ch'iao Chang-chieh to Hsi-men Kuan-ko.

K'ung family of the Eastern Capital, family into which P'ang Ch'un-mei is reincarnated as a daughter.

Kuo Shou-ch'ing, senior disciple of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.

Kuo Shou-li, junior disciple of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.

Kuo Yao-shih (d. after 1126), turncoat who accepts office under the Sung dynasty but goes over to the Chin side at a critical point and is instrumental in their conquest of North China.

La-mei, maidservant employed in the Wu Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.

Lai-an, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

Lai-chao, Liu Chao, head servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, husband of Hui-ch'ing, father of Little Iron Rod, helps Lai-wang to abscond with Sun Hsüeh-o.

Lai-chao's son. See Little Iron Rod.

Lai-chao's wife. See Hui-ch'ing.

Lai-chüeh, Lai-yu, husband of Hui-yüan, originally servant in the household of a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang, loses his position on exposure of his wife's affair with her employer, recommended as a servant to Hsi-men Ch'ing by his friend Ying Pao, the son of Ying Po-chüeh.

Lai-chüeh's deceased parents.

Lai-chüeh's wife. See Hui-yüan.

Lai-hsing, Kan Lai-hsing, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, originally recruited by Hsi-men Ch'ing's father while traveling on business in Kan-chou, husband of Hui-hsiu, father of Nien-erh and Ch'eng-erh, helps to frame Lai-wang for attempted murder, married to Chang Ju-i after the death of Hui-hsiu.

Lai-pao, T'ang Pao, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household often relied upon for important missions to the capital, husband of Hui-hsiang, father of Seng-pao, appointed to the post of commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün in return for his part in delivering birthday presents from Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ts'ai Ching, embezzles Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death and makes unsuccessful sexual advances to Wu Yüeh-niang, ends up in prison for misappropriation of funds.

Lai-pao's son. See Seng-pao.

Lai-pao's wife. See Hui-hsiang.

Lai-ting, page boy in the household of Hua Tzu-yu.

Lai-ting, page boy in the household of Huang the Fourth.

Lai-ting, page boy in the household of Wu K'ai.

Lai-wang, Cheng Wang, native of Hsü-chou, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, husband of Sung Hui-lien, framed for attempted murder and driven out of the household in order to get him out of the way, carries on a clandestine affair with Sun Hsüeh-o before his exile and absconds with her when he returns to Ch'ing-ho after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death.

Lai-wang's first wife, dies of consumption.

Lai-wang's second wife. See Sung Hui-lien.

Lai-yu. See Lai-chüeh.

Lan-hsiang, senior maidservant of Meng Yü-lou.

Lan-hua, junior maidservant of P'ang Ch'un-mei after she becomes the wife of Chou Hsiu.

Lan-hua, elderly maidservant in the household of Wu K'ai.

Lan Ts'ung-hsi (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan.

Lan Ts'ung-hsi's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Lan Ts'ung-hsi's niece. See Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan.

Lang, Buddhist Superior, monk of the Pao-en Temple in Ch'ing-ho.

Lei Ch'i-yüan, assistant commissioner of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit.

Li An, retainer in the household of Chou Hsiu who saves P'ang Ch'un-mei's life when she is threatened by Chang Sheng and resists her blandishments when she tries to seduce him.

Li An's father, deceased elder brother of Li Kuei.

Li An's mother, persuades Li An to avoid entanglement with P'ang Ch'un-mei by seeking refuge with his uncle Li Kuei in Ch'ing-chou.

Li, Barestick. See Li Kung-pi.

Li Ch'ang-ch'i, father of Li Kung-pi, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho and later assistant prefect of Yen-chou in Chekiang.

Li Ch'ang-ch'i's wife, mother of Li Kung-pi.

Li Chiao-erh, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Second Lady, originally a singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello in Ch'ing-ho, aunt of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, enemy of P'an Chin-lien, tight-fisted manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household finances, engages in hanky-panky with Wu the Second, begins pilfering Hsi-men Ch'ing's property while his corpse is still warm, ends up as Chang Mao-te's Second Lady.

Li Chih, Li the Third, father of Li Huo, merchant contractor in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Huang the Fourth, ends up dying in prison for misappropriation of funds.

Li Chin, servant in the household of Li Chih.

Li Chung-yu, servant on the domestic staff of Ts'ai Ching.

Li, Eunuch Director. See Li Yen.

Li family of the Eastern Capital, family into which P'an Chin-lien is reincarnated as a daughter.

Li Huo, son of Li Chih.

Li Kang (1083-1140), minister of war under Emperor Ch'in-tsung who directs the defense against the Chin invaders.

Li Kuei, Shantung Yaksha, uncle of Li An, military instructor from Ch'ing-chou patronized by Li Kung-pi.

Li Kuei-chieh, Cassia, daughter of Auntie Li the Third, niece of Li Chiao-erh and Li Ming, younger sister of Li Kuei-ch'ing, singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, deflowered by Hsi-men Ch'ing, who maintains her as his mistress for twenty taels a month, adopted daughter of Wu Yüeh-niang, betrays Hsi-men Ch'ing with Ting the Second, Wang Ts'ai, and others.

Li Kuei-chieh's fifth maternal aunt.

Li Kuei-ch'ing, daughter of Auntie Li the Third, niece of Li Chiao-erh and Li Ming, elder sister of Li Kuei-chieh, singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the Licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

Li K'uei, Black Whirlwind, bloodthirsty outlaw from Sung Chiang's band who massacres the household of Liang Shih-chieh and kills Yin T'ien-hsi.

Li Kung-pi, Bare Stick Li, only son of Li Ch'ang-ch'i, student at the Superior College of the National University, falls in love with Meng Yü-lou at first sight and arranges to marry her as his second wife, severely beaten by his father for his part in the abortive attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi, forced to return with his bride to his native place to resume his studies.

Li Kung-pi's deceased first wife.

Li Kung-pi's servant.

Li, Leaky. See Li Wai-ch'uan.

Li Ming, younger brother of Li Chiao-erh, uncle of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh; actor and musician from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho; employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing to teach Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang to sing and play musical instruments; driven out of the house by Ch'un-mei for having the temerity to squeeze her hand during a lesson but allowed to return on many subsequent occasions; assists Li Chiao-erh, Li Kuei-ch'ing, and Li Kuei-chieh in despoiling Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death.

Li Pang-yen (d. 1130), minister of the right, grand academician of the Hall for Aid in Governance, and concurrently minister of rites, alters Hsi-men Ch'ing's name to Chia Lien on a bill of impeachment in return for a bribe of five hundred taels of silver, promoted to the ranks of pillar of state and grand preceptor of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

Li P'ing-erh, Vase, Mrs. Hua, Mistress Hua, one of the three principal female protagonists of the novel, concubine of Liang Shih-chieh, wife of Hua Tzu-hsü, commits adultery with her husband's neighbor and sworn brother Hsi-men Ch'ing, wife of Dr. Chiang Chu-shan, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Sixth Lady, mother of Hsi-men Kuan-ko, dies of chronic hemorrhaging brought on by grief over the death of her son and Hsi-men Ch'ing's insistence on trying out his newly acquired aphrodisiac on her while she is in her menstrual period, commemorated in overly elaborate funeral observances that are prime examples of conspicuous consumption, haunts Hsi-men Ch'ing's dreams.

Li P'ing-erh's former incarnation. See Wang family of Pin-chou.

Li P'ing-erh's deceased parents.

Li P'ing-erh's reincarnation. See Yüan, Commander.

Li Ta-t'ien, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, relative of Chu Mien, appoints Wu Sung as police captain and later sends him to the Eastern Capital to stash his ill-gotten gains with his powerful relative, accepts Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes to abuse the law in the cases of Wu Sung, Lai-wang, Sung Hui-lien, Miao T'ien-hsiu, and others.

Li the Third, seller of won-ton in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.

Li the Third. See Li Chih.

Li the Third, Auntie, madam of the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, mother of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, partially paralyzed, prototypical procuress who milks her customers for all she can get.

Li, Vice-Minister, employer of Licentiate Shui.

Li Wai-ch'uan, Leaky Li, influence peddling lictor on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who is mistakenly killed by Wu Sung in his abortive attempt to wreak vengeance on Hsi-men Ch'ing for the murder of his elder brother Wu Chih.

Li Yen (d. 1126), Eunuch Director Li, entertains Miao Ch'ing in his residence behind the Forbidden City in the Eastern Capital, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

Li Yen's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Liang, Privy Councillor. See Liang Shih-chieh.

Liang Shih-chieh, Privy Councillor Liang, regent of the Northern Capital at Ta-ming Prefecture in Hopei, son-in-law of Ts'ai Ching, first husband of Li P'ing-erh, forced to flee for his life when his entire household is slaughtered by Li K'uei.

Liang Shih-chieh's wife, née Ts'ai, daughter of Ts'ai Ching, extremely jealous woman who beats numbers of maidservants and concubines of her husband to death and buries them in the rear flower garden, forced to flee for her life when her entire household is slaughtered by Li K'uei.

Liang To, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Liang Ying-lung, commandant of security for the Eastern Capital.

Lin Ch'eng-hsün, judicial commissioner in the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.

Lin Hsiao-hung, younger sister of Lin Ts'ai-hung, singing girl in Yang-chou patronized by Lai-pao.

Lin, Lady, widow of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, mother of Wang Ts'ai, former mistress of P'an Chin-lien who learns to play musical instruments and to sing as a servant in her household, carries on an adulterous affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing under the transparent pretext of asking him to superintend the morals of her profligate son.

Lin Ling-su (d. c. 1125), Perfect Man Lin, Taoist priest who gains an ascendancy over Emperor Hui-tsung for a time and is showered with high-sounding titles, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Lin, Perfect Man. See Lin Ling-su.

Lin Shu (d. c. 1126), minister of works rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Lin Ts'ai-hung, elder sister of Lin Hsiao-hung, singing girl in Yang-chou.

Ling, Master, fortune teller in Ch'ing-ho who interprets Meng Yü-lou's horoscope when she is about to marry Li Kung-pi.

Ling Yün-i, prefect of Yen-chou in Shantung.

Little Iron Rod, son of Lai-chao and his wife Hui-ch'ing.

Little Jade. See Hsiao-yü.

Little Whirlwind. See Ch'ai Chin.

Liu, Assistant Regional Commander, officer of the Hsi-hsia army who gives a horse to Chai Ch'ien, who in turn presents it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Liu Chao. See Lai-chao.

Liu Chü-chai, Dr., physician from Fen-chou in Shansi, friend of Ho Yung-shou who recommends him to Hsi-men Ch'ing when he is in extremis but whose treatment exacerbates his condition.

Liu, Company Commander, younger brother of Eunuch Director Liu, indicted for illicit use of imperial lumber in constructing a villa on a newly purchased estate at Wu-li Tien outside Ch'ing-ho, let off the hook by Hsi-men Ch'ing in response to a bribe proffered by Eunuch Director Liu.

Liu, Consort (1088–1121), Consort An, a favorite consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, mother of Chao I.

Liu, Dame, Stargazer Liu's wife, medical practitioner and shamaness frequently called upon by the women of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

Liu, Eunuch Director, elder brother of Company Commander Liu, manager of the Imperial Brickyard in Ch'ing-ho, resides on an estate outside the south gate of the city, intervenes with Hsi-men Ch'ing to get his younger brother off the hook when indicted for misappropriation of imperial lumber but supplies Hsi-men Ch'ing with bricks from the Imperial Brickyard for construction of his country estate.

Liu, Eunuch Director, landlord of Dr. Hu's house on East Street in Ch'ing-ho.

Liu, Eunuch Director, resides near Wine Vinegar Gate on the North Side of Ch'ing-ho, patron of Li Ming.

Liu Hui-hsiang. See Hui-hsiang.

Liu Kao, commander of An-p'ing Stockade, friend of Shih En who gives Wu Sung a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation to him when he is sent there in military exile.

Liu, Mr., official serving in Huai-an who passed the *chin-shih* examinations the same year as Sung Ch'iao-nien.

Liu Pao, servant employed as a cook in Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk dry goods store.

Liu, School Official, native of Hang-chou, educational official in Ch'ing-ho who borrows money from Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Liu the Second, Turf-protecting Tiger, brother-in-law of Chang Sheng, proprietor of My Own Tavern west of the bridge in Lin-ch'ing, pimp and racketeer, boss of unlicensed prostitution in Lin-ch'ing, beaten to death by Chou Hsiu at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei after Chang Sheng's murder of Ch'en Ching-chi.

Liu the Second, Little, seller of ready-cooked food in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.

Liu Sheng, foreman on the domestic staff of Yang Chien.

Liu, Stargazer, husband of Dame Liu, blind fortune teller and necromancer who interprets P'an Chin-lien's horoscope, teaches her a method for working black magic on Hsi-men Ch'ing, and treats Hsi-men Kuan-ko ineffectually.

Liu the Third, servant of Company Commander Liu.

Liu Ts'ang, younger brother of Hui-hsiang, brother-in-law of Lai-pao with whom he cooperates in surreptitiously making off with eight hundred taels worth of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death and using it to open a general store.

Liu Yen-ch'ing (1068–1127), commander-general of the Shensi region who leads the forces of Yen-sui against the Chin invaders.

Lo, Mohammedan, one of the "ball clubbers" patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Lo Ts'un-erh, singing girl of Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsiang the Fifth.

Lo Wan-hsiang, prefect of Tung-p'ing.

Love. See Chu Ai-ai.

Lu Ch'ang-t'ui, Longleg Lu, madam of the brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho where Chin-erh and Sai-erh work.

Lu Ch'ang-t'ui's husband.

Lu, Duke of. See Ts'ai Ching.

Lu Hu, clerical subofficial on the staff of Yang Chien.

Lu Hua, Snake-in-the-grass, "knockabout" who, along with Chang Sheng, shakes down Dr. Chiang Chu-shan at the behest of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Lu, Longleg. See Lu Ch'ang-t'ui.

Lu Ping-i, Lu the Second, crony of Ch'en Ching-chi who suggests how he can recover his property from Yang Kuang-yen and goes into partnership with him as the manager of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Lu the Second. See Lu Ping-i.

Lung-hsi, Duke of. See Wang Wei.

Lü Sai-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho.

Ma Chen, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Ma, Mrs., next-door neighbor of Ying Po-chüeh.

Man-t'ang, maidservant in the household of Li Kung-pi.

Mao-te, Princess (fl. early 12th century), fifth daughter of Emperor Hui-tsung, married to Ts'ai Ching's fourth son, Ts'ai T'iao.

Meng Ch'angling (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Meng Ch'angling's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Meng-ch'ang, Little Lord. See Ch'ai Chin.

Meng the Elder, elder brother of Meng Yü-lou.

Meng the Elder's wife, Meng Yü-lou's sister-in-law.

Meng Jui, Meng the Second, younger brother of Meng Yü-lou, a traveling merchant constantly on the road.

Meng Jui's wife, Meng Yü-lou's sister-in-law.

Meng the Second. See Meng Jui.

Meng the Third. See Meng Yü-lou.

Meng Yü-lou, Tower of Jade, Meng the Third, one of the female protagonists of the novel, widow of the textile merchant Yang Tsung-hsi, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Third Lady, confidante of P'an Chin-lien, marries Li Kung-pi after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, forced to return with her husband to his native place in Hopei after their abortive attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi, bears a son to Li Kung-pi at the age of forty and lives to the age of sixty-seven.

Meng Yü-lou's elder brother. See Meng the Elder.

Meng Yü-lou's elder sister. See Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng.

Meng Yü-lou's son by Li Kung-pi.

Meng Yü-lou's younger brother. See Meng Jui.

Miao Ch'ing, servant of Miao T'ien-hsiu who conspires with the boatmen Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth to murder his master on a trip to the Eastern Capital, bribes Hsi-men Ch'ing to get him off the hook, and returns to Yang-chou where he assumes his former master's position in society and maintains relations with his benefactor Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Miao-ch'ü, teenage disciple of Nun Hsüeh.

Miao-feng, teenage disciple of Nun Hsüeh.

Miao Hsiu, servant in the household of Miao Ch'ing.

Miao Shih, servant in the household of Miao Ch'ing.

Miao T'ien-hsiu, a wealthy merchant of Yang-chou who is murdered by his servant Miao Ch'ing on a trip to the Eastern Capital.

Miao T'ien-hsiu's concubine. See Tiao the Seventh.

Miao T'ien-hsiu's daughter.

Miao T'ien-hsiu's wife, née Li.

Ming-wu. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Mirror polisher, elderly itinerant artisan in Ch'ing-ho who polishes mirrors for P'an Chin-lien, Meng Yü-lou, and P'ang Ch'un-mei and elicits their sympathy with a sob story.

Mirror polisher's deceased first wife.

Mirror polisher's second wife.

Mirror polisher's son.

Monk, Indian, foreign monk presented as the personification of a penis whom Hsi-men Ch'ing encounters in the Temple of Eternal Felicity and from whom he obtains the aphrodisiac an overdose of which eventually kills him.

Moon Lady. See Wu Yüeh-niang.

Ni, Familiar. See Ni P'eng.

Ni, Licentiate. See Ni P'eng.

Ni P'eng, Familiar Ni, Licentiate Ni, tutor employed in the household of Hsia Yen-ling as a tutor for his son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, who recommends his fellow licentiate Wen Pi-ku to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Nieh Liang-hu, schoolmate of Shang Hsiao-t'ang employed in his household as a tutor for his son who writes two congratulatory scrolls for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Nieh, Tiptoe. See Nieh Yüeh.

Nieh Yüeh, Tiptoe Nieh, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.

Nieh Yüeh's wife.

Nien-erh, elder daughter of Lai-hsing by Hui-hsiu.

Nien-mo-ho. See Wan-yen Tsung-han.

Niu, Ms., singing girl in the Great Tavern on Lion Street who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal assault on Li Wai-ch'uan.

Old woman who tells the fortunes of Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh with the aid of a turtle.

Opportune Rain. See Sung Chiang.

Ostensibly Benign. See I Mien-tz'u.

Pai, Baldy. See Pai T'u-tzu.

Pai the Fifth, Moneybags Pai, father-in-law of Feng Huai, notorious local tyrant and fence for stolen goods in the area west of the Grand Canal.

Pai the Fourth, silversmith in Ch'ing-ho, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo.

Pai Lai-ch'iang, Scrounger Pai, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.

Pai Lai-ch'iang's wife.

Pai, Mohammedan. See Pai T'u-tzu.

Pai, Moneybags. See Pai the Fifth.

Pai, Scrounger. See Pai Lai-ch'iang.

Pai Shih-chung (d. 1127), right vice-minister of rites rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Pai T'u-tzu, Baldy Pai, Mohammedan Pai, "ball-clubber" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.

Pai Yü-lien, Jade Lotus, maidservant purchased by Mrs. Chang at the same time as P'an Chin-lien who dies shortly thereafter.

Palace foreman who plays the role of master of ceremonies at the imperial audience in the Hall for the Veneration of Governance.

Palefaced Gentleman. See Cheng T'ien-shou.

Pan-erh, unlicensed prostitute in Longfoot Wu's brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.

P'an Chi, one of the officials from the Ch'ing-ho Guard who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.

P'an Chin-lien, Golden Lotus, P'an the Sixth, principal female protagonist of the novel, daughter of Tailor P'an from outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho who dies when she is only six years old; studies in a girls' school run by Licentiate Yü for three years where she learns to read and write; sold by her mother at the age of eight into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang and Lady Lin where she is taught to play musical instruments and to sing; resold in her mid-teens, after the death of her master, into the household of Mr. Chang who deflowers her and then gives her as a bride to his tenant, Wu Sung's elder brother, the dwarf Wu Chih; paramour of Hsi-men Ch'ing who collaborates with

her in poisoning her husband and subsequently makes her his Fifth Lady; seduces her husband's page boy Ch'in-t'ung for which he is driven out of the household; carries on a running affair with her son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, which is consummated after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; responsible, directly or indirectly, for the suicide of Sung Hui-lien, the death of Hsi-men Kuan-ko, and the demise of Hsi-men Ch'ing; aborts her son by Ch'en Ching-chi; is sold out of the household by Wu Yüeh-niang, purchased by Wu Sung, and disemboweled by the latter in revenge for the death of his elder brother Wu Chih.

P'an Chin-lien's cat, Coal in the Snow, Snow Lion, Snow Bandit, longhaired white cat with a black streak on its forehead that P'an Chin-lien trains to attack Hsi-men Kuan-ko with fatal consequences.

P'an Chin-lien's father. See P'an, Tailor.

P'an Chin-lien's maternal aunt, younger sister of old Mrs. P'an.

P'an Chin-lien's maternal aunt's daughter, adopted by old Mrs. P'an to look after her in her old age.

P'an Chin-lien's mother. See P'an, old Mrs.

P'an Chin-lien's reincarnation. See Li Family of the Eastern Capital.

P'an, Demon-catcher. See P'an, Taoist Master.

P'an family prostitution ring operating out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, madam of.

P'an the fifth, white slaver, masquerading as a cotton merchant from Shantung, who operates a prostitution ring out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, buys Sun Hsüeh-o from Auntie Hsüeh, and forces her to become a singing girl.

P'an the Fifth's deceased first wife.

P'an the Fifth's mother.

P'an, old Mrs., widow of Tailor P'an, mother of P'an Chin-lien, sends her daughter to Licentiate Yü's girls' school for three years, sells her into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang and Lady Lin at the age of eight, resells her in her mid-teens into the household of Mr. Chang, frequent visitor in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household where she is maltreated by P'an Chin-lien who is ashamed of her low social status, adopts her younger sister's daughter to look after her in her old age, dies not long after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

P'an the Sixth. See P'an Chin-lien.

P'an, Tailor, father of P'an Chin-lien, artisan from outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho who dies when P'an Chin-lien is only six years old.

P'an, Taoist Master, Demon-catcher P'an, Taoist exorcist from the Temple of the Five Peaks outside Ch'ing-ho who performs various rituals on Li P'ing-erh's behalf but concludes that nothing can save her.

P'an, Taoist Master's acolyte.

P'ang Ch'un-mei, Spring Plum Blossom, one of the three principal female protagonists of the novel, originally purchased by Hsi-men Ch'ing from Auntie Hsüeh for sixteen taels of silver as a maidservant for Wu Yüeh-niang, reassigned as senior maidservant to P'an Chin-lien when she enters the household, becomes her chief ally and confidante; from the time that her mistress allows her to share the sexual favors of Hsi-men Ch'ing she remains loyal to her right up to and even after her death; after the demise of Hsi-men Ch'ing aids and abets P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'en Ching-chi, the discovery of which leads to her dismissal from the household; purchased as a concubine by Chou Hsiu, she bears him a son and is promoted to the status of principal wife, thereby rising higher in social status than any of the ladies she had formerly served as maidservant; comes to Wu Yüeh-niang's assistance when she is threatened by Wu Tien-en and condescends to pay a visit to her former mistress and to witness at first hand the signs of her relative decline; carries on an intermittent affair with Ch'en Ching-chi under her husband's nose and, after Chou Hsiu's death, dies in the act of sexual intercourse with his servant Chou I.

P'ang Ch'un-mei's deceased father who dies while Ch'un-mei is still a child.

P'ang Ch'un-mei's deceased mother who dies a year after Ch'un-mei's birth.

P'ang Ch'un-mei's reincarnation. See K'ung family of the Eastern Capital.

P'ang Ch'un-mei's son. See Chou Chin-ko.

P'ang Hsüan, clerical subofficial on the staff of Yang Chien.

Pao, Dr., pediatric physician in Ch'ing-ho called in to treat Hsi-men Kuan-ko who declares the case to be hopeless.

Pao-en Temple in the Eastern Capital, monk from, tries unsuccessfully to warn Miao T'ien-hsiu against leaving home before his fatal trip to the Eastern Capital.

Pao, Ms., singing girl in the Great Tavern on Lion Street who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal assault on Li Wai-ch'uan.

Pen Chang-chieh, Jui-yün, daughter of Pen Ti-ch'uan and Yeh the Fifth, concubine of Hsia Yen-ling.

Pen the Fourth. See Pen Ti-ch'uan.

Pen, Scurry-about. See Pen Ti-ch'uan.

Pen Ti-ch'uan, Scurry-about Pen, Pen the Fourth, husband of Yeh the Fifth, father of Pen Chang-chieh, manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various capacities, member of the brotherhood of ten in which he replaces Hua Tzu-hsü after his death.

Pen Ti-ch'uan's daughter. See Pen Chang-chieh.

Pen Ti-ch'uan's wife. See Yeh the Fifth.

Pin-yang, Commandery Prince of. See Wang Ching-ch'ung.

P'ing-an, page boy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, absconds with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, is caught, and allows himself to be coerced by the police chief Wu Tien-en into giving false testimony

that Wu Yüeh-niang has been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an.

P'ing-erh. See Li P'ing-erh.

Prison guard on Chou Hsiu's staff.

Pu Chih-tao, No-account Pu, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten whose place is taken after his death by Hua Tzu-hsü.

Pu, No-account. See Pu Chih-tao.

P'u-ching, Ch'an Master Snow Cave, mysterious Buddhist monk who provides Wu Yüeh-niang with a refuge in Snow Stream Cave on Mount T'ai when she is escaping attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi; at the end of the novel he conjures up a phantasmagoria in which all of the major protagonists describe themselves as being reborn in approximately the same social strata they had occupied in their previous incarnations; convinces Wu Yüeh-niang that her son Hsiao-ko is a reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and spirits him away into a life of Buddhist celibacy as his disciple.

Sai-erh, singing girl in Longleg Lu's brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho.

Sauce and Scallions. See Chiang Ts'ung.

Second Lady. See Li Chiao-erh.

Seng-pao, son of Lai-pao and Hui-hsiang, betrothed to Wang Liu-erh's niece, the daughter of Butcher Wang and Sow Wang.

Servant from the household of Chou Hsiu who is sent to fetch P'ang Ch'un-mei with a lantern.

Servant in the inn at the foot of Mount T'ai where Wu Yüeh-niang and Wu K'ai spend the night on their pilgrimage.

Servant from the Verdant Spring Bordello who runs errands for Li Kuei-chieh.

Sha San, Yokel Sha, one of the "cribbers" and "ball clubbers" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.

Sha, Yokel. See Sha San.

Shamaness brought to the Hsi-men household by Dame Liu to burn paper money and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of the sick Hsi-men Kuan-ko.

Shang Hsiao-t'ang, Provincial Graduate Shang, son of Shang Liu-t'ang, widower in Ch'ing-ho whom Chang Lung proposes unsuccessfully as a match for Meng Yü-lou, provincial graduate of the same year as Huang Pao-kuang, assisted by Hsi-men Ch'ing when he sets out for the Eastern Capital to compete in the *chin-shih* examinations.

Shang Hsiao-t'ang's second wife.

Shang Hsiao-t'ang's son.

Shang Liu-t'ang, Prefectural Judge Shang, father of Shang Hsiao-t'ang, formerly served as district magistrate of Huang Pao-kuang's district and prefectural judge of Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan, resident of Main Street in Ch'ing-ho from whom both Li P'ing-erh's and Hsi-men Ch'ing's coffins are purchased.

Shang Liu-t'ang's deceased wife, mother of Shang Hsiao-t'ang.

Shang, Prefectural Judge. See Shang Liu-t'ang.

Shang, Provincial Graduate. See Shang Hsiao-t'ang.

Shantung Yaksha. See Li Kuei.

Shao Ch'ien, boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Shen, Brother-in-law, Mr. Shen, husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister.

Shen Ching, resident of the Eastern Capital, father of Shen Shou-shan.

Shen, Mr. See Shen, Brother-in-law.

Shen, Second Sister, blind professional singer in Ch'ing-ho recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Wang Liu-erh but driven out of his household by P'ang Ch'un-mei when she refuses to sing for her.

Shen Shou-shan, second son of Shen Ching, reincarnation of Chou Hsiu.

Shen Ting, servant in the household of Brother-in-law Shen.

Shen T'ung, wealthy resident of the Eastern Capital, father of Shen Yüeh.

Shen Yüeh, second son of Shen T'ung, reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Sheng-chin, ten-year-old country girl offered to P'ang Ch'un-mei as a maidservant but rejected for befouling her bed.

Sheng-chin's parents.

Shih Cho-kuei, Plastrancer Shih, shaman in Ch'ing-ho who prognosticates about the sick Hsi-men Kuan-ko through interpreting the cracks produced by applying heat to notches on the surface of the plastron of a tortoise shell.

Shih En, son of the warden of the prison camp at Meng-chou who befriends the exiled Wu Sung, obtains his assistance in his struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern, and gives him a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation to Liu Kao when he is transferred to the An-p'ing Stockade.

Shih, Plastrancer. See Shih Cho-kuei.

Shih Po-ts'ai, corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.

Short-legged Tiger. See Wang Ying.

Shu-t'ung, Little Chang Sung, native of Su-chou, page boy catamite and transvestite presented to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Li Ta-t'ien, placed in charge of Hsi-men Ch'ing's studio where he handles his correspondence and caters to his polymorphous sexual tastes, becomes intimate with Yü-hsiao and when discovered in flagrante delicto by P'an Chin-lien purloins

enough of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property to make good his escape to his native place.
 Shui, Licentiate, scholar of problematic morals unsuccessfully recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing as a social secretary by Ying Po-chüeh; after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death he is engaged by the remaining members of the brotherhood of ten to compose a funeral eulogy for Hsi-men Ch'ing in which he compares him to the male genitalia.
 Shui, Licentiate's father, friend of Ying Po-chüeh's father.
 Shui, Licentiate's grandfather, friend of Ying Po-chüeh's grandfather.
 Shui, Licentiate's two sons, die of smallpox.
 Shui, Licentiate's wife, elopes to the Eastern Capital with her lover.
 Sick beggar whom Ch'en Ching-chi keeps alive with the warmth of his body when he is working as a night watchman.
 Silver. See Wu Yin-erh.
 Singing boys, two boy singers sent under escort all the way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's home in Ch'ing-ho by his host, Miao Ch'ing, after he expresses admiration for their singing at a banquet in the residence of Li Yen in the Eastern Capital.
 Six Traitors, Ts'ai Ching, T'ung Kuan, Li Pang-yen, Chu Mien, Kao Ch'iu, and Li Yen.
 Sixth Lady. See Li P'ing-erh.
 Snake-in-the-grass. See Lu Hua.
 Snow Bandit. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.
 Snow Cave, Ch'an Master. See P'u-ching.
 Snow Lion. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.
 Snow Moth. See Sun Hsüeh-o.
 Southerner who deflowers Cheng Ai-yüeh.
 Spring Plum Blossom. See P'ang Ch'un-mei.
 Ssu Feng-i, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
 Stand-hard. See Tao-chien.
 Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho, cook from.
 Storehouseman in charge of the local storehouse in Yen-chou Prefecture in Chekiang.
 Street-skulking Rat. See Chang Sheng.
 Sun, Blabbermouth. See Sun T'ien-hua.
 Sun Chi, next-door neighbor of Ch'en Ching-chi.
 Sun Ch'ing, father-in-law of Huang the Fourth, father of Sun Wen-hsiang, employer of Feng the Second, merchant in Ch'ing-ho engaged in the cotton trade.
 Sun Ch'ing's daughter. See Huang the Fourth's wife, née Sun.
 Sun Ch'ing's son. See Sun Wen-hsiang.
 Sun, Crooked-head, deceased husband of Aunt Yang.
 Sun Erh-niang, concubine of Chou Hsiu, mother of Chou Yü-chieh.
 Sun Erh-niang's maidservant.
 Sun Erh-niang's maidservant's father.
 Sun Hsüeh-o, Snow Moth, originally maidservant of Hsi-men Ch'ing's deceased first wife, née Ch'en, who enters his household as part of her dowry; Hsi-men Ch'ing's Fourth Lady but a second-class citizen among his womenfolk whose responsibility is the kitchen; enemy of P'an Chin-lien and P'ang Ch'un-mei; carries on a clandestine affair with Lai-wang with whom she absconds when he returns to Ch'ing-ho after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; apprehended by the authorities and sold into Chou Hsiu's household at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei who abuses her, beats her, and sells her into prostitution in order to get her out of the way when she wishes to pass off Ch'en Ching-chi as her cousin; renamed as the singing girl, Yü-erh, working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, she becomes the kept mistress of Chang Sheng until his death when she commits suicide.
 Sun Hsüeh-o's reincarnation. See Yao family from outside the Eastern Capital.
 Sun Jung, commandant of justice for the two townships of the Eastern Capital.
 Sun Kua-tsui. See Sun T'ien-hua.
 Sun T'ien-hua, Sun Kua-tsui, Blabbermouth Sun, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter.
 Sun T'ien-hua's wife.
 Sun Wen-hsiang, son of Sun Ch'ing, brother-in-law of Huang the Fourth, involved in an affray with Feng Huai who dies of his injuries half a month later.
 Sung Chiang (fl. 1117-21), Opportune Rain, chivalrous bandit chieftan, leader of a band of thirty-six outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh whose slogan is to "Carry out the Way on Heaven's behalf," slayer of Yen P'o-hsi, rescues Wu Yüeh-niang when she is captured by the bandits of Ch'ing-feng Stronghold and Wang Ying wants to make her his wife, eventually surrenders to Chang Shu-yeh and accepts the offer of a government amnesty.
 Sung Ch'iao-nien (1047-1113), father-in-law of Ts'ai Yu, father of Sung Sheng-ch'ung, protégé of Ts'ai Ching, appointed regional investigating censor of Shantung to replace Tseng Hsiao-hsü, entertained by Hsi-men Ch'ing who presents him periodically with lavish bribes in return for which he gets Miao Ch'ing off the hook and does him numerous other illicit

favors, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Sung Hui-lien, Chin-lien, daughter of Sung Jen, formerly maidservant in the household of Assistant Prefect Ts'ai who takes sexual advantage of her; sacked for colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery; marries the cook Chiang Ts'ung who is stabbed to death in a brawl; second wife of Lai-wang; carries on a clandestine affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing that soon becomes public knowledge; after Lai-wang is framed for attempted murder and driven out of the household she suffers from remorse and commits suicide.

Sung Hui-lien's reincarnation. See Chu family of the Eastern Capital.

Sung Hui-lien's maternal aunt.

Sung Jen, father of Sung Hui-lien, coffin seller in Ch'ing-ho who accuses Hsi-men Ch'ing of driving his daughter to suicide but is given such a beating by the corrupt magistrate Li Ta-t'ien that he dies of his wounds.

Sung Sheng-ch'ung (fl. early 12th century), son of Sung Ch'iao-nien, elder brother of Ts'ai Yu's wife, née Sung, regional investigating censor of Shensi suborned into traducing Tseng Hsiao-hsü by Ts'ai Ching.

Sung Te, commits adultery with Ms. Chou, the widowed second wife of his father-in-law, for which Hsi-men Ch'ing sentences them both to death by strangulation.

Sung Te's father-in-law, deceased husband of Ms. Chou.

Sung Te's mother-in-law, deceased mother of Sung Te's wife.

Sung Te's wife.

Sung T'ui, eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Ta T'ien-tao, prefect of Tung-ch'ang.

Tai-an, Hsi-men An, favorite page boy of Hsi-men Ch'ing and his sedulous understudy in the arts of roguery and dissimulation; manages to stay on the right side of everyone with the exception of Wu Yüeh-niang who periodically berates him for his duplicity; married to Hsiao-yü after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing when Wu Yüeh-niang discovers them in flagrante delicto; remains with Wu Yüeh-niang and supports her in her old age in return for which he is given the name Hsi-men An and inherits what is left of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property and social position.

T'ai-tsung, emperor of the Chin dynasty (r. 1123–35).

T'an Chen (fl. early 12th century), eunuch military commander with the concurrent rank of censor-in-chief, appointed to replace T'ung Kuan in command of the defense of the northern frontier against the Chin army.

T'ang Pao. See Lai-pao.

Tao-chien, Stand-hard, abbot of the Temple of Eternal Felicity at Wu-li Yüan outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho.

T'ao, Crud-crawler, an elderly resident of Ch'ing-ho who is renowned for having sexually molested all three of his daughters-in-law.

T'ao-hua, maidservant in the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho.

T'ao, Old Mother, licensed go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Li Kung-pi in his courtship of Meng Yü-lou.

Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho, lector of.

Teng, Midwife, called in by Ying Po-chüeh when his concubine, Ch'un-hua, bears him a son.

Third Lady. See Cho Tiu-erh and Meng Yü-lou.

Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin. See Wu Chih.

Ti Ssu-pin, Turbid Ti, vice-magistrate of Yang-ku district who locates the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu after his murder by Miao Ch'ing.

Ti, Turbid. See Ti Ssu-pin.

Tiao the Seventh, concubine of Miao T'ien-hsiu, formerly a singing girl from a brothel on the Yang-chou docks, carries on an affair with her husband's servant, Miao Ch'ing, the discovery of which leads to the beating of Miao Ch'ing and the murder of Miao T'ien-hsiu in revenge.

T'ien Chiu-kao, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

T'ien-fu. See Ch'in-t'ung.

T'ien-hsi, senior page boy in the household of Hua Tzu-hsü and Li P'ing-erh who absconds with five taels of silver when his master takes to his sickbed and vanishes without a trace.

T'ien Hu, bandit chieftan active in the Hopei area.

Ting, Director, Wu K'ai's predecessor as director of the State Farm Battalion in Ch'ing-ho, cashiered for corruption by Hou Meng.

Ting, Mr., father of Ting the Second, silk merchant from Hang-chou.

Ting the Second, Ting Shuang-ch'iao, son of Mr. Ting, friend of Ch'en Liang-huai, a silk merchant from Hang-chou who patronizes Li Kuei-chieh while on a visit to Ch'ing-ho and hides under the bed when Hsi-men Ch'ing discovers their liaison and smashes up the Verdant Spring Bordello.

Ting Shuang-ch'iao. See Ting the Second.

Ting the Southerner, wine merchant in Ch'ing-ho from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing buys forty jugs of Ho-ch'ing wine on credit.

Tou Chien (d. 1127), superintendent of the Capital Training Divisions and capital security commissioner.

Tower of Jade. See Meng Yü-lou.

Ts'ai, Assistant Prefect, resident of Ch'ing-ho from whose household Sung Hui-lien is expelled for colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery.

Ts'ai, Assistant Prefect's wife.

Ts'ai Ching (1046–1126), father of Ts'ai Yu, Ts'ai T'iao, Ts'ai T'ao, and Ts'ai Hsiu, father-in-law of Liang Shih-chieh, left grand councilor, grand academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, grand preceptor, minister of personnel, Duke of Lu, most powerful minister at the court of Emperor Hui-tsung, impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung, patron and adoptive father of Ts'ai Yün and Hsi-men Ch'ing, first of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

Ts'ai Ching's mansion in the Eastern Capital, gatekeepers of.

Ts'ai Ching's mansion in the Eastern Capital, page boy in.

Ts'ai Ching's wife.

Ts'ai family of Yen-chou in Shantung, family of which Hsi-men Hsiao-ko is alleged to have been a son in his previous incarnation.

Ts'ai Hsing (fl. early 12th century), son of Ts'ai Yu, appointed director of the Palace Administration as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Ts'ai Hsiu, ninth son of Ts'ai Ching, prefect of Chiu-chiang.

Ts'ai, Midwife, presides over the deliveries of Li P'ing-erh's son, Hsi-men Kuan-ko, and Wu Yüeh-niang's son, Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Ts'ai T'ao (d. after 1147), fifth son of Ts'ai Ching.

Ts'ai T'iao (d. after 1137), fourth son of Ts'ai Ching, consort of Princess Mao-te.

Ts'ai Yu (1077–1126), eldest son of Ts'ai Ching, son-in-law of Sung Ch'iao-nien, brother-in-law of Sung Sheng-ch'ung, father of Ts'ai Hsing, academician of the Hall of Auspicious Harmony, minister of rites, superintendent of the Temple of Supreme Unity, rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, executed by order of Emperor Ch'in-tsung after the fall of Ts'ai Ching and his faction.

Ts'ai Yu's son. See Ts'ai Hsing.

Ts'ai Yu's wife, née Sung, daughter of Sung Ch'iao-nien, younger sister of Sung Sheng-ch'ung.

Ts'ai Yün, awarded first place in the *chin-shih* examinations in place of An Ch'en when the latter is displaced for being the younger brother of the proscribed An Tun, becomes a protégé and adopted son of Ts'ai Ching, appointed proofreader in the Palace Library, is patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing; after being impeached by Ts'ao Ho he is appointed salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region where his illicit favors to Hsi-men Ch'ing abet his profitable speculations in the salt trade.

Ts'ai Yün's mother.

Tsang Pu-hsi, docket officer on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.

Ts'ao Ho, censor who impeaches Ts'ai Yün and thirteen others from the Historiography Institute who had passed the *chin-shih* examinations in the same year.

Tseng Hsiao-hsü (1049–1127), son of Tseng Pu, regional investigating censor of Shantung, reopens the case of Miao T'ien-hsiu's murder at the request of Huang Mei and arrives at the truth only to have his memorial suppressed when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling bribe Ts'ai Ching to intervene; submits a memorial to the throne criticizing the policies of Ts'ai Ching that so enrages the prime minister that he suborns his daughter-in-law's brother, Sung Sheng-ch'ung, into framing him on trumped up charges as a result of which he is deprived of his office and banished to the furthest southern extremity of the country.

Tseng Pu (1036–1107), father of Tseng Hsiao-hsü.

Tso Shun, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Ts'ui-erh, maidservant of Sun Hsüeh-o.

Ts'ui-hua, junior maidservant of P'ang Ch'un-mei after she becomes the wife of Chou Hsiu.

Ts'ui Pen, nephew of Ch'iao Hung, husband of Big Sister Tuan, employee, manager, and partner in several of Hsi-men Ch'ing's enterprises.

Ts'ui Pen's mother, Ch'iao Hung's elder sister.

Ts'ui, Privy Councilor. See Ts'ui Shou-yü.

Ts'ui Shou-yü, Privy Councilor Ts'ui, relative of Hsia Yen-ling with whom he stays on his visit to the Eastern Capital.

Tsung-mei. See Ch'en Ching-chi.

Tsung-ming. See Chin Tsung-ming.

Tsung Tse (1059–1128), general-in-chief of the Southern Sung armies who retakes parts of Shantung and Hopei from the Chin invaders on behalf of Emperor Kao-tsung.

Tu the Third, maternal cousin of Ying Po-chüeh.

Tu the Third's page boy.

Tu the Third's wife.

Tu Tzu-ch'un, privy councilor under a previous reign living in retirement in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho, engaged by Hsi-men Ch'ing to indite the inscription on Li P'ing-erh's funeral banderole.

Tuan, Big Sister, wife of Ts'ui Pen.

Tuan, Big Sister's father.

Tuan, Consort. See Feng, Consort.

Tuan, Half-baked. See Tuan Mien.

Tuan Mien, Half-baked Tuan, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Tuan, Old Mother, waiting woman in Lady Lin's household whose residence in the rear of the compound is used as a rendezvous by her lovers.

Tung the Cat. See Tung Chin-erh.

Tung Chiao-erh, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who spends the night with Ts'ai Yün at Hsi-men Ch'ing's behest.

Tung Chin-erh, Tung the Cat, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, patronized by Chang Mao-te.

Tung Sheng, clerical subofficial on the staff of Wang Fu.

Tung Yü-hsien, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

T'ung Kuan (1054–1126), eunuch military officer beaten up by Wu Sung in a drunken brawl, uncle of T'ung T'ien-yin, military affairs commissioner, defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, Commandery Prince of Kuang-yang, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.

T'ung Kuan's nephew. See T'ung T'ien-yin.

T'ung, Prefectural Judge, prefectural judge of Tung-p'ing who conducts the preliminary hearing in the case of the affray between Feng Huai and Sun Wen-hsiang.

T'ung T'ien-yin, nephew of T'ung Kuan, commander of the guard, director of the Office of Herds in the Inner and Outer Imperial Demesnes of the Court of the Imperial Stud.

Turf-protecting Tiger. See Liu the Second.

Tutor employed in the household of Miao Ch'ing.

Tz'u-hui Temple, abbot of, recovers the corpse of the murdered Miao T'ien-hsiu and buries it on the bank of the river west of Ch'ing-ho where it is discovered by Ti Ssu-pin.

Vase. See Li P'ing-erh.

Waiter in My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Wan-yen Tsung-han (1079–1136), Nien-mo-ho, nephew of Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1115–23) the founder of the Chin dynasty, commander of the Chin army that occupies K'ai-feng and takes Retired Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity.

Wan-yen Tsung-wang (d. 1127), Wo-li-pu, second son of Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1115–23) the founder of the Chin dynasty, associate commander of the Chin army that occupies K'ai-feng and takes Retired Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity, kills Chou Hsiu with an arrow through the throat.

Wang, Attendant, official on the staff of the Prince of Yün to whom Han Tao-kuo appeals through Hsi-men Ch'ing and Jen Hou-ch'i to be allowed to commute his hereditary corvée labor obligation to payments in money or goods.

Wang, Butcher, elder brother of Wang Liu-erh, husband of Sow Wang whose daughter is betrothed to Seng-pao.

Wang Ch'ao, son of Dame Wang, apprenticed to a merchant from the Huai River region from whom he steals a hundred taels entrusted to him for the purchase of stock, returns to Ch'ing-ho, and uses it as capital to buy two donkeys and set up a flour mill, becomes a casual lover of P'an Chin-lien while she is in Dame Wang's house awaiting purchase as a concubine.

Wang Chen, second son of Wang Hsüan, government student in the prefectural school.

Wang Ch'ien, eldest son of Wang Hsüan, hereditary battalion commander of the local Horse Pasturage Battalion of the Court of the Imperial Stud.

Wang Chin-ch'ing. See Wang Shen.

Wang Ching, younger brother of Wang Liu-erh, page boy employed in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing as a replacement for Shu-t'ung after he absconds, sodomized by Hsi-men Ch'ing during his visit to the Eastern Capital, expelled from the household by Wu Yüeh-niang after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Wang Ching-ch'ung (d. 949), military commissioner of T'ai-yüan, Commandery Prince of Pin-yang, ancestor of Wang I-hsüan.

Wang Ch'ing, bandit chieftan active in the Huai-hsi area.

Wang Chu, elder brother of Wang Hsiang, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Wang, Consort (d. 1117), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, mother of Chao K'ai, the Prince of Yün, related to Wang the Second.

Wang, Dame, mother of Wang Ch'ao, proprietress of a teahouse next door to Wu Chih's house on Amythest Street on the west side of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who is also active as a go-between and procuress; go-between who proposes the match between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang; inventor of the elaborate scheme by which Hsi-men Ch'ing seduces P'an Chin-lien; suggests the poisoning of her next-door neighbor Wu Chih and helps P'an Chin-lien carry it out; intervenes on behalf of Ho the Tenth when he is accused of fencing stolen goods with the result that Hsi-men Ch'ing gets him off the hook and executes an innocent monk in his stead; after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Wu Yüeh-niang discovers P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'en Ching-chi, she expels her from the household and consigns her

to Dame Wang, who entertains bids from Magnate Ho, Chang Mao-te, Ch'en Ching-chi, and Chou Hsiu before finally selling her to Wu Sung for a hundred taels of silver plus a five-tael brokerage fee; that same night she is decapitated by Wu Sung after he has disemboweled P'an Chin-lien.

Wang, Dame's deceased husband, father of Wang Ch'ao, dies when she is thirty-five.

Wang, Dame's son. See Wang Ch'ao.

Wang, distaff relative of the imperial family. See Wang the Second.

Wang family of Cheng-chou, family into which Hsi-men Kuan-ko is reincarnated as a son.

Wang family of the Eastern Capital, family into which Ch'en Ching-chi is reincarnated as a son.

Wang family of Pin-chou, family in which Li P'ing-erh is alleged to have been formerly incarnated as a son.

Wang the First, Auntie, madam of the Wang Family Brothel in Yang-chou.

Wang Fu (1079–1126), minister of war impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung.

Wang Fu's wife and children.

Wang Hai-feng. See Wang Ssu-feng.

Wang Han, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.

Wang Hsiang, younger brother of Wang Chu, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.

Wang Hsien, employee of Hsi-men Ch'ing who accompanies Lai-pao on a buying trip to Nan-ching.

Wang Hsüan, Layman of Apricot Hermitage, father of Wang Ch'ien and Wang Chen, friend of Ch'en Hung, retired philanthropist who provides aid to Ch'en Ching-chi three times after he is reduced to beggary and who recommends him to Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.

Wang Hsüan's manager, in charge of a pawnshop on the street front of his residence.

Wang Huan (fl. early 12th century), commander-general of the Hopei region who leads the forces of Wei-po against the Chin invaders.

Wang I-hsüan, Imperial Commissioner Wang, descendant of Wang Ching-ch'ung, deceased husband of Lady Lin, father of Wang Ts'ai.

Wang I-hsüan's wife. See Lady Lin.

Wang I-hsüan's son. See Wang Ts'ai.

Wang, Imperial Commissioner. See Wang I-hsüan.

Wang K'uan, head of the mutual security unit for Ch'en Ching-chi's residence in Ch'ing-ho.

Wang Lien, henchman on the domestic staff of Wang Fu.

Wang Liu-erh, Wang the Sixth, one of the female protagonists of the novel, younger sister of Butcher Wang, elder sister of Wang Ching, wife of Han Tao-kuo, mother of Han Ai-chieh; paramour of her brother-in-law, Han the Second, whom she marries after her husband's death, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, to whose death from sexual exhaustion she is a major contributor, and of Magnate Ho, whose property in Hu-chou she inherits.

Wang Liu-erh's niece, daughter of Butcher Wang and Sow Wang, betrothed to Seng-pao, the son of Lai-pao and Hui-hsiang.

Wang Luan, proprietor of the Great Tavern on Lion Street in Ch'ing-ho who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal attack on Li Wai-ch'uan.

Wang, Nun, Buddhist nun from the Kuan-yin Nunnery in Ch'ing-ho which is patronized by Wu Yüeh-niang, frequently invited to recite Buddhist "precious scrolls" to Wu Yüeh-niang and her guests, recommends Nun Hsüeh to Wu Yüeh-niang who takes her fertility potion and conceives Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, later quarrels with Nun Hsüeh over the division of alms from Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yüeh-niang.

Wang, old Mrs., neighbor of Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan who appears in Wu Yüeh-niang's nightmare.

Wang, Old Sister, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.

Wang Ping (d. 1126), commander-general of the Kuan-tung region who leads the forces of Fen-chiang against the Chin invaders.

Wang Po-ju, proprietor of an inn on the docks in Yang-chou recommended to Han Tao-kuo, Lai-pao, and Ts'ui Pen by Hsi-men Ch'ing as a good place to stay.

Wang Po-ju's father, friend of Hsi-men Ch'ing's father, Hsi-men Ta.

Wang Po-yen (1069–1141), right assistant administration commissioner of Shantung.

Wang the Second, distaff relative of the imperial family through Consort Wang, landlord of Wu Chih's residence on the west side of Amythest Street in Ch'ing-ho, purchaser of Eunuch Director Hua's mansion on Main Street in An-ch'ing ward of Ch'ing-ho, maintains a private troupe of twenty actors that he sometimes lends to Hsi-men Ch'ing to entertain his guests.

Wang Shen (c. 1048–c. 1103), Wang Chin-ch'ing, commandant-escort and director of the Court of the Imperial Clan, consort of the second daughter of Emperor Ying-tsung (r. 1063–67).

Wang Shih-ch'i, prefect of Ch'ing-chou in Shantung.

Wang the Sixth. See Wang Liu-erh.

Wang, Sow, wife of Butcher Wang whose daughter is betrothed to Seng-pao.

Wang Ssu-feng, Wang Hai-feng, salt merchant from Yang-chou who is set free from prison in Ts'ang-chou by Hou Meng, the grand coordinator of Shantung, as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's intervention with Ts'ai Ching.

Wang the Third. See Wang Ts'ai.

Wang Ts'ai (1078–1118), Wang the Third, feckless and dissolute third son of Wang I-hsüan and Lady Lin, married to the niece of Huang Ching-ch'en, tries unsuccessfully to borrow three hundred taels of silver from Hsü Pu-yü to purchase a position in the Military School, pawns his wife's possessions to pursue various singing girls in the licensed quarter including those patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, tricked into becoming the adopted son of Hsi-men Ch'ing during his intrigue with Lady Lin, continues his affair with Li Kuei-chieh after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Wang Ts'ai's wife, née Huang, niece of Huang Ching-ch'en.

Wang Tsu-tao (d. 1108), minister of personnel.

Wang Tung-ch'iao, traveling merchant entertained by Han Tao-kuo in Yang-chou.

Wang, Usher, official in the Court of State Ceremonial who offers the sixteen-year-old wife of his runaway retainer for sale as a maidservant through Old Mother Feng.

Wang, Usher's runaway retainer.

Wang, Usher's runaway retainer's wife.

Wang Wei, supreme commander of the Capital Training Divisions, Duke of Lung-hsi, granted the title of grand mentor for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Wang Ying, Short-legged Tiger, second outlaw leader of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain who wants to make Wu Yüeh-niang his wife when she is captured by his band but is prevented from doing so by Sung Chiang.

Wang Yu, commander of a training division rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Wang Yü, subofficial functionary on the domestic staff of Ts'ai Ching deputed by Chai Ch'ien to carry a message of condolence to Hsi-men Ch'ing and a personal letter from Han Ai-chieh to Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.

Wang Yü-chih, singing girl from the Wang Family Brothel in Yang-chou patronized by Han Tao-kuo.

Wei Ch'eng-hsün, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Wei Ts'ung-erh, a taciturn chair-bearer in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Chang Ch'uan-erh.

Wen, Auntie, mother of Wen T'ang, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Ch'en Ching-chi's family at the time of his betrothal to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, resident of Wang Family Alley on the South Side of town, active in promoting pilgrimages to Mount T'ai, patronized by Lady Lin for whom she acts as a procuress in her adulterous affairs including that with Hsi-men Ch'ing, involved with Auntie Hsüeh in arranging the betrothal between Chang Mao-te's son and Eunuch Director Hsü's niece.

Wen Ch'en, one of the officials from the Ch'ing-ho Guard who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.

Wen Hsi, military director-in-chief of Yen-chou in Shantung.

Wen, Licentiate. See Wen Pi-ku.

Wen, Pedant. See Wen Pi-ku.

Wen Pi-ku, Warm-buttocks Wen, Pedant Wen, Licentiate Wen, pederast recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing by his fellow licentiate Ni P'eng to be his social secretary, housed across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence in the property formerly belonging to Ch'iao Hung, divulges Hsi-men Ch'ing's private correspondence to Ni P'eng who shares it with Hsia Yen-ling, sodomizes Hua-t'ung against his will and is expelled from the Hsi-men household when his indiscretions are exposed.

Wen Pi-ku's mother-in-law.

Wen Pi-ku's wife.

Wen T'ang, son of Auntie Wen.

Wen T'ang's wife.

Wen, Warm-buttocks. See Wen Pi-ku.

Weng the Eighth, criminal boatman who, along with his partner Ch'en the Third, murders Miao T'ien-hsiu.

What a Whopper. See Hsieh Ju-huang.

Wo-li-pu. See Wan-yen Tsung-wang.

Wu, Abbot. See Wu Tsung-che.

Wu, Battalion Commander, father of Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Wu Yüeh-niang, hereditary battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard.

Wu, Captain. See Wu Sung.

Wu Ch'ang-chiao, Longfoot Wu, madam of the brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.

Wu Ch'ang-chiao's husband.

Wu Chih, Wu the Elder, Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, elder brother of Wu Sung, father of Ying-erh by his deceased first wife, husband of P'an Chin-lien, simple-minded dwarf, native of Yang-ku district in Shantung who moves to the district town of Ch'ing-ho because of a famine and makes his living by peddling steamed wheat cakes on the street, cuckolded by P'an Chin-lien with his landlord, Mr. Chang, and then with Hsi-men Ch'ing, catches P'an Chin-lien and Hsi-men Ch'ing in flagrante delicto in Dame Wang's teahouse but suffers a near-fatal injury when Hsi-men Ch'ing kicks him in the solar plexus, poisoned by P'an Chin-lien with arsenic supplied by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Wu Chih's daughter. See Ying-erh.

Wu Chih's deceased first wife, mother of Ying-erh.

Wu Chih's second wife. See P'an Chin-lien.

Wu the Elder. See Wu Chih.

Wu the Fourth, Auntie, madam of the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

Wu, Heartless. See Wu Tien-en.

Wu Hsün, secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Wu Hui, younger brother of Wu Yin-erh, actor and musician from the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.

Wu, Immortal. See Wu Shih.

Wu K'ai, eldest son of Battalion Commander Wu, elder brother of Wu the Second, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Wu Yüeh-niang, father of Wu Shun-ch'en, brother-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing, inherits the position of battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard upon the death of his father, deputed to repair the local Charity Granary, promoted to the rank of assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard in charge of the local State Farm Battalion as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's influence with Sung Ch'iao-nien, accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang on her pilgrimage to Mount T'ai after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing and is instrumental in rescuing her from attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi.

Wu K'ai's son. See Wu Shun-ch'en.

Wu K'ai's wife, Sister-in-law Wu, mother of Wu Shun-ch'en, sister-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing and a frequent guest in his household.

Wu, Longfoot. See Wu Ch'ang-chiao.

Wu the Second, second son of Battalion Commander Wu, younger brother of Wu K'ai, second elder brother of Wu Yüeh-niang, brother-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing and manager of his silk store on Lion Street; engages in hanky-panky with Li Chiao-erh for which he is denied access to the household by Wu Yüeh-niang when it is discovered after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing although he continues to manage the silk store and later, along with Tai-an, the wholesale pharmaceutical business; accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and Hsi-men Hsiao-ko when they flee the invading Chin armies to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan; ten days after the climactic encounter with P'u-ching in the Temple of Eternal Felicity and Wu Yüeh-niang's relinquishment of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko to a life of Buddhist celibacy he accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, and Hsiao-yü back to their now truncated household in Ch'ing-ho.

Wu the Second. See Wu Sung.

Wu the Second's wife, wife of Wu Yüeh-niang's second elder brother.

Wu Shih, Immortal Wu, Taoist physiognomist introduced to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Chou Hsiu who accurately foretells his fortune and those of his wife and concubines as well as Hsi-men Ta-chieh and P'ang Ch'un-mei; when Hsi-men Ch'ing is on his deathbed he is called in again and reports that there is no hope for him.

Wu Shih's servant boy.

Wu Shun-ch'en, son of Wu K'ai, husband of Third Sister Cheng.

Wu, Sister-in-law. See Wu K'ai's wife.

Wu Sung, Wu the Second, Captain Wu, younger brother of Wu Chih, brother-in-law of P'an Chin-lien; impulsive and implacable exponent of the code of honor; becomes a fugitive from the law for beating up T'ung Kuan in a drunken brawl; slays a tiger in single-handed combat while on his way to visit his brother and is made police captain in Ch'ing-ho for this feat; rejects attempted seduction by P'an Chin-lien and tells her off in no uncertain terms; delivers Li Ta-t'ien's illicit gains from his magistracy to the safe keeping of Chu Mien in the Eastern Capital; returns to Ch'ing-ho and mistakenly kills Li Wai-ch'uan while seeking to avenge the murder of his brother; is sentenced to military exile in Meng-chou where he is befriended by Shih En and helps him in his struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern; is framed by Military Director-in-chief Chang with the help of his concubine, Chiang Yü-lan, the younger sister of Chiang Men-shen, in revenge for which he murders his two guards and the entire households of Military Director-in-chief Chang and Chiang Men-shen; sets out for An-p'ing Stockade with a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation from Shih En but is enabled by a general amnesty to return to Ch'ing-ho where he buys P'an Chin-lien from Dame Wang for a hundred taels of silver and disembowels her to avenge the death of his brother; once more a fugitive he disguises himself as a Buddhist ascetic with the help of the criminal innkeepers Chang Ch'ing and his wife and goes to join Sung Chiang's band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh.

Wu-t'ai, Mount, monk from, who solicits alms from Wu Yüeh-niang for the repair of his temple.

Wu Tien-en, Heartless Wu, originally a Yin-yang master on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who has been removed from his post for cause; makes his living by hanging around in front of the yamen and acting as a guarantor for loans to local officials and functionaries; crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing; member of the brotherhood of ten; manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various of his enterprises; misrepresents himself as Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law and is appointed to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station in return for his part in delivering birthday presents from Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ts'ai Ching; receives an interest-free loan of one hundred taels from Hsi-men Ch'ing to help cover the expenses of assuming office; promoted to the position of police chief of a suburb of Ch'ing-ho after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing he apprehends the runaway P'ing-an and coerces him into giving false testimony that Wu Yüeh-niang has been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an, but when Wu Yüeh-niang appeals to P'ang Ch'un-mei he is dragged before Chou Hsiu's higher court and thoroughly humiliated.

Wu Tsung-che, Abbot Wu, head priest of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho, presides over the elaborate Taoist ceremony at which Hsi-men Kuan-ko is made an infant Taoist priest with the religious name Wu Ying-yüan, later officiates at funeral observances for Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Wu Yin-erh, Silver, elder sister of Wu Hui, singing girl from the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley of the licensed quarter in Ch'ing-ho, sweetheart of Hua Tzu-hsü, adopted daughter of Li P'ing-erh.

Wu Ying-yüan. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko.

Wu Yüeh-niang, Moon Lady, one of the female protagonists of the novel, daughter of Battalion Commander Wu, younger sister of Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, and an elder sister; second wife and First Lady of Hsi-men Ch'ing who marries her after the death of his first wife, née Ch'en, in a match proposed by Dame Wang; stepmother of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, mother of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko; a pious, credulous, and conventional Buddhist laywoman who constantly invites Nun Wang and Nun Hsüeh to the household to recite "precious scrolls" on the themes of salvation, retribution, and reincarnation, who has good intentions but is generally ineffectual at household management and is not a good judge of character; colludes with Hsi-men Ch'ing in taking secret possession of Li P'ing-erh's ill-gotten property but quarrels with him over admitting her to the household; suffers a miscarriage but later takes Nun Hsüeh's fertility potion and conceives Hsi-men Hsiao-ko who is born at the very moment of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; thoughtlessly betroths both Kuan-ko and Hsiao-ko to inappropriate partners while they are still babes in arms; makes a pilgrimage to Mount T'ai after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death and narrowly escapes an attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi and capture by the bandits on Ch'ing-feng Mountain; expels P'an Chin-lien, P'ang Ch'un-mei, and Ch'en Ching-chi from the household when she belatedly discovers their perfidy but is unable to cope effectively with the declining fortunes of the family; forced to seek the assistance of P'ang Ch'un-mei when she is threatened by Wu Tien-en she has no alternative but to accept the condescension of her former maidservant; while fleeing from the invading Chin armies to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan she encounters P'u-ching and spends the night in the Temple of Eternal Felicity where she dreams that Yün Li-shou threatens her with rape if she refuses to marry him; still traumatized by this nightmare, she allows P'u-ching to persuade her that Hsiao-ko is the reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and relinquishes her teenage son to a life of Buddhist celibacy without so much as asking his opinion; on returning safely to Ch'ing-ho she adopts Tai-an as her husband's heir, renaming him Hsi-men An, and lives in reduced circumstances, presiding over a truncated household, until dying a natural death at the age of sixty-nine.

Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, wife of Brother-in-law Shen.

Yang, Aunt, widow of Crooked-head Sun, paternal aunt of Yang Tsung-hsi and Yang Tsung-pao, forceful advocate of Meng Yü-lou's remarriage to Hsi-men Ch'ing after the latter offers her a hundred taels of silver for her support, quarrels with Chang Lung when he tries to prevent this match.

Yang Chien (d. 1121), Commander Yang, eunuch military officer related to Ch'en Hung by marriage, commander in chief of the Imperial Guard in the Eastern Capital, bribed by Hsi-men Ch'ing to intervene on his behalf against Wu Sung and in favor of Hua Tzu-hsü, impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung, reported in a letter from Chai Ch'ien to Hsi-men Ch'ing to have died in prison in 1117.

Yang, Commander. See Yang Chien.

Yang the Elder. See Yang Kuang-yen.

Yang Erh-feng, second son of Yang Pu-lai and his wife, née Pai, younger brother of Yang Kuang-yen, a gambler and tough guy who scares off Ch'en Ching-chi when he tries to recover the half shipload of property that Yang Kuang-yen had stolen from him.

Yang Kuang-yen, Yang the Elder, Iron Fingernail, native of Nobottom ward in Carryoff village of Makebelieve district in Nonesuch subprefecture, son of Yang Pu-lai and his wife, née Pai, disciple of the Barefaced Adept from whom he acquires the art of lying, husband of Miss Died-of-fright, con man employed by Ch'en Ching-chi who absconds with half a shipload of his property while he is in Yen-chou trying to shake down Meng Yü-lou and invests it in the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing only to lose everything when Ch'en Ching-chi sues him with the backing of Chou Hsiu and takes over ownership of the tavern.

Yang Kuang-yen's father. See Yang Pu-lai.

Yang Kuang-yen's mother, née Pai.

Yang Kuang-yen's page boy.

Yang Kuang-yen's wife. See Died-of-fright, Miss.

Yang, Poor-parent. See Yang Pu-lai.

Yang, Prefect. See Yang Shih.

Yang Pu-lai, Poor-parent Yang, father of Yang Kuang-yen and Yang Erh-feng, brother-in-law of Yao the Second.

Yang Sheng, factotum on the domestic staff of Yang Chien.

Yang Shih (1053-1135), Prefect Yang, prefect of K'ai-feng, protégé of Ts'ai Ching, agrees under pressure from Ts'ai Ching and Yang Chien to treat Hua Tzu-hsü leniently when he is sued over the division of Eunuch Director Hua's property by his brothers Hua Tzu-yu, Hua Tzu-kuang, and Hua Tzu-hua.

Yang T'ing-p'ei, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Yang Tsung-hsi, deceased first husband of Meng Yü-lou, elder brother of Yang Tsung-pao, nephew on his father's side of Aunt Yang and on his mother's side of Chang Lung, textile merchant residing on Stinkwater Lane outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho.

Yang Tsung-hsi's maternal uncle. See Chang Lung.

Yang Tsung-hsi's mother. See Chang Lung's elder sister.

Yang Tsung-hsi's paternal aunt. See Yang, Aunt.

Yang Tsung-pao, younger brother of Yang Tsung-hsi, nephew on his father's side of Aunt Yang and on his mother's side of Chang Lung, brother-in-law of Meng Yü-lou.

Yang Wei-chung (1067-1132), commander-general of the Shansi region who leads the forces of Tse-lu against the Chin invaders.

Yao family from outside the Eastern Capital, poor family into which Sun Hsüeh-o is reincarnated as a daughter.

Yao the Second, brother-in-law of Yang Pu-lai, neighbor of Wu Chih to whom Wu Sung entrusts his orphaned niece Ying-erh when he is condemned to military exile in Meng-chou; gives Ying-erh back to Wu Sung when he returns to Ch'ing-ho five years later only to repossess her after the inquest on P'an Chin-lien's murder when Wu Sung once more becomes a fugitive; later arranges for her marriage.

Yeh the Ascetic, one-eyed illiterate Buddhist ascetic employed as a cook by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh of the Water Moon Monastery outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho, physiognomizes Ch'en Ching-chi when he is reduced to penury and working nearby as a day laborer.

Yeh Ch'ien, prefect of Lai-chou in Shantung.

Yeh the Fifth, wife of Pen Ti-ch'uan, mother of Pen Chang-chieh, originally a wet nurse who elopes with her fellow employee Pen Ti-ch'uan, carries on an intermittent affair with Tai-an while at the same time complaisantly accepting the sexual favors of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Yen the Fourth, neighbor of Han Tao-kuo who informs him of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death when their boats pass each other on the Grand Canal at Lin-ch'ing.

Yen P'o-hsi, singing girl slain by Sung Chiang.

Yen Shun, Brocade Tiger, outlaw chieftan of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain who is persuaded by Sung Chiang to let the captured Wu Yüeh-niang go rather than allowing Wang Ying to make her his wife.

Yin Chih, Good Deed, chief clerk in charge of the files in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission who recognizes that Lai-wang has been framed by Hsi-men Ch'ing and manages to get his sentence reduced and to have him treated more leniently.

Yin Ching, vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel.

Yin Ta-liang, regional investigating censor of Liang-che, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Yin T'ien-hsi, Year Star Yin, younger brother of Kao Lien's wife, née Yin, dissolute wastrel who takes advantage of his official connections to lord it over the Mount T'ai area with a gang of followers at his disposal, colludes with Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai, in attempting to rape Wu Yüeh-niang when she visits the temple on a pilgrimage after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; later killed at Sung Chiang's behest by the outlaw, Li K'uei.

Yin, Year Star. See Yin T'ien-hsi.

Ying, Beggar. See Ying Po-chüeh.

Ying-ch'un, disciple of Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho.

Ying-ch'un, senior maidservant of Li P'ing-erh who after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing agrees to be sent to the household of Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital and is raped by Lai-pao on the way.

Ying the Elder, eldest son of the deceased silk merchant Master Ying, elder brother of Ying Po-chüeh, continues to operate his father's silk business in Ch'ing-ho.

Ying the Elder's wife.

Ying-erh, daughter of Wu Chih by his deceased first wife, niece of Wu Sung, much abused stepdaughter of P'an Chin-lien who turns her over to Dame Wang when she marries Hsi-men Ch'ing; repossessed by Wu Sung when he returns from the Eastern Capital after the death of her father; consigned to the care of his neighbor Yao the Second when he is condemned to military exile in Meng-chou after his first abortive attempt to avenge the murder of her father; taken back by Wu Sung on his return to Ch'ing-ho five years later and forced to witness his disembowelment of P'an Chin-lien and decapitation of Dame Wang; repossessed by Yao the Second after the inquest and provided by him with a husband.

Ying, Master, father of Ying the Elder and Ying Po-chüeh, deceased silk merchant of Ch'ing-ho.

Ying Pao, eldest son of Ying Po-chüeh, recommends his friend Lai-yu to Hsi-men Ch'ing who employs him as a servant and changes his name to Lai-chüeh.

Ying Po-chüeh, Ying the Second, Sponger Ying, Beggar Ying, son of the deceased silk merchant Master Ying, younger brother of Ying the Elder, father of Ying Pao and two daughters by his wife, née Tu, and a younger son by his concubine Ch'un-hua; having squandered his patrimony and fallen on hard times he has been reduced to squiring wealthy young rakes about the licensed quarters and living by his wits; boon companion and favorite crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten; a clever and amusing sycophant and opportunist he has the art to openly impose on Hsi-men Ch'ing and make him like it while he is alive and the gall to double-cross him without compunction as soon as he is dead.

Ying Po-chüeh's concubine. See Ch'un-hua.

Ying Po-chüeh's elder daughter, married with the financial assistance of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ying Po-chüeh's grandfather, friend of Licentiate Shui's grandfather.

Ying Po-chüeh's second daughter, after the death of her father she is proposed by Auntie Hsüeh as a match for Ch'en Ching-chi but turned down by P'ang Ch'un-mei for lack of a dowry.

Ying Po-chüeh's son by his concubine Ch'un-hua.

Ying Po-chüeh's wife, née Tu, mother of Ying Pao and two daughters.

Ying the Second. See Ying Po-chüeh.

Ying, Sponger. See Ying Po-chüeh.

Yu, Loafer. See Yu Shou.

Yu Shou, Loafer Yu, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.

Yung-ting, page boy in the household of Wang Ts'ai.

Yü, Big Sister, blind professional singer in Ch'ing-ho frequently invited into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household to entertain his womenfolk and their guests.

Yü Ch'un, Stupid Yü, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.

Yü-erh. See Sun Hsüeh-o.

Yü-hsiao, Jade Flute, senior maidservant of Wu Yüeh-niang, carries on an affair with Shu-t'ung the discovery of which by P'an Chin-lien leads him to abscond and return to his native Su-chou; after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing agrees to be sent to the household of Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital and is raped by Lai-pao on the way.

Yü, Licentiate, master of a girls' school in his home in Ch'ing-ho where P'an Chin-lien studies for three years as a child.

Yü-lou. See Meng Yü-lou.

Yü Shen (d. 1132), minister of war who suppresses Tseng Hsiao-hsü's memorial impeaching Hsia Yen-ling and Hsi-men Ch'ing for malfeasance in the case of Miao Ch'ing, rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Yü, Stupid. See Yü Ch'un.

Yü-t'ang, employed in Chou Hsiu's household as a wet nurse for Chou Chin-ko.

Yü-tsan, concubine of Li Kung-pi, originally maidservant of his deceased first wife, who enters his household as part of her dowry, reacts jealously to his marriage with Meng Yü-lou and is beaten by him and sold out of the household.

Yü-wen, Censor. See Yü-wen Hsü-chung.

Yü-wen Hsü-chung (1079-1146), Censor Yü-wen, supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for War who submits a memorial to the throne impeaching Ts'ai Ching, Wang Fu, and Yang Chien.

Yüan, Commander, resident of Potter's Alley in the Eastern Capital into whose family Li P'ing-erh is reincarnated as a daughter.

Yüan-hsiao, senior maidservant of Li Chiao-erh who is transferred to the service of Hsi-men Ta-chieh at the request of Ch'en Ching-chi after her former mistress leaves the household, accompanies her new mistress through her many vicissitudes while also putting up with the capricious treatment of Ch'en Ching-chi in whose service she dies after he is reduced to penury.

Yüan Yen, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing subsidiary female roles.

Yüeh Ho-an, vice-magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.

Yüeh-kuei, concubine of Chou Hsiu much abused by P'ang Ch'un-mei.

Yüeh-niang. See Wu Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh the Third, next-door neighbor of Han Tao-kuo on Lion Street who fences Miao Ch'ing's stolen goods and suggests that he approach Hsi-men Ch'ing through Wang Liu-erh to get him off the hook for the murder of Miao T'ien-hsiu.

Yüeh the Third's wife, close friend of Wang Liu-erh who acts as an intermediary in Miao Ch'ing's approach to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Yün, Assistant Regional Commander, elder brother of Yün Li-shou, hereditary military officer who dies at his post on the frontier.

Yün-ko. See Ch'iao Yün-ko.

Yün Li-shou, Welsher Yün, Yün the Second, younger brother of Assistant Regional Commander Yün, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various of his enterprises, upon the death of his elder brother succeeds to his rank and the substantive post of vice-commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard, later appointed stockade commander of Ling-pi Stockade at Chinan where Wu Yüeh-niang seeks refuge with him from the invading Chin armies but dreams that he attempts to rape her.

Yün Li-shou's daughter, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.

Yün Li-shou's wife, née Su, proposes a marriage alliance to Wu Yüeh-niang while they are both pregnant and formally betroths her daughter to Hsi-men Hsiao-ko after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Yün, Little. See Ch'iao Yün-ko.

Yün, Prince of. See Chao K'ai.

Yün the Second. See Yün Li-shou.

Yün, Welsher. See Yün Li-shou.

There is a vile place, reached through side roads,
Where there are heaps of deer and pigs;
It is not made beautiful by the fair and clean,
But is the resort of the filthy and impure....
[Here] the Three Chin concocted their alliances
And Cheng and Wei¹⁹ spread their disorder....
That is why violence ran loose within families
And poisoned hate sprang up between husband and wife.
These people still had boundless desires to do bad:
How could it be long before they gave vent to them? ...
With its back to the mountains, facing the waters,
The region was filthy, full of egotism,
So that in the small quarters and border towns
No one would deny the bad things said of it....
Arrogant menials from small towns
Lived here.
The waterways lead, by the quickest route,
To Lake Tung-t'ing and to the state of Ch'u,
And they carry [southern] influences [to Tung-p'ing],
Directly to it, and to its entire domain.
Thus they inherited [southern] customs
And were without rules, without models:
Not barbarians, they still followed no laws,
And came to do harm.
... in their cooperative ventures, each vaunts his own power;
They turn away from reason and towards debauchery.
Extolling the passions and chasing after profit,
The only thing they respect is excess.²⁰

PREFACE TO THE *CHIN P'ING MEI TZ'U-HUA*¹

I VENTURE to observe that in writing the *Chin P'ing Mei chuan* (The story of the plum in the golden vase) the Scoffing Scholar of Lan-ling² has focused his attention on the manners of the age, about which he has something significant to say. Of the seven feelings natural to mankind,³ melancholy is the most intractable. For such men of superior wisdom as may occasionally appear in the natural course of evolution, the fogs and ice that melancholy engenders disperse and splinter of their own accord, so there is no need to speak of such as these. Even those of lesser endowment know how to dispel melancholy with the aid of reason so that it may be prevented from encumbering them. Among the many who fall short of this, however, who have been unable to achieve enlightenment in their hearts, and who do not have access to the riches of the classic tradition to alleviate their melancholy, those who escape its infection are few.

It is in consideration of this fact that my friend, the Scoffing Scholar, has poured the accumulated wisdom of a lifetime into the composition of this work, consisting of one hundred chapters in all. Its striking rhetoric, which appeals to every taste,⁴ is designed to illuminate the cardinal human relationships, to discourage sexual promiscuity, to distinguish between the pure and the impure, to edify both the good and the ungood, and to expound the secrets of flourishing and decay, failure and success, through the inexorable working of karmic cause and effect, in such a way that they lie utterly revealed before the reader's eyes. From its beginning to its end the strands of the plot are as intricately articulated as the conduits of the circulatory system⁵ and are like a myriad skeins of silk that flutter in the wind without ever becoming entangled. So enticingly are these effects accomplished that the reader may, perhaps, be beguiled into forgetting his melancholy with a smile.

It is scarcely to be denied that in this work the language encroaches on the vulgar and the atmosphere is redolent of rouge and powder.⁶ But I would assert that such allegations miss the point. The first song in the *Shih-ching* (The book of songs)⁷ has been characterized by Confucius as expressing "Pleasure that does not extend to wantonness and sorrow that does not lead to injury."⁸ "Wealth and distinction are things that man desires,"⁹ but few are able to attain them without resort to wantonness. Sorrow and resentment are sentiments that man dislikes, but few are able to experience them without injury to themselves.

I have surveyed such productions of fabulists of earlier times as Lu Ching-hui's *Chien-teng hsin-hua* (New wick-trimming tales),¹⁰ Yüan Chen's *Ying-ying chuan* (Story of Ying-ying),¹¹ Chao Pi's *Hsiao-p'in chi* (Emulative frowns collection),¹² Lo Kuan-chung's *Shui-hu chuan* (Outlaws of the marsh),¹³ Ch'in Chün's *Chung-ch'ing li-chi* (A pleasing tale of passion),¹⁴ Lu Mei-hu's *Huai-ch'un ya-chi* (Elegant vignettes of spring yearning),¹⁵ and Chou Li's *Ping-chu ch'ing-t'an* (Pure conversations by candlelight),¹⁶ as well as such later works as the *Ju-i chuan* (The story of Lord As You Like It)¹⁷ and the *Yü-hu chi* (Tale of Chang Yü-hu).¹⁸ Their diction is so demanding that readers are often unable to enjoy them and discard them before reaching the end.

As for this story, although it may be couched in the everyday language of the marketplace or the idle chatter of the boudoir, even a three-foot-tall lad can derive as much pleasure from it as he would if he were enabled to suck the nectar of Heaven or pluck the tusk of leviathan,¹⁹ so easy is it for him to understand. Although it may not be the equal of the works of former days, its purport and its rhetoric are outstanding enough to make it worthy of consideration. In addition, with regard to the moral reformation of the age, the reproof of vice and encouragement of virtue, the purification of the mind and cleansing of the heart,²⁰ it cannot fail to make a small contribution.²¹

As for those events that take place in the bedchamber, everyone feels attracted to them, on the one hand, and repulsed by them, on the other. Of those who are not sages or worthies like Yao and Shun,²² there are few who escape entanglement. It is on this account that even the best of those who have attained wealth and distinction allow their hearts to be swayed and their intentions to be deflected. Behold: how secluded are the high halls and spacious structures,²³ the cloudy windows and misty chambers;²⁴ how magnificent are the golden screens and embroidered bedding; how enticing are the clouds of hair tumbling in disarray,²⁵ the creamy texture of swelling breasts; how assiduous are the cavortings of the cock phoenix and his mates; how extravagant are the brocade garments and the rare repasts;²⁶ how devoted are the women of beauty and men of talent²⁷ as they descant upon the breeze and apostrophize the moon;²⁸ how abandoned are the fragrant tongues as the jadelike drops of saliva commingle; how reckless are the pair of jade wrists, tugging and retugging at the ropes, and the pair of golden lotuses, tossing and retossing on the swing.²⁹

Surely this is happiness. Yet, when joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow.³⁰ Occasions for separation will occur, bringing haggard countenances in their wake, for this is inevitable. The need to "Pluck a sprig of plum blossoms to entrust to a courier,"³¹ or resort to a square of silk to be conveyed by a fish,³² cannot then be avoided. Calamitous missteps and disruptive dislocations³³ will become inescapable. Sacrifice of life to blade and sword can no longer be prevented. For in the world of light there is the imperial law, in the world of darkness there are ghosts and spirits,³⁴ that cannot be evaded.³⁵ And as for the propositions that if you defile the wife and children of another your own wife and children will be defiled,³⁶ or that calamity is the result of accumulated misdeeds and good fortune the reward of virtue,³⁷ they may all be subsumed under the rubric of the workings of the cycle of retribution.

Thus, "Heaven has its spring, summer, autumn, and winter,"³⁸ just as "Man has his sorrows and joys, partings and

reunions.”³⁹ There is no reason to be surprised that this is so. As for those who act in accord with Heaven’s seasons, in the long term their descendants will continue to prosper, and in the short term they will serenely enjoy their allotted days. As for those who act in defiance of Heaven’s seasons, they will sacrifice life and reputation, for calamity will strike before they can turn on their heels.⁴⁰ Since no man in this world can escape the periodic revolutions of the times,⁴¹ those who remain unscathed by cruel fate and untainted by disgrace are fortunate indeed. That is why I have observed that the Scoffing Scholar in writing this story has something significant to say.

*Written by the Master of Delight⁴²
in his studio in Bright Worthy Village*

PREFACE TO THE *CHIN P'ING MEI*

THE *Chin P'ing Mei* is an obscene book. In praising it as highly as he did, Yüan Hung-tao was merely giving indirect expression to his own discontent, not bestowing his approbation on the *Chin P'ing Mei*.¹ Nevertheless, the author did have intentions of his own that were admonitory rather than hortatory. For example, many women play a role in the story, but the fact that the author chose to emphasize only the names of P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Ch'un-mei by including them in his title is an instance of the type of historiography exemplified by the *T'ao-wu* of the State of Ch'u.² Thus, Chin-lien dies for her adultery, P'ing-erh dies for her burden of sins, and Ch'un-mei dies for her licentiousness, each of them coming to a more horrendous end than any of the other women. The author has availed himself of Hsi-men Ch'ing to depict the great villains of the world. He has availed himself of Ying Po-chüeh to depict the petty clowns³ of the world. He has availed himself of all these wanton women to depict the female clowns and villains of the world. So effective is his delineation that we cannot but break into a sweat as we read. Thus, his intentions are admonitory rather than hortatory.

I have remarked that "He who reads the *Chin P'ing Mei* and responds with a feeling of compassion is a Bodhisattva; he who responds with a feeling of apprehension is a superior man; he who responds with a feeling of enjoyment is a petty person; and he who responds with a feeling of emulation is no better than a beast."

My friend Ch'u Hsiao-hsiu⁴ once accompanied a young man to a banquet at which live entertainment was provided. When the point came in the play at which the Hegemon-King feasted at night the young man drooled with admiration, saying, "How can the life of a real man be anything but this?"

"The fact is," responded Hsiao-hsiu, "that it is only by way of contrast with the denouement at Wu-chiang that the dramatist has inserted this scene."⁵

Those present who overheard this remark sighed at the prescience of his comment. Only those who grasp the significance of this statement should be permitted to read the *Chin P'ing Mei*. Otherwise, Yüan Hung-tao may be accused of having been a flagrant instigator of venery. The people of this world must be exhorted not to follow in the footsteps of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

*Casually indited en route to Su-chou by
The Pearl-juggler of Eastern Wu⁶
Last month of winter, 1617-18⁷*

COLOPHON

***T**HE STORY of the Plum in the Golden Vase* is a fable created by a prominent figure of the Chia-ching reign period¹ whose satirical shafts were directed at contemporary targets. But is not the explicitness with which he exposes the uglier aspects of human life also consistent with the purpose of our former teacher, Confucius, in not deleting the airs of Cheng and Wei from the *Book of Songs*?² The way that, in incident after incident, he has taken pains to sow the seeds of karmic cause and effect shows that the author was also a man of great compassion.

Those who help to disseminate this book in the future will earn immeasurable merit. The ignorant go so far as to regard this as an obscene book. In so doing not only do they fail to comprehend the author's purpose but they also unjustly repudiate the intentions of those who would disseminate it. It is the purpose of this colophon to make this clear.

*Written by Nien-kung*³

TRANSLATIONS OF SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

1. Song suite beginning with the tune “Flowers in Brocade,” the first line of which is “The fair weather is balmy.” See [chapter 15, note 20](#). This song suite is performed twice in the *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua*, vol. 1, ch. 15, p. 9a, ll. 1–2; and vol. 4, ch. 78, p. 20a, l. 3. It is preserved in *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 2:618–23; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu, ts'e* 12, pp. 57a–59a. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*.

TO THE TUNE “FLOWERS IN BROCADE” (NORTHERN STYLE): The fair weather is balmy,
Spring is at its most beautiful.
Now lightly warm, now lightly cool, It reveals itself in flowering branches.
Deep in secluded courtyards,
The swallows suddenly return.
On purple roads and fragrant streets, Fine steeds with golden bridles neigh.
Parks and woods are bright with silks, Peach and apricot blossoms vie in fragrance.
The sounds of imperial music,
Drift across the Dragon Pool.
Fragrant verdure gradually blends into the green mist.
Truly, on such a fine day,
One revels joyously in the beautiful scene.

TO THE TUNE “GOLD LAMÉ CURTAINS” (SOUTHERN STYLE): The lingering cold is chilly;
Layers of emerald curtains are drawn.
Throughout the imperial capital, spring has returned.
The east wind grows more importunate.
The scene is at its most beautiful; Bright with silks and jewels.
Having moistened the flowers, the rain has cleared.
The rain has cleared,
And the flowering branches reach to the ground.
The smell of flowers permeates the fragrant streets; Subtly invading the sleeves of the passersby.
On Bronze Camel Street, they have roamed everywhere.
They have roamed everywhere,
In love with the long days and genial sun.

TO THE TUNE “PLUCKING THE CASSIA” (NORTHERN STYLE): On the roads of the pleasure quarter lissome willows are trailing;
On the banks of the Wei River
the genial sun lingers.
Reds and purples exude fragrance; Plum branches lose their powdery blooms; Peach trees venture into flower;
Crab apples and pears vie with their snowy blossoms.
Blowing the willow catkins
the fragrant breeze is gentle;
Embracing the roving wheels
the emerald grass is luxuriant.
Let carnelian goblets overflow;
Exchange songs and lyrics.
Meeting with times of peace
and glorious days;
In every place they celebrate
the season of the flowers.

TO THE TUNE “RIVER WATER” (SOUTHERN STYLE): Spring colors live up to the revelers' desires; The fragrant breeze penetrates their silks.
See how they compete to display flowery lanterns; How the light of the moon shines refulgently; And how, clustering on the branches of fiery trees, Tens of thousands of candles envelop them.
The silver river and pearly dipper grow dim.
This festive day, the fifteenth of the first month, Surpasses the revels at the Jasper Pool.
Bright lotus lamps illuminate the hills of lanterns, Truly, they are magnificent.
Crowds surge about vermilion wheels, traffic on the celestial streets is slow.
Reining in their jeweled horses are the imperial guards by their ten thousands, Watching until the shadows of the trees fall east and the moon sinks west.

TO THE BINARY TUNES “WILD GEESE ALIGHT” AND “VICTORY SONG” (NORTHERN STYLE): Arabesques of incense float from jeweled censers; The oriole's song shatters the silence of dawn.
Spring breezes waft the fragrance of flowery plants; Lingering sunlight enhances rivers and mountains.
Frowning-eyebrow willow leaves expand their greens; Rain-drenched crab apple blossoms drip in threads.
Village mummers and country folk enjoy themselves; At the Lustration Festival wine cups are set afloat.
Everyone must know,
The myriad nations are now all at peace; Upon prescribed topics,
One must compose poetry on phoenix notepaper.

TO THE BINARY TUNES “REITERATIVE BROCADE” AND “INTOXICATED IN THE EAST WIND” (SOUTHERN STYLE): Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways, And spring will soon depart.
Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways, And spring will soon depart.
The cuckoo cries,
Only causing the flowers to fall and the willow catkins to fly.
The effects of the east wind permeate everything; On these fine days when spring is in its glory, Half the flowers have already fallen, Leaving only a few branches of peony behind.
Outside the painted pavilions,
One is surrounded by misty peaks and emerald waves.
Behold: swings kick into view behind the walls, Revealing pearls and kingfisher feather ornaments, Which set off to perfection golden bridle trappings.
Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways, And spring will soon depart.
Climbing high towers, leaning on all the balustrades,

On the eve of the spring festival, fires are prohibited, one eats cold food.
 Windblown red petals stick to the picnic mats.
 In the I-ch'un Park there is banqueting.
 Begrudging what remains of spring, One lies intoxicated in the slanting sunlight.
 In the shadow of the weeping willow trees, The calls of auspicious birds awaken the slumberer.
 As one traverses the twenty-four divisions of the flowering cycle,
 One can calculate how much of the glorious season has already gone by.

TO THE BINARY TUNES “RIVER-BOBBED OARS” AND “SEVEN BROTHERS” (NORTHERN STYLE): Traversing willow paths,
 Crossing peach tree streams,
 Skimming the clear waves,
 Pairs of swallows fly.
 Fragrant verdure grows wild and luxuriant; Fallen willow catkins lie soiled in mud.
 Cuckoos cry incessantly,
 But cannot call a halt to spring's wending way.
 Only the myriad willow fronds
 impede its progress.
 The beautiful scene basks in genial sunlight.
 Truly: as greens darken reds dwindle.
 The most touching element is a pair of orioles, Warbling to the humans,
 Harmonizing with the notes of pipe and song.
 As the sun moves, flower shadows traverse hanging painted screens.
 Truly: Chinese and barbarians alike share in the enjoyment of these years of peace.

TO THE TUNE “WAVE-BOBBING OARS” (SOUTHERN STYLE): The realm of luxury,
 Is apparent in the picturelike towers and terraces.
 Beside the dance floors, swallows kick blossoms into flight.
 Performing new music, the mandola and psaltery are tuned to a low pitch.
 As though calling to the revelers, orioles compete in song.

TO THE BINARY TUNES “PLUM BLOSSOM WINE” AND “ENJOYING THE SOUTH” (NORTHERN STYLE): See how in spring pools,
 Brocadelike carp leap.
 Hear how in green trees,
 Yellow orioles warble.
 Everything conveys the idea of spring.
 Each is content;
 Each is happy.
 The east wind blows the willow catkins, Skidding over the green verdure,
 As far as the horizon.
 They cannot be restrained,
 Seeing spring on its way,
 Alighting on the fallen blossoms, Entangled in floating gossamer.
 Outside the ornate mansion,
 West of the little bridge,
 The new plums are like beans,
 The willow leaves like eyebrows.
 Remember mid-spring in the Southern Park, homeward bound, treading the green; After doing a stint on the swing, showing off one's silken garments.
 Slowly singing “Golden Threads” and toasting with golden goblets;
 Idly apostrophizing the peonies and appreciating the yellow roses.
 Truly: an auspicious festival in a glorious season, Thanks to the unification of the Great Ming, favoring Chinese and barbarian alike.

CODA: Of all the beauteous seasons of the year, one must remember,
 Throughout the human world, the glory of spring is most enjoyable.
 May the good fortune and long life of our Sage Sovereign equal Heaven.

2. Song suite to the tune “Thirty Melodies,” the first line of which is “How happy this auspicious day.” See [chapter 16](#), [note 19](#). This song suite is performed twice in the *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua*, vol. 1, ch. 16, p. 11a, l. 9; and vol. 2, ch. 31. p. 15a, l. 5. It is preserved in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 513–14; *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 1:235–37; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu*, ts'e 16, pp. 8a–9a. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*.

TO THE TUNE “THIRTY MELODIES”: How happy this auspicious day;
 The planet Venus has appeared, dimly discernible amid variegated clouds.
 See how the jade tree before the reception hall, Has once again put forth a magic sprout.
 Having been invited to attend the feast, We offer a curved kingfisher feather with a sharp quill,
 And a round gold embroidery frame of paltry diameter,
 As tokens of esteem for this lovely new face; And in the hope that you will remain a happy pair, And continue to live harmoniously together for a hundred years.
 Five hundred years ago your destiny was sealed,
 Only to be fulfilled today.
 Here in your magistrate's tribunal, on the occasion of this birthday, We offer a toast to your long life.
 As pure as jade,
 As captivating as a flower,
 This is the flawless jewel of the age.
 At this feast to celebrate the bathing of the child, On this auspicious day,
 The whole household is happy as can be.
 Necklaces and bracelets hold in place the mermaid silk.
 Our only wish is that,
 Your longevity be that of a mountain, Your good fortune as deep as the sea, And that you share glorious success.
 The happy hubbub at this elegant feast is not inconsiderable.
 Truly: the Queen Mother of the Western Pool has temporarily abandoned paradise; Immortal lads amid the clouds proffer the peaches of immortality.
 With her patent of nobility she is entitled to a coach and four,
 The phoenix headdress and cloud-patterned cape.
 Surrounded by attendant beauties, Entitled to golden insignia and purple seal-ribbons, He has returned to his old home,
 Where, dressed in motley, he can join his family in enjoying the season.
 If the proper rites are not observed it may give rise to resentment;
 Human nature is such that one must be chary of too intimate relationships.
 We are happy to live in an era of good government when the people are not disturbed, And wish the nation to be at peace and the wind and rain harmonious.
 A jade *ch'i-lin* has fulfilled the bear's portent of a noble birth.
 So now that famous beauty, the elder Ch'iao, is as lucky as her little sister, And with a baby to boot,
 To bring glory to its ancestors,
 And continue the family tradition of wearing gold and sable.
 Tortoise and crane portend good fortune, sporting in pool and pavilion;
 Pine and cypress intertwine their branches, intimating endurance.
 Grain grows in double ears; phoenixes alight in respect.
 They are like birds that fly only in pairs, like mating phoenixes.
 Shadows of flowers tumble and toss on the screen; The sound of singing resounds in the air.

The dancers with willowy waists like Hsiao-man's are danced out;
 The tune "Rainbow Skirts and Feathered Garments"
 is finally over;
 As they turn their heads, cloud-shaped palace head ornaments fall out.
 The ornate halls are deep,
 The gardens and courtyards secluded.
 The incense floating from jeweled censers is curling upwards.
 Roll up the embroidered curtains and beaded portieres;
 Let the swallows come and nest
 if they will.
 We are confronted with crimson peaches, seemingly afire,
 Just as they should be.
 We see butterflies, one pair after another, flying around us.
 At this auspicious feast, this
 festival of flowers,
 The small zither and great zither are in harmony.
 Let us enjoy the music of
 pipes and woodwinds;
 Unbutton our collars,
 Open our mouths in laughter;
 Give way to drunkenness, empty
 the golden flagons;
 And leave the red apricot blossoms to revel on their branch tips.
 May your wealth and distinction flourish like the three months of spring,
 And may the voice of the cuckoo never be heard to portend their end.

CODA: May the incense of your sacrifices never cease, your flowers never grow old;
 May your good fortune be deep as the Eastern Sea, your longevity ever increase;
 May you fulfill your days with mutual respect and enjoy your life together.

3. Song suite beginning with the tune "Clever Improvisation," the first line of which is "How pleased we are by your success." See [chapter 20, note 28](#). This song suite is performed and partially quoted in the *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua*, vol. 1, ch. 20, p. 10b, ll. 2–4. It is preserved in *Ts'ai-lou chi*, scene 20, p. 69, ll. 3–11; *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 418–20; *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 2:1272–75; *Yung-hsi yieh-fu*, ts'e 16, pp. 32b–33b; and *Ch'ün-yin lei-hsüan*, 3:1971–73. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*.

TO THE TUNE "CLEVER IMPROVISATION": How pleased we are by your success, You have been doubly favored.
 Heaven has made this perfect match; Like male and female phoenix
 are husband and wife.
 Wearing golden seal and purple ribbon, marks of glory and distinction,
 Today we thank our parents,
 Profoundly grateful for their loving care.
 Chorus:
 How happy we are to meet again,
 How happy we are to meet again.
 In the decorated hall ranks of pearls and head ornaments are arrayed.
 The happy hubbub of feasting and music is graced with a spring breeze.
 This day we will renew our marriage vows, Enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss, Like fish sporting in the water.

TO THE TUNE "FLIRTATIOUS LAUGHTER": Gayly laughing we celebrate this happy occasion, By raising our phoenix goblets on high.
 To the sound of ivory clappers, silver psaltery, and jade flute,
 Let them bring on in cups and platters, The fruits of sea and land to grace the auspicious feast.
 The name of the winner of top honors is emblazoned on the tiger placard.
 Behold: in perfumed hall and painted chamber we feast from brazen vessels.
 May they live happily together as husband and wife for ever and ever.

TO THE TUNE "CONGRUENT WAYS": Formerly we feared the shame of
 public exposure;
 Our temporary anger was only
 a pretense.
 We did not anticipate that you would reject us;
 At that time we had no way of
 keeping you.
 But now that we have arrived at the present day, Let us enjoy ourselves and endeavor to get drunk.
 Endeavor to get drunk,
 But never forget the role played in the past by the gaily colored ball.

TO THE TUNE "THE DOLL": How joyous our delight as tortoiseshell mats are spread for the feast.
 In the fine haze, incense curls from golden lion-shaped censers.
 We are surrounded by red, encircled by emerald, like piles of embroidered brocade.
 Hear how the musicians play in perfect unison; Truly: it is a model occasion.

TO THE TUNE "IMPOSTER'S SONG": In spring we enjoy this famous park; the flowers are like silks;
 The scene is most remarkable.
 Amid ten li of lotus blossoms
 oars move lightly;
 Everything is perfect.
 In the decorated hall, day after day, fine feasts are spread.
 Do not fail to take advantage of
 such auspicious occasions,
 Such auspicious occasions;
 But give others cause to celebrate the story of *The Gaily Colored Tower*.

TO THE TUNE "SACRED BHAIŠAJYA-RĀJA": The notes are harmonious,
 The melodies entrancing;
 Happily we celebrate the occasion by providing this feast.
 Never parted for a moment,
 Following in each other's steps; In such a good marriage, truly,
 we will never separate,
 But enjoy forever the pleasures
 of connubial bliss.

TO THE TUNE "PLUM BLOSSOM WINE": At every festival, in every season, May our wishes be granted, our moods happy.
 Let fragrant breezes sweep courtyards gay with the sound of song.
 Pour frothing bumpers,
 Float golden wine cups.

Chorus:

In decorated halls let happy laughter reign.

Who is as lucky as you and I,

Sharing the delights of the nuptial chamber, Able to spend the rest of our lives with branches entwined?

Crimson curtains and embroidered hangings, Hide fairy caverns, the realms of the blessed.

It is just like stumbling on the

Peach Blossom Spring.

Such glory and distinction,

Are unmatched in this world.

Chorus:

In decorated halls let happy laughter reign.

Who is as lucky as you and I,

Sharing the delights of the nuptial chamber, Able to spend the rest of our lives with branches entwined?

CODA: It seems we must have been united in a former life;

How happy we are to have met again in this incarnation.

Father and mother, husband and wife, Are reunited and all wish them well.

1. Song suite in the southern style beginning with the tune “Pomegranate Blossoms,” the first line of which is “It was the night of their assignation.” See chap. 21, n. 29. It is preserved in [*Hsin-pien*] *Nan chiu-kung tz’u*, *chiian* 3, pp. 4a–4b; *Nan-kung tz’u-chi*, vol. 1, *chiian* 1, pp. 38–39; *Ch’ün-yin leihsian*, 4:2067–69; and *Wu-yü ts’ui-ya*, 12:287–89. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Nan-kung tz’u-chi*.

TO THE TUNE “POMEGRANATE BLOSSOMS”

It was the night of their assignation,
Which had been planned for this evening.
People were silent;
The moon was high.
He had been instructed not to
 knock at the gate,
But ever-so-gently to sway the
 flowering branches,
So that their shadows would appear on the silken window,
And she would know that her
 lover had arrived.
What was the need for butterfly messengers
 or bee go-betweens?
The tryst would take place between the
 phoenix lovers.

TO THE SAME TUNE

“Who could have known my fickle lover would
 fail me on this fine night?
My bedchamber is silent,
As I endure my solitude.
The shadows of the wind-blown bamboos move
 fitfully on the latticework; With the result that my dreams are interrupted,
 my soul is troubled.
I sigh that we spend more time apart than together.
When I gaze back toward the Radiant Terrace of Ch’u,¹
 mountains and barriers intervene.
For want of clouds and rain, my eyebrows have faded,
 my fragrance has dissipated.
Unhappily the road to the Blue Bridge is blocked.”²

TO THE TUNE “FISHERMAN’S PRIDE, WITH A VARIATION”

“Late at night I get up and trim the silver lamp
 to look for him, But my shadow is solitary and my image lone.
Who could have anticipated that the pleasure
 of last evening, And the even greater pleasure expected tonight,
Should end up, after we separated, without
 further communication?
All day long it has been preoccupying me.
Perhaps he is drunk and his feelings are
 topsy-turvy; Perhaps he is performing on his zither
 for other ears; Perhaps he has taken up with some other
 flower by the wayside; Perhaps he has what it takes to get started,
 but he won’t carry through.”

TO THE SAME TUNE

“All on his account I am neglecting
my toilet;
Too tired to paint my eyebrows.
All on his account I no longer enjoy
tea or food;
My thoughts are too disturbed.
All on his account my good feelings
have turned to vexation.
All on his account my heart is sore
and I suffer from boredom.
How can I dispel these feelings at separation?
I’ll end up as prematurely gray as P’an Yüeh,
as emaciated as Shen Yüeh.”³

TO THE SAME TUNE

“He has suddenly forgotten our vows beneath
the moon and stars.
He has suddenly forgotten our singing and laughter.
He has suddenly forgotten the poems he indited
on my mermaid silk handkerchief.
He has suddenly forgotten the tiny shoe
I gave him as a keepsake.
He has suddenly forgotten the deft needlework
with which I fashioned his spring gown.
He has completely forgotten that we burned incense
together to solemnize our union.
He has suddenly forgotten the peach-red stain
on the fragrant silk handkerchief.”

TO THE SAME TUNE

“As for my lovesickness,
How can I quickly dispel it?
Will the debt created by our intertwining branches
ever be paid?
Truly, the fallen blossom would like to
float with the current, But the heartless current is too turbulent
to bear it along.
Concluding that this anguish may be something
I am fated to endure, I secretly cast my lot with coins, but
get no clear answer.
I would appeal to Heaven itself, but
Heaven is too high.”

Coda

If she were ever to see him again,
How could she ever forgive him?
Her only regret was that she was not able to
devastate him with a single tirade.
But once they were reunited, they got along
just as well as before.

2. Song suite beginning with the tune “Spring in the Metropolis,” the first line of which is “A cold wind has overspread the land.” See chap. 21, n. 43. It is preserved in *Tz’u-lin chai-yen*, 2:867–72; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu, ts’e* 16, pp. 51b–53b. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Tz’u-lin chai-yen*.

TO THE TUNE “SPRING IN THE METROPOLIS” (SOUTHERN STYLE) A cold wind has overspread the land.

The frost-braving branches of the golden larch
retain their coin-like leaves.
The oranges are green and the tangerines yellow.
The trees on the embankment are bare, but
the maple leaves are red.
The movements of the hands on the jade clepsydra
are faintly audible; Somewhat enhancing the effect of the new frost
in the frozen night.

It is time to clear the stackyards, bring in the harvest,
Drill the troops, and practice archery.

TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE" (NORTHERN STYLE) The southward returning geese,

The crows resting at night,
Perch in the trees and alight on the flat strand.
When one surveys the vista it is worthy of a painting.
During Indian summer there are still plants in flower;
Several verdant peach blossoms have been spared.
Travelers halt their steeds to admire the scene.

TO THE TUNE "SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN SLOPE" (SOUTHERN STYLE) In painted chambers beaded portieres have just been lowered.

Wintry hues oppress the distant mountains.
Beside the brazier wine is poured and portions
of savory meat are divided.
Three passages are played on the drums.
Icy strings stretch over bridges ranged like wild geese.
Golden braziers are replenished, burning incense
redolent of orchid and musk.
The shivery effect of the cold gradually
becomes more intense.
"Let us imbibe 'sunset clouds,'
And feast on 'jade peaches' in fabled love nests,
As, everywhere in the capital,
Pipes and voices resound in a myriad houses."

TO THE TUNE "DANCERS' ENSEMBLE" (SOUTHERN STYLE) In several places flute-players in moon-viewing
kiosks are heard.

Wine is amply decanted, poems are slowly indited.
There is no helping the fact that the chill
has somewhat increased.
For a time the curtains have been let down half way.
The winter solstice is at hand, after which
we will welcome the lengthening days.

TO THE TUNE "GOLD CHRYSANTHEMUM'S FRAGRANCE" (NORTHERN STYLE) The ashes of reed pith have been blown from
all six yin pitch-pipes.

The sun's shadow has moved across the line
on the sundial.
Like translucent jade, morning frost covers
the turquoise tiles; Like glistening alabaster, water congeals into
ice crystals.
"Let us raise jade goblets and decant 'sunset clouds.' "

TO THE TUNE "GOURD OF VINEGAR" (NORTHERN STYLE) The cold-weather plants gradually begin to bud;

The mountain plum is about to burst into bloom.
In frosty courtyards the *p'i-p'a* is plucked
in time to the dance.
The fragrance fades from garden and wood
as the year winds to an end.
In several places monks pause in reading their sacred texts,
To observe that in the distant sky the force of the wind
is blowing the geese out of line.

TO THE TUNE "WEN-CHOU SONG" (SOUTHERN STYLE)

The dark clouds obscuring it,
Blown off by the evening wind,
The image of the moon traversing the void
illuminates the snow.
Its single hue of alabaster is truly bright,
obscuring the open country.
It falls densely on the sing-song houses,
and flutters into monkish abodes.⁴
Wavering before "silver seas,"

its dazzle creates a blur.⁵
In no time at all it has half covered
the whitewashed wall.

TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES" (SOUTHERN STYLE) As we idly climb to a lofty kiosk,
Moonlight gleams on white jade girdle pendants,
and shines on white horses.
In the evening the view over the river
is resplendent; A solitary rain-caped fisherman returns home,
worthy of a painting.
The tiles of golden gates and jade structures
are frozen in white.
Brushing windows and infiltrating blinds, the snow
continues to flutter down, An auspicious omen, presaging an era
of universal peace.

TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD" (NORTHERN STYLE) The rivers and mountains present an imposing vista.
Psaltery and mandola are called for to celebrate the season.
Superior wine is served within curtains of gold lamé;
Enhanced by clear breezes, phoenix tablet tea is sipped.
Donning crane's-down cloaks we search for plum blossoms,
Emulate Wang Hui-chih's abortive visit to Tai K'uei
on a snowy night,⁶
And show off our poetic effusions by the bridge at Pa-ling.⁷
The jasper terraces in the bright moonlight resemble,
The Celestial Emperor's abode in the Isles of the Blest.

TO THE TUNE "THE JADE GIRDLE" (SOUTHERN STYLE) A subtle fragrance suffuses the air;
Taking advantage of the mild weather, the early plum
has burst into bloom.
Its white beauty is pure and perfect.
Gracing moonlit terraces and breezy kiosks,
It stoops over low fences and thatched cottages.
Its jade bones and icy flesh are
cleansed of makeup.
Interspersed with bamboo and pine
it inspires poetic fancy.

TO THE TUNE "BLACK SILK ROBE" (SOUTHERN STYLE) As in the past, its quintessential nature is resplendent.
Its glossy flesh, tinged with powder, adorns
shallow waters and flat strands.
Its sparse branches encage the moon, casting
their shadows aslant.
Last night it bloomed amid the snow
in the nearby village; But under Lo-fu Mountain in the south,
It lends its presence to the wineshops.
Its aura of purity is truly astonishing;
Its white decor is beauteous and elegant.
Illuminated by moonlight, set off by bamboo,
what more could one ask?

TO THE TUNE "THE GREENHORN" (NORTHERN STYLE) Beside glowing braziers, the banquet spread,
the banquet spread is just over.
Lifting golden cups, toasts are exchanged,
toasts are exchanged in "sunset clouds."
Snow is swept together and ice broken up
with which to brew fine tea.
Inserted into silver vases, several sprigs of
plum blossoms are displayed.
On the festival of the eighth day of the twelfth month,
The populace celebrates boisterously,
Effigies of Śākyamuni Buddha are bathed,
And public devotions proceed unhindered.
The year is drawing to an end; and once spring arrives,

spring wind and spring light will fill the world, Just as the sage emperor governs the myriad states,
and ensures peace in the realm.

TO THE TUNE "PLAYING THE OLD CRONE" (SOUTHERN STYLE) Welcoming the new spring, we gradually perceive
that the cold is receding.

En route to festive feasts, we ride in perfumed carriages.
Carefully we decant the apotropaic T'u-su wine,
And set off firecrackers on New Year's Eve.
New peachwood talismans are exchanged for the old.
When spring arrives, the wicks in jade lamps
shed their ashes.

Fires are lit, illuminating the frosty tiles;
To the beat of drums the exorcistic *No* rites are performed; As, troupe by troupe, the dancers put on a noisy show.
Portraits of the demon queller Chung K'uei are hung up.⁸
At midnight New Year's toasts are everywhere exchanged.
Pepper-flavored wine is served and its praises sung.
Rowdy friends disturb their stabled horses;
Rows of torches scatter the roosting crows.⁹

CODA (SOUTHERN STYLE) The sage ruler of the Great Ming dynasty
has pacified the realm.

He has brought peace and contentment to
natives and foreigners alike.
Within the four seas all is tranquil
and the populace is happy.

3. Song suite by Ch'en To (fl. early 16th century) beginning with the tune "Powdery Butterflies," the first line of which is "Three Variations on the Plum Blossom." See chap. 22, n. 14. This song suite is performed twice in the *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua*, vol. 2, chapter 22, p. 5a, 1. 10; and vol. 4, ch. 68, p. 9b, 1. 4. It is also mentioned in vol. 4, ch. 73, p. 7a, 11. 9–10. It is preserved in *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 1:383–86; *Yung-hsi yieh-fu*, *ts'e* 6, pp. 97a–98a; *Ch'ün-yin leihsian*, 4:2300–2303; *Pei-kung tz'u-chi*, 4:650–51; and *Ch'ü-pi yieh-fu*, vol. 1, pp. 11b–13a. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Pei-kung tz'u-chi*.

TO THE TUNE "POWDERY BUTTERFLIES" (NORTHERN STYLE) "Three Variations on the Plum Blossom";¹⁰

In the frontier watchtower the bugle has
finished playing it.
The wheel of the moon shines aslant
on the gauze window.
Supporting her fragrant cheek on her hand,
Her eyes overflow with tears.
Beneath the shaded lamp,
She tosses and sighs.
The words he had whispered in her ear have turned out
to be nothing but empty talk.

TO THE TUNE "GRIEVING FOR YEN HUI" (SOUTHERN STYLE) "My fickle lover is too inconstant.

This playfulness of his is something out of the ordinary.
He went out the door easily enough,
And now he's at the sea's rim or the sky's edge.
He was supposed to return late last year,
But, in no time at all, spring and summer
have passed.
When he left, the frost had already aged
the lotus blossoms, And now, once again, the water is
chilling the reeds."

TO THE TUNE "POMEGRANATE BLOSSOMS" (NORTHERN STYLE) "I have dissipated the best years of my life
beside the green gauze windows.

For a long time now, I have not bothered
to put on any makeup.
My bowels, which are wrenched nine times a day,
are ever more constricted.
It is nearly enough to kill me;
On top of which I suffer from spectral visitations.

Sometimes I entrust my fate to azure Heaven by
consulting the tortoise oracle; But I am quite unable to interpret the
conflicting results.

All of a sudden, I happen to pick up a
fragrant silk handkerchief, Only to find that it is aptly embroidered
with a double-headed flower.”

TO THE TUNE “GRIEVING FOR YEN HUI” (SOUTHERN STYLE) “The slippery villain,

His heart is impossible to fathom.
He is always deceiving people with his clever tongue,
While he floats about restlessly,
Just like willow catkins in the wind.
The more I think about it the clearer it is,
Your lustful daring has ever been
as big as the sky.
You have devoted yourself to pilfering jade
and purloining perfume,¹¹
In order to violate the mansions and offices
of the rich and powerful.”

TO THE TUNE “FIGHTING QUAILS” (NORTHERN STYLE) “This hateful separation seems to go on
for year after year; It is not to be compared to a brief space
or a short time.

Vexation has worn away the twin arcs
of my eyebrows;
And so emaciated my waist that it is
only a handful.
Here I am, yearning for him every morning
and every night, But when does he ever bother
to remember me?
Unable to mount to the azure firmament
aboard a phoenix, He has tethered his horse to the willow tree
at some girl’s house.”

TO THE TUNE “MOTH FLYING INTO THE LAMP” (SOUTHERN STYLE) “Hungering for love is like grasping sand;

This lonely suffering is like chewing wax.
Who knows where he is, cuddling up to
some smiling face, While I’m putting up with all this anxiety
for no good reason?
And there’s no way for me to get
any news of him.
In the end the day will come when he
returns home.
I’ll enumerate the entire gamut
of his peccadillos,
And take him to task for each
and every one of them.”

TO THE TUNE “MOUNTING THE LITTLE TOWER” (NORTHERN STYLE) “I have always remained completely unblemished,

And he has always known the rules of propriety.
Yet, for no good reason, I have had to suffer
all this desolation; Put up with all this loneliness;
And endure all this ill treatment.
It is obvious that the bronze-dragon spouts
on the clepsydra have run dry; The horse-shaped iron chimes on the eaves sound in vain;
The incense in the duck-shaped metal burner is burnt out.
The hardest time to endure is this remnant of
the twelfth month at the end of winter.”

TO THE TUNE “MOTH FLYING INTO THE LAMP” (SOUTHERN STYLE) The wind soughs wildly, sou-sou,

The snow falls densely, fen-fen,
Ch’i-ch’i, the phoenix pillow is desolate,
Ch’en-ch’en, the mandarin duck curtains
are porous and thin, She-she, the brocade coverlet

lies cold,
Cho-cho, the silver lamp flares
violently,
Wu-wu, the nomad flute wails
on the ramparts, Tung-tung, the last night watch
is sounded,
Ya-ya, the crows on the trees
scatter at dawn.

CODA

Once again Cho Wen-chün must elope in
her perfumed carriage.
Her sole fear, that she has misconstrued
the zither's message, And will only join Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju to
become a topic of scandal.¹²

4. Song suite beginning with the tune “Cries of the Wild Geese in Flight,” the first line of which is, “The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze in the Great Void.” See chap. 27, n. 32. It is preserved in *Sung Yüan hsi-wen chi-i*, pp. 116–17; *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, p. 552; *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 1:264–65; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu, ts'e* 3, pp. 61b–62a. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sung Yüan hsi-wen chi-i*.

TO THE TUNE “CRIES OF THE WILD GEESE IN FLIGHT”

The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze
in the Great Void.
There is not a trace of fragrant
breeze from the south.
Even sucking ice and nibbling snow
would be of no avail.
Though fans are kept in constant motion,
Beads of perspiration hang like pearls,
Serving to enervate jade bones
and icy flesh.
Moving to the verdant hillside,
Boys are ordered to shake the bamboos
to attract a breeze, And thereby momentarily alleviate
the oppressive heat.

TO THE SAME TUNE WITH A MODIFIED OPENING

“The long days are exhausting,
Powder becomes damp and perfume sticky.
Though fans move over ice to cool one off,
it is impossible to sleep.
Late at night,
The two of us,
Move where the pure fragrance of the lotus blossoms
is most pervasive, In the hope that by that time the power of the heat
will have abated.
In waterside pavilions we can join voices to sing
‘Golden Threads,’¹³
Submerge red plums and float green melons as we drain
a few cups together.”

TO THE TUNE “WINDBLOWN SAND”

As they lean against the carved balustrade
the sun sets in the west.
While they watch the mandarin ducks playing
amid the ripples, Before they know it, the evening chill creeps
into their sleeves.
In the gaps between the duckweed they see the
moon invade the water, Sending gilded waves sailing into the clumps
of blue-green lotus.
With visages illuminated by the evening light,
Showing off their loveliness to best advantage,
They contemplate a double-headed lotus blossom.

Its fragrant heart, unfortunately, is not
able to speak.
For whom does it wait there in its frozen beauty?

TO THE SAME TUNE

“The incense burner diffuses the scent of aloeswood
throughout the courtyard.
In such an attractive setting,
The spirits are invigorated,
And the feelings are relaxed.
Sticking jasmine blossoms in our hair,
Reciting newly composed poems,
How many can experience scenes such as this?
What need is there for pillows and mats
or bedsteads with gauze netting?”

TO THE TUNE “A BUNDLE OF OARS”

The clear night is short,
With flagon at hand it is meet to pass the cup.
When days are long,
How is one to combat the cruel heat?
One hopes that on the watchtower,
The bronze clepsydra will slow its pace.
After two or three cups of wine,
What does it matter if one is late getting to sleep?

CODA

“The milky way still turns,
The jade clepsydra drips;
We'd better catch a little rest by the southern window.
Tomorrow night we can come to cool off again
in the same place.”

5. Song suite beginning with the tune “A Single Missive,” the first line of which is “Everyone fears the days of summer.” See chap. 30, n. 36. It is preserved in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 531–32; *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 1:206–207; *Chiu-pien nan chiu-kung p'u*, pp. 76–77; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu, ts'e* 4, pp. 68a–68b; and *ts'e* 16, pp. 45b–46b. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*.

TO THE TUNE “A SINGLE MISSIVE”

“Everyone fears the days of summer,
But I love the glory of burning days
and summer heat.
Wherever one looks there are things to celebrate.
Bamboo shoots become stalks, sunflowers burst into bloom;
Clouds soar into strangely shaped peaks by the
thousands and ten thousands; Pomegranates produce clusters of three or four
red-capped blossoms; The cicadas are clamorous,
The rain has just stopped,
From the green grass around the pond,
frogs are heard everywhere.
With nothing on our minds,
Who is our equal?
From time to time we glimpse a pair of swallows
darting about the curtains.”

CHORUS

“In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out ‘sunset clouds,’
and exchange mutual toasts.”

TO THE TUNE “BLACK SILK ROBE”

“In the twinkling of an eye it is the Dragon Boat Festival.
Because of the genial weather, one is not too aware
of the summer heat.

When it is appropriate to sing lustily,
one should sing lustily, Don't let the fine days and lovely scenery
go unappreciated.
Having just experienced the joys of the nuptial chamber,
We try tugging together on the gaudy ropes of the swing.
Enjoying calamus wine and festival *tsung-tzu*,¹⁴
We feast and drink together.
There is no reason one should not choose to pick
the fruit from the branches."

CHORUS

"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,'
and exchange mutual toasts."

TO THE TUNE "A SPLENDID CALABASH"

"All of a sudden we perceive the scent
of hidden blossoms.
A fragrant breeze ruffles the lotuses in the pond.
We watch the mandarin ducks sport in the water,
their necks entwined.
Coming this way and going that way,
They startle the frolicking fish into
surfacing in the azure waves.
From the vantage point of a waterside retreat,
We observe the lotus gatherers singing their
lotus-gathering songs."

CHORUS

"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,'
and exchange mutual toasts."

TO THE TUNE "MUSIC CALMS THE SPIRIT"

"In the evening, having bathed,
We enjoy the breeze, gaze at the moon,
and lightly pluck the *p'i-p'a*.
Beauties can be heard laughing responsively
behind gauze windows.
From time to time, one can hear their
whispered endearments.
The word is that it will be a fine night,
Much cooler than the night before.
We might as well enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Inebriated among the flowers,
The taste of the wine is alluring.
What need is there for punkahs
with flagon at hand?"

CHORUS

"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,'
and exchange mutual toasts."

CODA

"Laughing, we enter the bedstead with gauze netting.
In this breezy compartment and cool chamber,
let us linger.
Where jade bones and icy flesh are concerned,
anything goes."

6. Song suite by Lü Chih-an (14th century) beginning with the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests," the first line of which is "Alas! This floating life of ours is like a dream." See chap. 31, n. 57. It is preserved in *Ch'üan Yüan san-ch'ü*, 2:1130-32; *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 466-67; *Tz'u-lin chai-yen*, 2:914-18; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu*, ts'e 14, pp. 26a-27b. The

following translation is based on the text as given in *Ch'üan Yüan san-ch'ü*.

TO THE TUNE "A GATHERING OF WORTHY GUESTS"

"Alas! This floating life of ours
is like a dream.
The events of the past have already come to naught.
In a snap of the fingers, the red disk
sinks in the west; In a trice, dust rises from what was once
a wide blue sea.
The youngster's glossy black hair
has turned to gray; The red-cheeked youth's head is white,
his eyebrows bushy.
In a turn of the head we will all be ghosts
under the Pei-mang Mountains.
Merely to mention the subject is enough
to induce sorrowful reflection.
We might as well let wine soak the sleeves
of our gowns, And flowers weigh down the brims
of our hats."¹⁵

TO THE TUNE "FREE AND EASY WANDERING"

"Without any entanglements,
I might just as well rest
at my ease.
I can sleep until the sun is three rods high¹⁶
without getting up.
I amuse myself with poetry, wine,
zither, and chess,
And am able to be united with my children
and my rustic wife.
Wealth and distinction, success and fame,
are external affairs.
I am tired of striving for them and being
driven by others.
I would rather relax and give free rein
to my fancy,
Indulge my natural feelings,
Extend my horizons and unknit my brow."

TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE"

"Why strive for fame and fortune?
Why differentiate you from me?
In the twinkling of an eye our old friends
are few and far between.
Gradually our red-cheeked countenances
become altered; Before we know it white hairs
encroach upon us.
To mention the subject induces sorrowful reflection.
The fact is, we cannot prevent time from flying
like a white horse galloping past a crack."¹⁷

TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD"

"Alas! Time passes like a dream.
The fullness of youth flows away like water.
One can only observe the endless affairs of the world,
While draining the finite cups this life affords.
Do not become deluded.
Resolutely reverse course while the current is swift.¹⁸
By the banks of P'an Stream the fish are lovely as ever.¹⁹
On Shou-yang Mountain the ferns are full-grown.²⁰
The peaks of Mount Hua in the west remain striking.²¹
On the Tung-t'ing Lake the breezes are still gentle."²²

TO THE TUNE "A PAIR OF WILD GESE"

“It is better to learn the wisdom of returning home
as early as possible, Where one can enjoy the leisure to study ultimate principles.
There one will not be encumbered by
disgrace or glory.
One can live in honest poverty and avoid controversy,
Distance oneself from the red dust and practice the Tao.”

TO THE TUNE “GOURD OF VINEGAR”

“When spring comes, one listens to the oriole
singing on the branch.
One hears the call of the cuckoo beneath the flowers,
Repeating with every cry the message,
‘why not go home?’
As for the money in your wallet, I urge you
not to begrudge it.
You might as well sober up when drunk, the better
to get drunk once more.
The shadows of the flowers move across the mat
even as you feast.”²³

TO THE SAME TUNE

“When summer comes, one observes the rippling light
on the surface of the lake.
The fragrant breeze is gentle everywhere,
Flapping one’s lapels and loosening one’s hair,
on the willow-shaded embankment.
A day gained, is a day lived through,
and one day the less.
Why strive for fame or fortune?
In this life, from of old, those who live
to seventy are few.”²⁴

TO THE SAME TUNE

“When autumn comes, one watches the chrysanthemum
by the hedge blossom into gold.
One enjoys the watery moon in the distant sky.
Truly, the river reflects the autumn landscape
as wild geese take flight.”²⁵
It pleases the heart to laugh and talk
while sharing cups of wine.
When able to do so with a soul mate,
One returns home with yellow blossoms
stuck all over one’s head.”

TO THE SAME TUNE

“When winter comes, alabaster flakes
come swirling down.
Eddies of shredded goosedown start to fly.
Shadows of plum blossoms by the wattled fence
are projected across the window.
In one’s humble parlor one fills cup after cup
of wine to the brim.
Once inebriated one can take a nap,
And let the red dust billow back and forth
wherever it will.”

CODA

“Do not seek the snail’s tentacle of fame;
Do not covet a fly’s head worth of profit.
The crane’s legs are long, the duck’s legs short,²⁶
they cannot be equalized.
In the end, who can say who is
in the right?
The best course for me is to conceal myself

amid the vulgar herd, And let someone else carry the gourd
from now on.”

7. Song to the tune “A Sprig of Flowers,” the first line of which is “Though I am not one of the eight ministers entitled to wear the purple sash.” See chap. 31, n. 58. It is the first song in a long dramatic suite that is preserved in *Yüan-ch’ü hsiian*, 4:1460–65; *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 293–96; *Tz’u-lin chai-yen*, 2:1053–60; and *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu*, ts’e 9, pp. 43a–45b. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*.

TO THE TUNE “A SPRIG OF FLOWERS”

“Though I am not one of the eight ministers
entitled to wear the purple sash; I command the denizens of the six palaces
with their golden hairpins.
When I hear the purple whip crack,
To bring the civil and military ranks to attention,
I observe the raising of the purple curtain
as His Imperial Majesty comes in.
Though I may not be fit material to be
a general or a minister, I attend the imperial equipage and
enjoy the ruler’s regard.
At the behest of the consorts and empress
in the various palaces, I supervise a lighthearted bevy of
eight hundred beauties, And command the charming company of
three thousand palace women.”

8. Song to the tune “Eight Beats of a Kan-chou Song,” the first line of which is “Concealed amid clusters of turquoise hair ornaments.” See chap. 32, n. 10. It is the first song in a long dramatic suite that is preserved in *Yüan-ch’ü hsiian*, 3:1093–95; *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*, pp. 137–39; *Tz’u-lin chai-yen*, 1:481–85; *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu*, ts’e 4, pp. 47b–49a; and *Ch’ün-yin leihsian*, 3:1895–98. The following translation is based on the text as given in *Sheng-shih hsin-sheng*.

TO THE TUNE “EIGHT BEATS OF A KAN-CHOU SONG”

Concealed amid clusters of turquoise hair ornaments,
And a hazy nimbus of incense like sunset clouds,
By the wavering glare of red candlelight,
Under moon-shaped rafters and cloudlike beams,
Enclosed within twelve latticework partitions
held up with golden hooks, In the gilded chamber, standing screens surround
a feast on tortoiseshell mats.
Where fragrant foam floats on the contents of
white jade goblets, An aura of exhilaration pervades the breast, As faces are suffused with the air of spring.

9. Song to the tune “The Water Nymphs,” the first line of which is “With his tiger-head tally minted out of horse-hoof gold.” See chap. 32, n. 16. This song is the second of a set of four anonymous songs to the same tune that are included in *Yung-hsi yüeh-fu*, ts’e 18, pp. 45a–45b.

TO THE TUNE “THE WATER NYMPHS”

With his tiger-head tally minted out of
horse-hoof gold, With his duck green, velvet lined,
tortoiseshell armor, His mutton-fat jade belt plaque with its
lion and barbarian king, He is fit material to be an imperial general or minister.
May His Excellency and his lady remain true
till their heads are white; May His Excellency’s ancestors be enfeoffed
three generations back; May His Excellency’s fame be broadcast
throughout the four seas; May His Excellency daily advance up the
golden ladder of success.

FOUR LYRICS TO THE TUNE “BURNING INCENSE”¹

ONE

Gardens of Paradise, Isles of the Blest, The storied towers of Golden Valley,²
Are scarcely equal to a thatched cottage for pure seclusion.
Where wildflowers embroider the ground, Is that not also elegant?
Appropriate to spring,
Appropriate to summer,
Appropriate to autumn.

Wine is mature, ready for straining, Guests arrive, fit for retaining.
Here is no glory, here no disgrace, here no sorrow.
Step back and relax.
What reason for that?
Only, when tired to sleep, When thirsty to drink,
When drunk to sing.

TWO

A short angled wall,
Low roughhewn windows,
A tiny pond, no bigger
than a pimple.
Amid serried peaks,
By green waters,
There is a little wind,
There is a little moonlight, There is a little coolness.

Life's ordinary needs fulfilled, By bamboo table, on rattan couch, Look to what lies before the eyes, the water's hue, the mountain's light.
If guests appear and there's no wine, What's wrong with plain conversation?
Just, carefully brew the tea, Gently warm the cup,
Fastidiously pour the water.

THREE

Situated amid water and bamboo, I love my cottage.³
Rocks lie clear beneath the stream, like randomly placed steps.
The design of my retreat is personal, Along lines delicately wrought.
It is secluded,
It is elegant,
It is comfortable.

At ease, without restraint, What is this like?
Leaning on the railing, I gaze into the water and watch the fish.
From breeze and blossoms, snow and moonlight, I have wrested the freedom, To burn some incense,
Make some comments,
Read some books.

FOUR

Sweep away the dust,
Conserve the moss,
Before the door, let the red leaves cover the steps.
The scene might be depicted in a painting, But that it still continues to surprise, With only a few boles of pine, Few stalks of bamboo,
Few sprigs of plum.

Flowers and trees are so cultivated, That they come into bloom one after another.
As for the events of the morrow, leave them to Heaven.
Let wealth and distinction, Come when they will.
I'll simply go where I please, Abide by my lot,
Unbutton my collar.

LYRICS ON THE FOUR VICES⁴ TO THE TUNE “PARTRIDGE SKY”

DRUNKENNESS

Wine depletes the spiritual resources and destroys the home;
It causes speech to become incoherent, makes conduct riotous.
Estrangement from family, loss of friends, derive therefrom;
Deeds of injustice and ingratitude are all its doing.

One ought not to imbibe, From the flowing cup.
If you are able to obey this injunction, you cannot go wrong.
The foundering of all your undertakings may be traced to this.
From now on, when you entertain guests, serve them tea.

LUST

Do not become enamored of glossy black hair and beautiful complexions; Cease to hanker after crimson powder and halcyon-feathered ornaments.
What ravages man's body and shortens his life are those bewitching figures; Beauties capable of toppling kingdoms and cities are more alluring still.

Be not beguiled,

Husband your cinnabar fields.⁵

Those who are able to diminish their desires live longer years.

From this time on, abandon all thought of casual amours;

Within paper curtains decorated with plum blossoms sleep by yourself.⁶

AVARICE

Money and silk, gold and pearls, may pile up in your coffers; But, unless they are gotten legitimately, forgo their greedy acquisition.
Family and friends, honesty and integrity, are often forfeited for gain; Even the feelings that bind father and son are sometimes sacrificed for profit.

Pull back your hand,

Restrain yourself,

Lest body and mind be fraught with care, both day and night.

Your descendants, of course, will have the fortunes that befit them; On their behalf, you can spare yourself anticipatory worry.⁷

ANGER

Do not resort to violence or endeavor to show off your prowess; By brandishing fists, rolling up sleeves, or displaying your spirit.

Once you let the flames of your temper escape your control;

You will subsequently stew with anxiety at the calamitous results.

Don't go overboard,

Avoid catastrophe;

Be advised, the best policy is to be tolerant in all things.

When it is appropriate to let things go, you should let them go;

When you can make allowances for people, you should make allowances.⁸

Chapter 1

WU SUNG FIGHTS A TIGER ON CHING-YANG RIDGE; P'AN CHIN-LIEN DISDAINS HER MATE AND PLAYS THE COQUETTE

PROLOGUE¹

THESE IS a lyric to the tune “Pleasing Eyes”² that goes: The hero grips his “Hook of Wu,”

Eager to cut off ten thousand heads.
How is it that a heart forged out of iron and stone,
Can yet be melted by a flower?

Just take a look at Hsiang Yü and Liu Pang:³
Both cases are equally distressing.
They had only to meet with Yü-chi⁴ and Lady Ch'ü,⁵
For all their valor to come to naught.⁶

The subject of this lyric is the words *passion* and *beauty*, two concepts that are related to each other as substance is to function. Thus, when beauty bedazzles the eye, passion is born in the heart. Passion and beauty evoke each other; the heart and the eye are interdependent. This is a fact that, from ancient times until the present day, gentlemen of moral cultivation ought never to forget. As two men of the Chin dynasty once said, “It is people just like ourselves who are most affected by passion”;⁷ and “Beauty is like the lodestone which exerts its unseen pull on the needle even when obstacles intervene. If this be true even for nonsentient objects, how much the more must it be so for man, who must spend his days striving to survive in the realm of passion and beauty?”⁸

“The hero grips his ‘Hook of Wu.’ ” Hook of Wu is the name of an ancient sword. In those days there were swords with names such as Kan-chiang, Mo-yeh, T'ai-o, Hook of Wu, Fish Gut, and Death's-head.⁹ The lyric speaks of heroes with temperaments of iron and stone and the sort of heroic prowess that vaults across the heavens like a rainbow, who yet did not escape the fate of allowing their ambitions to be blunted by women. It then goes on to refer to the Hegemon-King of Western Ch'u, whose name was Hsiang Chi, or Hsiang Yü. Because the First Emperor of the Ch'in dynasty¹⁰ was so lacking in virtue that he: Garrisoned the Five Ranges to the south,

Built the Great Wall to the north,
Filled in the sea to the east,
Constructed the O-pang Palace¹¹ in the west, Swallowed up the Six States,
Buried the scholars alive, and
Burned the books,¹²

Hsiang Yü rose up in rebellion against him and was joined by the King of Han, whose name was Liu Chi, or Liu Pang. Liu Pang rolled up like a mat the territory in which the capital of the First Emperor had been located and thus put an end to the Ch'in dynasty. Later he and Hsiang Yü agreed to make the Hung Canal¹³ a boundary line between their territories and divided the empire between them.

Now, in the course of their conflict, Hsiang Yü was able, with the help of plans provided by Fan Tseng,¹⁴ to defeat the King of Han in seventy-two military engagements. But he was so infatuated with his favorite, Yü-chi, who possessed the kind of beauty that can topple kingdoms, that he took her with him on his campaigns so they could be together day and night. The result of this was that he was finally defeated by Liu Pang's general, Han Hsin,¹⁵ and had to flee by night as far as Yin-ling, where the enemy troops caught up with him. Although Hsiang Yü was defeated, he might have sought help from the area east of the Yangtze River, but he could not bear to part with Yü-chi. Hearing the armies that surrounded him on all sides singing the songs of his homeland, the region of Ch'u, he realized that his situation was hopeless and expressed his sorrow in song: My strength can uproot mountains,

My valor knows no peer;
But the times are against me,
And my steed will run no more.
My steed will run no more,
So what can I do?
Oh, Yü-chi, Yü-chi,
What is to be done?¹⁶

When he finished singing his face was streaked with tears.

“Your highness must be sacrificing important military considerations on my account,” Yü-chi said to him.

“Not really,” the Hegemon-King replied. “It's just that we can't bear to give each other up. Moreover, you're such a beauty that Liu Pang, who is a ruler addicted to wine and women, is sure to take you for himself if he should see you.”

“I would rather die in an honest cause than compromise myself in order to save my life,” Yü-chi wept.

Then, asking Hsiang Yü for his sword, she slit her throat and died. The Hegemon-King was so moved by her act that, when the time came, he followed suit by cutting his own throat.

A historian has composed a poem to commemorate this event:

Gone was the strength that could uproot mountains,
the dream of hegemony destroyed;
Laying aside his sword, he merely sang
that his steed would run no more.
As bright moonlight flooded the encampment
beneath the liquescent sky;
How could he bear to turn back his head
and bid Yü-chi farewell?¹⁷

Now the King of Han, Liu Pang, was originally no more than a neighborhood head in Ssu-shui. Yet, with his three-foot sword in hand, he slew the white snake¹⁸ and rose in righteous revolt in the mountainous area between the districts of Mang and Tang. Three years later he destroyed the Ch'in dynasty, and in the fifth year of his reign destroyed the Ch'u, thereby winning the empire for himself and establishing the Han dynasty.¹⁹ But he became infatuated with a woman whose maiden name was Ch'i.

Lady Ch'i gave birth to a son whose title was Prince Ju-i of Chao.²⁰ Because Empress Lü²¹ was jealous of her and wished her no good, Lady Ch'i was extremely uneasy. One day when Emperor Kao-tsu²² was ill and lay with his head in her lap, Lady Ch'i began to weep, saying, "After you have fulfilled your ten thousand years, on whom shall my son and I be able to rely?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," the emperor said. "When I hold court tomorrow I'll depose the heir apparent and set up your son in his stead. How would that be?"

Lady Ch'i dried her tears and thanked him for his favor.

When Empress Lü heard about this she summoned her husband's chief adviser, Chang Liang,²³ for a secret consultation. Chang Liang recommended that the Four Graybeards of Mount Shang be induced to come out of retirement and lend their support to the heir apparent.

One day the Four Graybeards appeared in court with the heir apparent. When Emperor Kao-tsu saw these four men with their snow-white hair and beards and imposing caps and gowns, he asked them who they were. They identified themselves as Master Tung-yüan, Ch'i-li Chi, Master Hsia-huang, and Master Lu-li. Greatly astonished, the emperor asked, "Why did you not choose to come when We offered you employment in the past, only to appear today in the company of our son?"

"The heir apparent is destined to be the preserver of what Your Majesty has established," the Four Graybeards replied.

Upon hearing this Emperor Kao-tsu felt dejected and upset. As the Four Graybeards were on their way out of the palace he summoned Lady Ch'i into his presence, pointed them out to her, and said, "I would have liked to replace the heir apparent, but these four men have lent him their support. Now that his wings are full-grown his position will prove difficult to shake."

Lady Ch'i wept inconsolably and the emperor extemporized a song to explain the situation:

The great swan soars aloft,
A thousand li in one flight.
Once his pinions are complete,
He can range the Four Seas.
He can range the Four Seas,
So what can we do?
Of what avail are stringed arrows,
Against a target that lies beyond their reach?²⁴

The emperor finished his song and, in the end, did not make the Prince of Chao his heir apparent.

After the death of Emperor Kao-tsu, to rid herself of her apprehensions, Empress Lü had Prince Ju-i of Chao put to death with poisoned wine and so mutilated Lady Ch'i as to turn her into a "human pig."²⁵

Poets have remarked, on reaching this point in their evaluations of these two rulers, that Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü were certainly heroes of their day and yet did not escape the fate of suffering their ambitions to be blunted by these two women.

Although the position of wife is superior to that of concubine, the calamity that befell Lady Ch'i was even crueler than that which befell Yü-chi. Thus it is that the way of a wife or concubine who wishes to serve her husband faithfully and yet keep her head and neck intact within her own windows is hard. With regard to these two rulers, is it not true that: They had only to meet with Yü-chi and Lady Ch'i,

For all their valor to come to naught?

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The favorites of Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü
are much to be pitied;

These heroes proved powerless
to protect their beauties.
Yet even the site of Lady Ch'i's burial
remains unknown;
She was less fortunate than Yü-chi,
who has a tomb.²⁶

Now why do you suppose your narrator is so preoccupied with explicating the two words *passion* and *beauty*?²⁷ It is because "Gentlemen who presume on their talents are lacking in virtue, and women who flaunt their beauty are dissolute. If only they were able to maintain the fullness of their gifts while taking care to avoid the overflow of excess, they could be upright men and virtuous women."²⁸ What need would they have then to fear the calamity of unnatural death?

This has always been so, in ancient as in modern times;

It is as true for the exalted as for the humble.

Now this book is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions. In it a licentious woman commits adultery with a decadent man-about-town: Every evening devoted to the pursuit of pleasure;

Every morning an occasion for deluded dalliance.

But in the end she does not escape the fate of:

A corpse prostrate beneath the blade,

A bloodstained carcass in the Yellow Springs;²⁹

Never again to don silk or satin,

No longer able to apply rouge or powder.

If we pause to reflect on these events, from whence do they arise?³⁰ And moreover, what does the death of such a woman matter anyway?

He who coveted her sent to perdition his

imposing six-foot body;

He who loved her squandered wealth enough

to splash against the sky.³¹

The prefecture of Tung-p'ing

was dumbfounded;

The district of Ch'ing-ho

was greatly disturbed.

If, in fact, you don't know to whose family this woman belonged, whose wife she was, by whom she was subsequently usurped, or at whose hands she died, truly: The telling of this tale is enough to knock the peak

of Mount Hua askew;

Its revelation is sufficient to make
the Yellow River flow backward.³²

.

The story goes that during the years of the Cheng-ho reign period³³ of Emperor Hui-tsung³⁴ of the Sung dynasty,³⁵ the emperor bestowed his trust and favor upon the four wicked ministers, Kao Ch'iu,³⁶ Yang Chien,³⁷ T'ung Kuan,³⁸ and Ts'ai Ching,³⁹ with the result that the empire was thrown into great disorder. The people were unable to pursue their vocations and the populace was in dire straits. On all sides bandits arose in swarms and baleful stars descended to earth to be incarnated in human form.⁴⁰ The glittering facade presented by the empire of the Great Sung dynasty was disrupted, and in four different places great bandit chieftains arose.

Who were these four great bandit chieftains?

In Shantung there was Sung Chiang,⁴¹

In Huai-hsi there was Wang Ch'ing.

In Hopei there was T'ien Hu.⁴²

In Chiang-nan there was Fang La.⁴³

All of them:

Disrupted subprefectures and pillaged districts,

Setting fires and killing people;

Assuming royal titles for themselves.

Among them Sung Chiang alone:

Carried out the Way on Heaven's behalf,⁴⁴ and Devoted himself to the righting of injustice;
endeavoring to slay all the:

Venial officials, corrupt functionaries,

Evil magnates, and delinquent commoners

in the empire.

At that time, in Yang-ku district of Shantung Province, there was a man named Wu Chih who was the eldest sibling in his generation of the family. He had a younger brother, by the same mother, whose name was Wu Sung. This Wu Sung was: More than six feet in stature, and

Broad-shouldered as they come.

From his youth he had cultivated his strength and become expert with the spear and quarterstaff. His brother, Wu the

Elder, who was not quite three feet tall, was of a meek disposition and muddleheaded to a ridiculous degree. He was disposed to mind his own business and did not pick quarrels with anyone. Because of the hardship created by a famine in the locality, he decided that he would have to let his younger brother fend for himself, sold the house they had inherited from their forebears, and moved to the district town of Ch'ing-ho.

Now at the time that this occurred Wu Sung, because he had beaten up the military affairs commissioner, T'ung Kuan, in a drunken brawl, found himself: Completely on his own.

He had been forced to become a fugitive and had sought refuge on the manor of the Little Whirlwind, Ch'ai Chin, which was located in the military prefecture of Heng-hai, in Ts'ang-chou. This Ch'ai Chin enjoyed patronizing the heroes and stout fellows of the world and was so: Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth, that people called him Little Lord Meng-ch'ang.⁴⁵ In fact, Master Ch'ai was a direct descendant of Ch'ai Jung, Emperor Shih-tsung of the Later Chou dynasty.⁴⁶

When Ch'ai Chin saw what a fine fellow Wu Sung was, he offered him a place to stay on his manor. But who could have anticipated that Wu Sung would come down with a case of malaria that required him to recuperate on the premises for more than a year? Upon his recovery he bethought himself of his brother, Wu the Elder, bade farewell to his host, and set out for home.

After spending several days on the road, Wu Sung arrived on the border between Yang-ku and Ch'ing-ho districts. At that time there was a ridge of hills on the border of Shantung Province called Ching-yang Ridge, and in these hills there was a bulging-eyed, white-browed tiger who had eaten so many people that travelers along that route were few. The authorities had ordered the licensed hunters of the locality, on pain of being beaten, to capture this tiger by a fixed deadline. There were public notices posted on either side of the road warning traveling merchants to form into bands and cross over only between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M., and prohibiting them from crossing the ridge at any other time.

When Wu Sung heard about this he laughed out loud and stopped at an inn by the side of the road for a few bowls of wine to bolster his courage. Then, with his quarterstaff at the ready, he staggered off, proceeding straight up the ridge in large strides. Before he had gone so far as half a li he saw another public notice, stamped with an official seal, posted on the gate of a temple to the tutelary god of the mountain. When Wu Sung looked at this notice he saw that the message read as follows: There is a tiger on Ching-yang Ridge that has recently attacked many people. At present the responsible persons of the relevant subdistricts and the licensed hunters of the locality have been ordered to capture it by a fixed deadline, and the authorities have offered a reward of thirty taels of silver for its capture. If there should be any traveling merchants who wish to use this route, they should first form into bands and cross the ridge only between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. Passage over the ridge is prohibited at all other times, and unaccompanied travelers are forbidden to cross even during daylight hours. Be it known that anyone who disregards these instructions proceeds at his own risk. With a loud voice Wu Sung proclaimed, "What the hell is there to be afraid of anyway! I'll just go on up the ridge and see what kind of a tiger this is."

Wu Sung tucked his quarterstaff under his arm and proceeded to stride up the ridge. He looked back and saw that the sun was slowly setting behind the mountains. It was the tenth month when the days were short and the nights long, so it got dark early.

Wu Sung continued on his way for a while when he began to feel the effects of the wine. Looking into the distance he saw a tangled clump of trees. When he had made his way, at a fast clip, through this clump of trees he came upon a big, shiny, black rock, the shape of a reclining water buffalo. Propping his quarterstaff against the side of the rock, he laid himself down on top of it and prepared to take a nap.

Just at this juncture, out of the blue sky, a strong gust of wind suddenly arose. What was this wind like? Behold: Devoid of shape and form, it insinuates itself

into men's breasts;
Throughout the four seasons, it has the power to
blow things into life.
Touching the ground, it swirls away
the yellow leaves;
Entering the mountains, it pushes out
the white clouds.⁴⁷

It so happens that:

Clouds arise in response to dragons;

Winds arise in response to tigers.⁴⁸

As this gust of wind passed by, the yellow leaves from the clump of tangled trees fell to the ground with a rustling noise and, with a sudden roar, out jumped a ferocious striped tiger, as big as a water buffalo, with bulging eyes and a white forehead.

When Wu Sung saw this he cried out, "Ai-ya!" rolled off the black rock, grabbed his quarterstaff, and made haste to put the rock between himself and his assailant. The tiger was both hungry and thirsty. Pawing the ground with its front claws, it stretched itself and gave first one lash and then another with its tail. Then it gave a roar, like a dry clap of thunder out of the blue, which made all the hills and ridges reverberate. Wu Sung's consternation had long since turned the wine in his stomach into cold sweat.

The telling is slow;

What happened was quick.

When Wu Sung saw the tiger pounce at him he dodged to one side so that the tiger overshot him.

It so happens that this ferocious tiger had a short neck so that it was not easy for it to turn its head and look behind

itself. Planting its front paws on the ground, it stretched its trunk and made a swipe at Wu Sung with its hindquarters. Wu Sung managed to jump to one side. When the tiger saw that it had failed to sideswipe Wu Sung it gave a roar that shook the ridge. But Wu Sung once again evaded it by dodging to one side.

It so happens that when tigers attack people, if they fail to overcome them with a pounce, a sideswipe, or a lash of the tail, their powers are half exhausted. When Wu Sung saw that the tiger's strength was failing, he turned around, swung his quarterstaff aloft with both hands, and brought it down with all the strength at his command. But the only thing he heard was a loud report and a thrashing noise as the branch of a tree, with all its leaves, came tumbling down in front of him.

It so happens that he had not made contact with the tiger at all, but had hit the branch of a tree so hard that his quarterstaff had broken in two, and only half of it was left in his hand. Wu Sung was more than a little disconcerted by this. The tiger gave vent to its wrath with a roar and, lashing its tail back and forth in a show of might, pounced at Wu Sung once again. With one leap Wu Sung leapt back some ten paces. The tiger's pounce fell short and its forepaws came to rest right in front of him. Wu Sung threw what was left of his quarterstaff to one side and took advantage of the inertia of the tiger's leap by stepping forward, grabbing hold of the skin on the crown of the tiger's head with both hands, and pressing its head down with all his might.

The tiger tried to put up a fight but its strength was already failing. Wu Sung held on for all he was worth, not letting up to the slightest degree. Meanwhile, with his foot, he kicked viciously at the tiger's face and eyes. The tiger roared with pain and pawed so frantically that it heaped up two piles of brown dirt and dug a pit for itself. Wu Sung pressed its head down into the pit and, freeing his right hand, pummeled it with his fist, using all the strength at his command. In no time at all he had beaten the tiger to death. It lay on the ground like an embroidered bag, no longer able to move.

There is an ancient-style poem describing Wu Sung's fight with the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge that goes:

On top of Ching-yang Ridge the wind
blows wildly;
For ten thousand li dark clouds obscure
the sun's light.
Flaming above the length of the river, the
crimson sun is red;
Spreading everywhere over the ground, the
grass has all turned brown.
Catching the eye, a sunset glow hangs
over the woods;
Assailing the inhabitants, a cold fog
fills the firmament.
Suddenly the sound of a thunderclap
is heard;
From the side of the hill out flies
the king of the beasts.
With head held high, flaunting its might,
it bares its teeth and claws;
The deer in the valley all flee
out of its way.
The foxes and rabbits in the hills
keep out of sight;
The deer and gibbons by the stream
are startled into panic.
If Pien Chuang⁴⁹ had seen it, his souls would have fled;
If Li Ts'un-hsiao⁵⁰ had met it, he would have lost heart.
The strongman of Ch'ing-ho while still
in his cups,
Suddenly encounters it on the top
of the ridge.
Searching high and low for its prey
the tiger is famished;
Chancing on Wu Sung it pounces at him
with ferocity.
The tiger's pounce at the man is like
the fall of a mountain;
The man's response to the tiger is like
the collapse of a cliff.
The fall of his arm is like that of a
cannonball;
Its claws and teeth gouge a pit out
of the earth.
The blows of his fist and foot
descend like rain;

His two hands are splattered
with fresh blood.
The stench of raw flesh suffuses
the forest;
Tufts of fur and whiskers lie scattered
over the mountain.
Even close-up, its thousand-stone might
appears intact;
Though, seen from afar, its eightfold majesty
is diminished.
Its body lies in the underbrush, the pattern
of its stripes faded;
Tightly closed, its two eyes will glitter
no more.⁵¹

In less time than it would take to eat a meal, Wu Sung had so beaten this ferocious tiger with his fists and his feet that it was no longer able to move. Panting hard, he let go of the tiger and went looking for his broken quarterstaff, which had fallen by the side of a pine tree. He was afraid the tiger might not really be dead, so he hit it another ten blows or so with his stick. But the tiger had already breathed its last.

Wu Sung thought to himself, "I might as well take advantage of this stroke of luck and drag the tiger down to the foot of the ridge." But when he approached the pool of blood in which it was lying and tugged at the tiger with both hands, he couldn't get it to budge. It so happens that he had exhausted his strength, with the result that his hands and feet had turned to jelly.

Just as Wu Sung was sitting on the rock, resting, he heard a rustling noise in the underbrush on the slope of the hill.

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he was alarmed.

"It's already dark! If another tiger were to jump out at me, how could I hope to overcome it?"

Before he had finished speaking, lo and behold, two tigers emerged into view on the slope below. Wu Sung cried out in consternation, "Ai-ya! This time I'm done for!"

Before his very eyes, these two tigers stood up in front of him. When Wu Sung gave a closer look he saw that they were two men, clothed in tiger skins, who were wearing tiger skulls on their heads and carrying five-pronged spears in their hands. No sooner did they come up to Wu Sung than they bowed their heads in homage, saying, "Strongman, are you a human or a god? You must have eaten the heart of an alligator, the liver of a leopard, and the leg of a lion, or be made out of gall! Otherwise, all by yourself, in the waning light, and without a weapon, how could you possibly have slain this man-eating tiger? We've been on the lookout here for a long time. Tell us the truth, strongman, what is your name?"

Wu Sung replied:

"I neither alter my given name when abroad,

Nor change my surname when at home.

I am a man of Yang-ku district, Wu Sung by name, and the second sibling in my generation of the family." Then he went on to ask, "And who are the two of you?"

"There is no reason for us to deceive you," the two men replied. "We are licensed hunters from this locality. Ever since this tiger appeared on the ridge it has come out every night and attacked lots of people. We hunters alone have lost seven or eight of our number, and there is no telling how many travelers have suffered the same fate. His honor, the district magistrate, ordered us licensed hunters to capture it by a fixed deadline. He offered a reward of thirty taels of silver if it were captured beforehand, but promised us a beating if the deadline expired. Unfortunately, the damned creature is so powerful that no one has dared to go near it. We have been lying in wait for it here, along with several tens of corvée laborers from the subdistrict, and have set up spring-bows with poisoned arrows at a safe distance. Then we saw you come striding up the ridge, as cool as you please, take on the tiger and dispatch it, in no time at all, with three blows of your fist and two kicks of your foot. How could you be so strong! We will truss up the tiger for you and then invite you to come down to the foot of the ridge with us, to the district yamen, so you can meet the magistrate and claim the reward."

At this point the corvée laborers from the subdistrict and the licensed hunters, some seventy or eighty men in all, set off, bearing the dead tiger at the head of the procession and carrying Wu Sung in an open litter behind. They headed straight for the compound of a prominent householder in the neighborhood. This householder and the village head came out to meet them. The tiger was carried into the main room of the house where all the community elders came to see it. They asked Wu Sung his name and he related the story of his conquest of the tiger. Everyone said, "He really is a hero and a stout fellow!" The hunters provided game for a feast and toasted Wu Sung until he was quite drunk. Then a guest room was prepared for him and he retired for the night.

Early the following morning the community elders went to the district yamen to report what had happened. At the same time a litter was prepared for the tiger and a gaily decorated sedan chair for Wu Sung in which he was escorted to the yamen in appropriate state. The magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district sent runners out to usher him into the courtroom. The people of the whole district, on hearing that a strongman had killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge and was being given a formal welcome, all came out to see the show. The entire district was in an uproar.

When Wu Sung arrived at the courtroom he got out of the sedan chair and the tiger was carried in and laid down in front of him. The district magistrate looked Wu Sung over and thought to himself, "If he weren't such a hefty fellow, how could he have overcome this fierce tiger?" Then he summoned him to come forward and Wu Sung, after having paid his respects, related the story of his conquest of the tiger from start to finish. The functionaries standing to either side were stupefied with amazement.

The magistrate offered him several cups of wine right in the courtroom and then presented him with the reward of

thirty taels of silver that had been contributed by the prominent families of the district.

Wu Sung said respectfully, "It is only owing to Your Honor's benevolent deeds that I have had the accidental good fortune to kill this tiger. It is due to no merit of mine. How could I accept this reward? These thirty taels of silver ought to go to the licensed hunters who have suffered so much at your hands on account of this beast. Why not divide up the reward among them as a demonstration of Your Honor's graciousness and of my own public spirit?"

"If that's what you want," the magistrate said, "you may do as you wish." There and then Wu Sung proceeded to distribute the thirty taels of reward money to the licensed hunters, who went their way.

When the magistrate saw that Wu Sung was a man of virtue and integrity, and a stout fellow to boot, it occurred to him that he might be able to do something for him, so he said, "Even though you come from the district of Yang-ku rather than Ch'ing-ho, they are right next to each other. If I were to appoint you to the post of police captain here in Ch'ing-ho, with the responsibility for maintaining law and order throughout the jurisdiction, what would you think?"

Wu Sung knelt down and thanked him, saying, "If Your Honor should deign to raise me up in this way, I would be grateful to you for the rest of my life."

The magistrate ordered his clerk to take care of the necessary paperwork immediately, and he appointed Wu Sung to the post of police captain that very day. All the village heads and prominent householders of the district came to offer him their congratulations, and the celebrations attendant upon his appointment lasted for three days.

Wu Sung had intended to look up his elder brother in Yang-ku district and could hardly have foreseen that he would end up being appointed a captain in Ch'ing-ho. He was so delighted he could scarcely contain himself. The news of this event spread throughout the two districts that comprised the prefecture of Tung-p'ing so that the name of Wu Sung was known to everyone. There is a poem that testifies to this: The martial prowess of the strongman hero

was highly esteemed;
Risking his life he marched straight up
Ching-yang Ridge.
Even though drunk he slew the tiger
on the mountain;
From then on his renown spread to the
four quarters.⁵²

Let us put aside the story of Wu Sung for a moment and return to that of Wu the Elder. After parting company with his younger brother because of the hardship created by a famine in the locality, he had moved to Ch'ing-ho district where he rented a house on Amethyst Street. When people observed his meek disposition and unsightly appearance they gave him the nickname Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, in vulgar allusion to his coarse exterior and cramped features. There were many who did not scruple to take advantage of his weakness and naïveté, but Wu the Elder did not respond with anger, merely endeavoring to keep out of their way.

Gentle reader take note:

In this world the heart of man alone
remains vile.⁵³

It despises the weak,
While fearing the wicked.
If it's too hard it's brittle;
If it's too soft it's no use.⁵⁴

A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that express this very well:

To the tune "Moon on the West River"

Flexibility is the root of success;
Adamancy is the womb of misfortune.
Not to vie or contend is to show true worth;
If I lose out now and then, what's the harm?

History is but a succession of spring dreams,
Though the red dust spawns a profusion of talents.
There is no need to scheme or contrive;
It is those who abide by their lot who survive.⁵⁵

To resume our story, Wu the Elder made his living by shouldering his carrying pole and peddling steamed wheat cakes on the street all day. Unfortunately, his wife died, leaving behind a daughter, named Ying-erh, who was just eleven years old. Father and daughter lived together as best they could, but before half a year had gone by their resources were exhausted and they had to move into a storefront, on Main Street, belonging to a well-to-do merchant named Chang, where Wu the Elder continued to ply his trade.

The servants in Mr. Chang's household, seeing that Wu the Elder was an honest man, looked out for his interests and often patronized his steamed wheat cakes and sat around in his shop when they had nothing better to do. Wu the Elder was always so obliging that everyone was partial to him and spoke up vigorously on his behalf in the presence of their employer whenever the opportunity arose. As a result of these good offices Mr. Chang even went so far as to forgive him his rent.

Now this Mr. Chang had the equivalent of ten thousand strings of cash in capital and owned a hundred parcels of real estate. He was more than sixty years old and did not have so much as a foot or an inch's worth of progeny of either sex. His wife, whose maiden name was Yü, ruled the roost with an iron hand so that there was not so much as an attractive servant girl on the premises.

One day Mr. Chang struck himself ostentatiously on the breast and gave vent to a sigh.

"Your property and wealth are more than sufficient," his wife remarked. "Why on earth should you disturb your leisure with such a sigh?"

"Old as I am," her husband replied, "I still don't have any children. Even though I may be rich, what good does it do me?"

"If that's what's bothering you," said Mrs. Chang, "I'll have a go-between buy two servant girls for you. Once they've been taught to play and sing they ought to be able to look after you."

Mr. Chang was delighted by this and thanked his wife accordingly.⁵⁶

Some time later Mrs. Chang actually engaged a go-between to buy two servant girls, one of whom was called P'an Chin-lien and the other Pai Yü-lien.

This P'an Chin-lien was the daughter of Tailor P'an whose shop was located outside the South Gate. She was the sixth sibling in her generation of the family. Because she had always been good-looking and possessed a pair of very small bound feet she was called Chin-lien, or Golden Lotus.⁵⁷ After the death of her father her mother was unable to make ends meet, and so, when Chin-lien was only eight years old, she sold her into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang,⁵⁸ where she was taught to play musical instruments and to sing. She was adept at: Painting her brows and making up her eyes,

Applying powder and putting on rouge,
Combing her hair into a chignon,
Wearing form-fitting gowns,
Putting on airs,
And making a spectacle of herself.⁵⁹

Moreover, she was quick and clever by nature. Before she was fourteen she could draw phoenix designs and execute them in embroidery and perform on woodwind and string instruments, her favorite among which was the *p'i-p'a*, or balloon guitar.

Sometime later Imperial Commissioner Wang died and Chin-lien's mother succeeded in extricating her from the Wang household only to resell her to the Changs for thirty taels of silver. She and Pai Yü-lien entered the household together where they continued to improve their skills as musicians and singers. Chin-lien concentrated on the *p'i-p'a* and Yü-lien on the *cheng*, or psaltery. Yü-lien was also just fifteen and was the daughter of a family registered as professional musicians. Because she had always had a fair complexion she was called Yü-lien, or Jade Lotus.

The two of them shared the same bedroom. Initially the mistress of the household, Mrs. Chang, treated them very well, not requiring them to work in the kitchen or do any housework, and giving them presents of gold and silver jewelry with which to adorn themselves. Later Pai Yü-lien died unexpectedly, leaving Chin-lien all by herself.

She was now seventeen years old and had developed into a slender and curvaceous beauty with:

Cheeks like peach blossoms, and
Eyebrows like the crescent moon.

Mr. Chang had wished to take advantage of her for some time, but fear of his wife's temper had prevented him from making a move. One day when the mistress of the household was out of the way on a visit to a neighbor, Mr. Chang surreptitiously invited Chin-lien into his room and had his way with her. Truly: The beautiful unblemished jade

will one day be destroyed.

How will the pearl ever
regain its former perfection?

Once Mr. Chang had had his way with Chin-lien, before he knew it he found himself afflicted with four or five ailments. Truly, what five ailments were these?

No. 1: his loins began to ache.

No. 2: his eyes began to tear.

No. 3: his ears began to grow deaf.

No. 4: his nose began to run.⁶⁰

No. 5: his urine began to drip.

And there was still another ailment that doesn't even bear mentioning.

In broad daylight he dozed off, and

At night he couldn't stop sneezing.

When the mistress of the household got wind of what was going on behind her back she quarreled for several days with her husband and gave Chin-lien a terrible beating. Mr. Chang realized that he wouldn't be able to keep her any longer but determined, in spite of his wife, to provide her with a dowry and marry her off to an appropriate person. The servants in the household reminded him what an honorable man Wu the Elder was and pointed out that he was not only currently unmarried but also resided on the premises, which would make him a convenient choice. Mr. Chang had hopes of being able to continue his liaison with the young woman, and so, without demanding a candareen from Wu the Elder, he made him a present of her as his wife.

After Chin-lien and Wu the Elder were married, Mr. Chang made it a point to look after him. If he were short of capital for his trade in steamed wheat cakes, he would slip him five taels of silver to make up the deficiency. While Wu the Elder was out peddling his wares, Mr. Chang would wait until there was no one about and then steal into their room for an assignation with Chin-lien. Although Wu the Elder occasionally happened upon them in compromising circumstances, he did not dare to make a fuss about it.

Mornings and evenings succeeded one another, and this situation had prevailed for some time when Mr. Chang suddenly came down with a venereal chill and: Alas and alack, died. When the mistress of the household discovered what had been going on, without more ado she angrily ordered the servants to drive Chin-lien and Wu the Elder out of the house, so they no longer had a place to stay.

Scarcely aware of the implications of what had happened, Wu the Elder once more found a house on the west side of Amethyst Street, belonging to a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang, in which he rented an inner and an outer room and continued to peddle his steamed wheat cakes as before.

It so happens that ever since Chin-lien had married Wu the Elder and had a chance to observe his guileless disposition and unsightly appearance she had taken a violent dislike to him and quarreled with him all the time. She resented what Mr. Chang had done to her and said to herself, "It's not as though there weren't another man in the whole wide world. Why did he have to marry me off to the likes of this?"

If you tug him he won't move;

If you hit him he pulls back.

The only thing he can be counted on to do every day is to guzzle his wine. When you get right down to it, you could jab him with an awl without arousing him. What did I ever do in a previous incarnation to deserve such a fate? It's really intolerable."

Whenever there was no one around she used to play a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this: How did it all begin?

I was mismatched to him.
I thought he was a real man.
Not that I want to boast,
But how can a crow be a match for a phoenix?
I'm like buried gold,
He's only bogus brass;
How can his luster compare with mine?
He's just a hunk of rough stone;
What right's he got to my mutton-fat jade body?
I'm like a magic mushroom growing out of the muck.⁶¹
But what can I do?
No matter what he does,
I'll never be satisfied.
Just listen to me:
How can a gold brick be laid
On such a mud foundation?

Gentle reader take note: Most of the women of this world, if they are blessed with good looks and natural intelligence, will turn out all right if they are only married to a decent man. But as for the likes of Wu the Elder, even the best woman in the world might find it hard to avoid repining. It has always been true that: Women of beauty and men of talent are seldom matched;

Just when you're in the market for gold
you can never find a seller.

Every day Wu the Elder shouldered his load of steamed wheat cakes and went out to peddle his wares, not returning until evening. His wife had little to occupy her other than the preparation of three daily meals. After eating she would make herself up and stand behind the bamboo blind that hung over the front door. From that vantage point she was in the habit of: Provoking attention with her brows, and

Sending messages with her eyes.

Now this fact was not lost on a number of dissolute young scamps in the neighborhood who were seldom up to any good. When they saw the way that Wu the Elder's wife was: Dolling herself up so slickly,

Engaging the breeze and disturbing the foliage,
they began to make riddling allusions to her in public and even to engage her in badinage with remarks like: "How did a piece of fine mutton

End up in the mouth of such a dog?"⁶²

Everyone knew that Wu the Elder was a man of meek disposition but not many were aware that he had such a mismatched wife in his house, who was both romantically inclined and clever, in fact, good at everything, but particularly adultery. There is a poem that testifies to this: Chin-lien's beauty is certainly worthy

of remark;
When she laughs her eyebrows rise up
like spring peaks.
If she ever encounters a dashing
young gentleman,
She will make an assignation with him
without more ado.⁶³

Every day, after she had seen Wu the Elder out the door, this woman would stand inside the blind, cracking melon seeds with her teeth, and revealing her tiny golden lotuses for all to see. Such conduct attracted the aforesaid young gentlemen, who gathered on her doorstep day after day, strumming guitars and ukuleles,⁶⁴ and giving voice to every indecent suggestion their fertile imaginations could invent. As a result, Wu the Elder came to feel that he could no longer continue to live on that part of Amethyst Street and wanted to move somewhere else.

When he raised this issue with his wife she said, "You lousy muddleheaded ignoramus! If you're content to rent such inadequate lodgings in somebody else's house, it's scarcely surprising that petty-minded people should abuse you. Why don't you get together a few taels of silver, look about for an appropriate place, and take out a mortgage on a house with at least a couple of rooms? If we lived in more presentable quarters nobody would take advantage of us. You're the man of the house, but you're always so much at a loss that I end up taking the brunt of things on your account."

"And where would I get the money for a mortgage?" Wu the Elder asked.

"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a nincompoop! You can sell my hairpins and combs to make up the sum. What's so difficult about that? They can always be replaced later on when we're better off than we are now."

Wu the Elder allowed himself to be persuaded by his wife. When he had scraped together something over ten taels of silver he took out a mortgage on a two-story house near the gate of the district yamen. It was quite cozy, with three rooms on the ground floor, an upstairs room in the front, and two little courtyards. After moving to this new address, on that part of Amethyst Street that ran along the west side of the district yamen,⁶⁵ Wu the Elder continued to peddle steamed wheat cakes as before.

One day as he was going along the street he heard the din of gongs and drums and noticed several contingents of soldiers with tasseled spears escorting a man in a gaily decorated sedan chair. Who should this turn out to be but his own younger brother, Wu Sung. Because Wu Sung had killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge the district magistrate had elevated him to the position of police captain, and the community elders were participating in the celebration of this event by accompanying him on the way to his lodgings.

When Wu the Elder caught sight of him he grasped hold of him with his hand and called out, "Younger Brother, now that you're a captain, haven't you any time for me?" Wu Sung turned around and saw that it was his elder brother.

Both of them were greatly delighted by their reunion, and Wu the Elder invited Wu Sung to his home where he ushered him to a seat in the upstairs room and called Chin-lien out to meet him. Then he said, "The man who killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge the other day is your brother-in-law. Now he has just been appointed to the post of police captain. He and I are brothers from the same womb."

The woman:

Stepping forward and saluting him with folded hands,
said, "Many felicitations, Brother-in-law."

Wu Sung returned her salutation by kneeling down to kowtow, but the woman attempted to help him to his feet, saying, "Please rise, Brother-in-law. You'll be the death of me yet."



P'an Chin-lien Disdains Her Mate and Plays the Coquette

"Accept my salutation, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. The two of them dickered politely for a while and ended up kowtowing to each other before getting to their feet.

After a brief interval Wu the Elder's daughter served tea to the two of them. Wu Sung saw that the woman was extremely seductive and merely lowered his head. Before long Wu the Elder took it upon himself to provide food and drink for Wu Sung's entertainment and, leaving the two of them to their conversation, went downstairs to buy the necessary provisions. The woman was left upstairs all by herself to keep Wu Sung company.

Chin-lien looked at Wu Sung and saw that:

His physique was awe-inspiring, and

His appearance was imposing.
His body seemed to be possessed of boundless strength. Were this not so, how could he have overcome the tiger?
“They are brothers, born of the same mother,” she thought to herself, “and yet one of them is so big and strong. If I’d been married to him I might have gotten by somehow or other. But look at that Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin of mine! He’s only: Three parts human, and

Seven parts ghou!.⁶⁶
I must have been so plague-stricken in a previous incarnation that I’m still suffering the ill effects to this day. Wu Sung certainly looks manly enough to me. Why don’t I see if I can get him to move in with us here? Who knows? This may turn out to be the very love-match I’ve been waiting for.”

Making herself all smiles, the woman asked, “Brother-in-law, where are you staying right now, and who’s looking after your meals?”

“I’ve just been appointed to the post of captain,” Wu Sung said, “so I have to be on duty every day to await the orders of my superiors. For the sake of convenience I’m making do with lodgings right in front of the district yamen. Two local recruits are detailed every day to act as my orderlies and take care of my meals.”

“Brother-in-law,” the woman said, “why don’t you move in with us here? It would save you the trouble of having to put up with the services of those orderlies from the yamen who probably aren’t any too sanitary where food is concerned. It’s more convenient if we all live under the same roof. Then, if you happen to want some soup or something, I can make it for you myself, and you’ll know it’s safe to eat.”

“Thank you very much, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung.

“You must have a wife somewhere,” the woman went on. “Why don’t you bring her along and introduce her to us?”

“I’ve never gotten married,” said Wu Sung.

“How old are you, Brother-in-law?” the woman asked.

“I’m twenty-seven,” said Wu Sung.

“It so happens that you’re just three years older than I am,” the woman said. “Where have you come from on this occasion, Brother-in-law?”

“I’ve been living in Ts’ang-chou for more than a year,” Wu Sung said. “I thought my brother was still living in our old house and had no idea he had moved here.”

“It’s a long story,”
the woman said. “Ever since I married your elder brother, people have taken advantage of his good-heartedness. That’s why we had to move here. If he were only a real man like you, Brother-in-law, who would dare to say him nay?”

“My brother has always minded his own business,” said Wu Sung. “He doesn’t allow himself to lose his temper the way I do.”

“You’ve got it all backward,” laughed the woman. “As the saying goes:

If you aren’t tough enough,

You will never be secure.”⁶⁷

I’ve always been quick-tempered myself, and could never abide the sort of person who:

If you hit him three times won’t turn around; but

If you hit him a fourth time goes into a spin.”⁶⁸

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Brother and sister-in-law happen to meet
like floating duckweed;
With a seductive air she insists on
flaunting her beauty.
In her heart she only wants him
to make love to her;
With deceptive words she sets out
to inveigle Wu Sung.⁶⁹

It so happens that this woman was the sort who is forever protesting her own virtue.

Wu Sung said, “My brother is not a troublemaker, so you have nothing to worry about, Sister-in-law.”

Before the two of them had finished speaking, Wu the Elder returned from his shopping expedition, laden with meat and vegetables, fruit and pastries. Putting these down in the kitchen he started up the stairs and called out, “My dear, why don’t you come downstairs and fix these things for us?”

“Just see what an ignoramus he is!” the woman responded. “Here you are, Brother-in-law, with no one to entertain you, and he wants me to go downstairs and abandon you.”

“Please don’t inconvenience yourself on my account, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung.

“Why don’t you go next door and ask Godmother Wang if she could help out?” the woman demanded. “Can’t you ever figure things out for yourself?” Wu the Elder did as he was bidden and Dame Wang prepared everything very nicely, bringing it upstairs and setting it out on the table for them. The fare consisted of fish and meat, fruit and vegetables, sweetmeats, and the like. As soon as the wine was heated, Wu the Elder asked his wife to play the role of host, with Wu Sung sitting across from her, while he took a seat to one side. When the three of them had sat down at their places Wu the Elder took up the wine and poured a little for each of them.

Picking up her winecup the woman said, “Brother-in-law, don’t take it amiss, but we’ve nothing to offer you. Please try a cup of this watery wine.”

“Thank you, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung. “Please don’t talk that way any more.”

Wu the Elder was so preoccupied with running up and down stairs to heat and pour the wine that he could hardly

concern himself with what went on between them.

The woman gave Wu Sung:

Such a smile you could have plucked it off her face,⁷⁰
while her mouth was full of nothing but “Brother-in-law this and Brother-in-law that.” “Why don’t you help yourself to the meat, or some fruit?” she asked, and she picked out the best tidbits and put them on his plate with her own chopsticks.

Now Wu Sung was a man of straightforward temperament and took this to be no more than his sister-in-law’s cordiality. How could he have known that this woman had started her career as a serving maid and become adept at the art of playing up to others? He was quite unaware that in her heart she had designs on him. Wu the Elder, on the other hand, was too naïve to be any good at entertaining guests.

By the time the woman had downed a few cups of wine with Wu Sung she couldn’t take her eyes off him. Wu Sung was embarrassed by the way she looked at him and merely lowered his head without responding to her. After they had been drinking for a while the wine ran out and he got up to go. Wu the Elder said, “If you haven’t anything else to do, Brother, why not have another cup or two before you go?”

“I’ve troubled you enough,” said Wu Sung. “I’ll come and see you again, Brother and Sister-in-law.”

When they had seen him downstairs and out the door the woman said, “Brother-in-law, be sure you don’t forget to come and move in with us here. People will laugh at us if you don’t. After all, you’re blood brothers. It’s not as though you were anyone else. Besides, if you can stick up for us, you’ll actually be doing us a favor.”

“Since you’re so hospitable, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung, “I’ll get my things and move in this very evening.”

“Brother-in-law,” the woman said, “be sure you don’t forget. I’ll be waiting for you.” Truly: The natural beauty of the vista

remains unseen;
In spring the peach blossoms bloom
all by themselves.⁷¹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

How reprehensible is Chin-lien
whose schemes are deep;
She conceals her wanton intent though
her desires are in a tumult.
Wu Sung is steadfast and true,
not easily tempted;
The shining integrity of his name is worth
ten thousand pieces of gold.⁷²

That day the woman outdid herself in her efforts to please him.

To resume our story, Wu Sung returned to the inn in front of the district yamen where he had been staying, collected his luggage and bedroll, got his orderlies to carry them for him, and led the way to his brother’s house. When the woman saw him she was happier than she would have been if she had: Discovered a piece of gold or a precious stone.⁷³ Then she swept out a room and fixed it up nicely for him. Wu Sung sent the orderlies back to the yamen and slept that night at his brother’s house.

The next day he arose early and the woman also got up hastily and heated water for him so he could wash his face. Wu Sung washed, combed his hair, put on his turban, and headed out the door to make the morning roll call at the yamen.

“Brother-in-law,” the woman said, “after the roll call is over come back for something to eat as soon as you can. Don’t go anywhere else for your meals.”

Wu Sung assented and then went to the yamen to be in time for roll call. When he returned home after putting in a morning on duty he found that the woman had prepared a full-course meal. After the three of them had finished eating, the woman brought Wu Sung a cup of tea and served it to him with both hands.

“I’m really imposing on you, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung. “It makes me:

Too uncomfortable to sleep or eat in peace.⁷⁴

Tomorrow I’ll have the yamen send an orderly over to help out.”

“Brother-in-law,” the woman retorted, “how can you make so much of it? Our own flesh and blood! It’s not as though I were waiting on anyone else. It’s true we’ve got this little chit, Ying-erh, but when I see the way she: Picks up this and then picks up that,

Floundering about all over the place,
there’s no way I can rely on her. And even if you arrange for an orderly, he won’t be any too sanitary where food is concerned. I really can’t abide people like that.”

“If that’s the way it is, Sister-in-law,” said Wu Sung, “I guess I’ll just have to impose on you.”

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Wu Sung’s demeanor is really
awe-inspiring;
His sister-in-law’s wantonness can
not be checked.
She inveigles him into coming to live
under the same roof;
In order to share the clouds and rain
in a romantic affair.⁷⁵

To make a long story short, after moving into his brother's home Wu Sung took out some silver and gave it to Wu the Elder in order to buy pastries, tea, and fruit to entertain the neighbors on either side. The neighbors, on their part, clubbed together to return the treat, and Wu the Elder, in due course, reciprocated. But no more of this.

After several days had gone by, Wu Sung presented his sister-in-law with a bolt of variegated satin to make a dress for herself.

With an ingratiating smile the woman said, "Brother-in-law, this will never do. But since you've already given it to me, I can't very well refuse, can I? I guess I'll just have to accept." And she bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations."

From this time on Wu Sung lived in his brother's home. Wu the Elder continued to shoulder his load and go out into the streets to sell his steamed wheat cakes as before. Wu Sung went to the yamen every day to report for duty and no matter whether he: Returned early or returned late, the woman would:

Cook some soup or cook a meal,
As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could
make her happier.

This only had the effect of making Wu Sung feel more uncomfortable.

From time to time the woman would try to arouse him with a suggestive comment, but Wu Sung was an adamantly straightforward man and did not rise to the bait.

When there is a story to tell it is long;
When there is no story to tell it is short.

Before anyone knew it more than a month had gone by. It was now the eleventh month and a strong north wind began to blow, day after day. In every quarter what should appear but: Dense masses of dark clouds, and all of a sudden:

Fluttering and swirling,
A skyful of auspicious snow came flying down.

Behold:

To the tune "Immortal at the River"

For ten thousand li dark clouds
are densely massed;

In midair the auspicious omen
ripples the blinds;

The petals of alabaster flowers
dance before the eaves.
It was at just such a time,
on the Shan River,
That Wang Hui-chih's boat,
was immersed. [76](#)

In an instant the towers and terraces
are weighted down;
Rivers and mountains are linked by
an expanse of silver;

Flying salt and scattered powder
fill the sky.

Such was the occasion when
Lü Meng-cheng,
In his dilapidated kiln, bemoaned
his penury.⁷⁷

The snow continued to fall that day until the first watch and made everything look like:

A world decorated with silver;
A universe carved out of jade.

The next day Wu Sung reported to the yamen in time for the morning roll call, as usual, and had not yet returned home at noon. Wu the Elder had long since allowed himself to be hustled out of the house by his wife to ply his trade. Now she asked Dame Wang, next door, to buy her some meat and wine, and then went into Wu Sung's room and lit a brazier of charcoal.

"Today I'll give his cinders a real stirring," she thought to herself. "Never fear, he's bound to catch fire."

Cold as it was, the woman stood inside the hanging blind at the door, all by herself, until she caught sight of Wu Sung: Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade, as he made his way homeward through the snow.

The woman raised the blind to let him in and said with a smile, "Brother-in-law, you must be cold."

"Thanks for your concern, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung.

He came in the door and took off his broad-brimmed felt hat. The woman reached out her hand to take it from him, but Wu Sung said, "Don't bother, Sister-in-law," and proceeded to brush off the snow and hang it on the wall himself. Then he unfastened his belt, took off his parrot-green silk jacket, and went into his room.

"I've been waiting for you all morning, Brother-in-law," the woman said. "Why didn't you come home for breakfast?"

"A friend of mine treated me to a meal this morning," said Wu Sung. "Just now another one invited me for a drink, but I couldn't be bothered, and came straight home."

"In that case, warm yourself at the fire, Brother-in-law," the woman said.

"That's just what I need," said Wu Sung, who proceeded to take off his waxed boots, change his socks, put on a pair of warm slippers, pull over a bench, and seat himself next to the brazier.

By this time the woman had already told Ying-erh to shut the front door and check to see that the back door was closed also. Then she put the wine on to heat, prepared a few dishes of food, brought them into his room, and laid them out on the table.

"Where is my brother?" Wu Sung asked.

"Your brother has gone out to peddle his wares as he does every day," said the woman, "but I'll share three cups with you, Brother-in-law."

"I'd just as soon wait till he gets home," said Wu Sung.

"Why should we wait for him?" the woman said.

Before she had finished speaking the little girl, Ying-erh, appeared with a flagon of warmed wine.

"You needn't have gone to so much trouble, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. "Let me do the honors."

The woman also pulled over a bench and sat down next to the brazier. The table was already set. Picking up a cup of wine and holding it out to him in her hand, she looked at Wu Sung and said, "Bottoms up, Brother-in-law."

Wu Sung took the cup of wine and:

Drained it in one gulp.

The woman refilled it and said, "The weather's cold, Brother-in-law. Have another cup. It takes two to make a couple."

"Why don't you help yourself, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung, but he took the cup of wine and again:

Drained it in one gulp.

Wu Sung then poured a cupful of wine and offered it to the woman, who accepted and swallowed it. Picking up the flagon, she refilled the cup and put it in front of Wu Sung. Then and there: Her creamy breasts slightly exposed, and

Her cloudy locks half askew,

the woman said to him with an ingratiating smile, "I've heard people say, Brother-in-law, that you're keeping a singing girl on the street in front of the district yamen. Is that true?"

"Sister-in-law, you shouldn't pay any attention to the nonsense people talk," said Wu Sung. "I've never been that sort of person."

"I don't believe you," the woman said. "I only fear that:

Your mouth is not in harmony with your heart."

"If you don't believe me, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung, "just ask my brother and see what he says."

"Ai-ya!" the woman said, "why bring him into it? What does he know about anything? For him:

Life and death are but a drunken dream."⁷⁸

If he knew the score he wouldn't be peddling steamed wheat cakes. Brother-in-law, have another drink."

By the time a few more rounds had been poured and drunk the woman had reached that state in which:

Three cups of wine in the stomach

ignite the flames of desire.

How could she hope to repress

the fire of lust in her heart?

But she merely continued her idle conversation.

Wu Sung was now 80 or 90 percent aware of what was going on, but he merely lowered his head without responding to her.

The woman got up and went to heat some more wine, leaving Wu Sung alone in the room. He picked up the fire tongs and started to poke up the fire in the brazier. After a while, when the wine had been heated, she came back into the room. Holding the flagon in one hand, she reached out with the other and gave Wu Sung a pinch on the shoulder, saying, "Brother-in-law, if that's all you've got on, you must be cold, aren't you?"

Wu Sung was already more than a little uncomfortable about the situation, but did not pay any attention to her. When the woman saw that he did not respond, she grabbed the fire tongs out of his hand and said, "Brother-in-law, you don't know how to stir up a flame. Let me show you how. It's got to be red-hot or it won't do any good."

Wu Sung had nearly reached the end of his fuse, but did not make any reply. Without noticing that he was upset, the woman dropped the fire-tongs and poured a cupful of wine. She took a sip from this herself, leaving the cup more than half full. Then, looking at Wu Sung, she said, "If you share my feelings, you'll drink the rest of my cup."

Wu Sung grabbed the cup away from her and threw its contents on the floor, saying, "Sister-in-law, how can you be so shameless!"

At the same time, he gave her a push with his hand that nearly knocked her over. Opening his eyes wide, Wu Sung said, "I'm the sort of man who: Stands erect between Heaven and Earth,⁷⁹

With teeth in his mouth and hair on his head.⁸⁰
I'm not the sort of pig or dog who:

Poses a threat to public morality,⁸¹
or violates the standards of human decency. Sister-in-law, this kind of shameless behavior must cease! From now on: If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,⁸²

My eyes may recognize you as my sister-in-law,
But my fists won't recognize you.⁸³
Let's have no more of this."

The woman's face turned bright red as she listened to this tirade. Calling in Ying-erh to clear the saucers, cups, and other utensils from the table, she muttered under her breath, "I was only kidding. It's hardly worth taking so seriously."

You wouldn't know a favor if you saw one."

As soon as the table was cleared she retired to the kitchen. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Chin-lien's disreputable schemes are
all too wicked;
Wanton and shameless, she knows no
behavioral norms.
Even at table she seeks the consolation
of clouds and rain;
Only to find herself subjected to the
captain's reprimand.⁸⁴

Not only did the woman discover that Wu Sung would not respond to her advances, but she got a good verbal drubbing for her pains.

Wu Sung remained in his room, still fuming, and thinking to himself. Before long it was five o'clock in the afternoon and Wu the Elder, with his carrying pole over his shoulder, made his way home through the snow. After pushing open the door and putting down his load he came into the room and saw that his wife's eyes were red with weeping.

"Who've you been quarreling with?" he asked.

"It's all your fault," the woman said. "You never stick up for yourself, and you allow other people to take advantage of me."

"Who would dare take advantage of you?" Wu the Elder demanded.

"You know perfectly well who it is," the woman replied. "It's really intolerable! That bastard, Wu the Second! When I saw him come home through the snow I went to the trouble of fixing some wine and food for him. Then, when he saw there was no one about, he tried to proposition me. Ying-erh saw it with her own eyes. I'm not making it up."

"My brother isn't that sort of person," stated Wu the Elder. "He's always been an honorable man. Keep your voice down! The neighbors will laugh at us if they hear you."

Leaving his wife where she was, Wu the Elder went into Wu Sung's room and said, "Brother, if you haven't had an afternoon snack yet, I'll have something to eat with you."

Wu Sung made no reply. Instead, after thinking for a while, he took off his silk slippers and pulled his waxed boots back onto his feet. Then he put on his jacket and his wide-brimmed felt hat, fastened his belt, and strode out the front door.

"Brother, where are you going?" Wu the Elder called after him, but Wu Sung made no reply and proceeded straight on his way.

Wu the Elder went back into the house to interrogate his wife. "He didn't even respond when I called to him," he said. "He just headed along the street toward the front gate of the district yamen. I really don't know what's the matter with him."

"You lousy muddleheaded worm!" his wife railed at him. "What's so hard to see about it? The bastard's so ashamed of himself he doesn't have the face to confront you, so he's walked out on you. I'll bet he sends someone to fetch his luggage and refuses to live here any longer. I wouldn't put it past you to urge him to stay!"

"If he moves out people will laugh at us," Wu the Elder said.

"You muddleheaded troll!" his wife cursed. "If he starts playing around with *me*, no one will laugh at us I suppose! Go stay with *him*, if that's what you want to do; but I'm not the kind of person to put up with this sort of thing. Just give me a writ of divorce and you can have him all to yourself!"

Wu the Elder scarcely dared open his mouth again in response to this tirade from his wife. The two of them were still going at it when who should appear but Wu Sung, with an orderly in tow, who walked right into the house with his carrying pole, picked up his luggage, and headed out the door.

Wu the Elder ran outside and called after him, "Brother, why are you moving out like this?"

"Don't ask, Brother," said Wu Sung. "If I tried to explain, it would only serve to publicize the problem. Just let me go my own way."

Wu the Elder didn't dare ask anything more about it and let Wu Sung do as he wished.

Inside the house his wife continued to rail away. "A fine thing it is, too! Just as they say:

It's not easy to collect a debt from a relative.

All anybody knows is that you've got a younger brother who's been made a captain, and everyone assumes that he's supporting his brother and sister-in-law in fine style. What they don't know is that he's just a sponger. In fact: He's a real quince:

Good to look at, but not fit to eat.⁸⁵

Now that he's moved out, all I can say is:

Thanks be to Heaven and Earth;

At long last my enemy has been removed from my sight."⁸⁶

When Wu the Elder heard his wife utter these imprecations he didn't know what to make of it, and remained in a state of mental perturbation. After Wu Sung moved back into his room in the inn in front of the district yamen, Wu the Elder continued to go out on the street and peddle his steamed wheat cakes as before. He wanted to look up his brother and have a talk with him, but his wife forbade him, in no uncertain terms, to have anything to do with him. For this reason Wu the Elder did not dare seek out Wu Sung.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Chin-lien's dream of clouds and rain
did not materialize;
Who would believe that this evoked
hostility in her heart?
Thus did she contrive to get Wu Sung
out of the way;

And sow enmity between brothers
of the same flesh and blood.⁸⁷

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

BENEATH THE BLIND HSI-MEN CH'ING MEETS CHIN-LIEN; INSPIRED BY GREED DAME WANG SPEAKS OF ROMANCE

In making this match, the Old Man under the Moon¹
has made a mistake;
Displaying her talents, P'an Chin-lien
flaunts her beauty.
Merely because she dreams of assignations
under the moon, beneath the stars;
She attracts the attentions of those
beyond the door, outside the screen.
Tempted by greed, Dame Wang employs
a crafty scheme;
Peddling his fruit, Y'ün-ko becomes
the object of rancor.²
How can she foresee that a later day
will bring domestic disaster;
That her blood will spatter the standing screen
and make the whole floor red?

THE STORY GOES that Wu Sung had no sooner moved out of his elder brother's house than, in a snap of the fingers, the snow stopped and the weather cleared. This state of affairs prevailed for more than ten days.

To resume our story, two years and more had elapsed since the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho assumed office, and during that time he had been able to put away a tidy sum in gold and silver. It now occurred to him that he should find a trustworthy person to deliver these valuables into the hands of a relative in the Eastern Capital³ for safekeeping. When he reported to the capital for an audience at the expiration of his three-year term they would come in handy in fixing things up with his superiors. The only problem was that the roads were infested with criminal elements so that he would have to find a fairly formidable person for the task. Suddenly he thought to himself, "That captain, Wu Sung, with his heroic combination of courage and strength, is the very man for the job."

The same day he called Wu Sung into the yamen to discuss this matter, saying, "I have a relative who is serving as an official in the Eastern Capital. His name is Chu Mien,⁴ and he holds the post of defender-in-chief in the Palace Command. I'd like to send a consignment of presents to him, along with a letter asking after his health, but I'm afraid that the roads may not be safe. You're the only person I can trust with such a responsibility, and I hope you won't refuse on account of the hardships involved. When you return, of course, I'll see that you are amply rewarded."

"Your Honor has already done so much for me," responded Wu Sung, "that I could hardly refuse. Since you have a mission for me to perform, I'll set off at once. Actually, I've never been to the Eastern Capital, so Your Honor is only doing me another favor by giving me this chance to take in the sights of the big city."

The district magistrate was delighted and rewarded Wu Sung with three cups of wine, along with ten taels of silver for his traveling expenses. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after Wu Sung had received his instructions from the district magistrate, he walked out the gate of the yamen and went by his lodging place to pick up an orderly. Then he stopped on the street to buy a bottle of wine and some groceries and proceeded straight to his brother's house. Wu the Elder happened to come home at about the same time and when he found Wu Sung waiting for him on the doorstep, he invited him inside and instructed the orderly to go into the kitchen and start fixing the food.

The smoldering feelings of the lady of the house had not been completely extinguished. When she saw Wu Sung arrive, with wine and food in hand, she thought to herself, "That bastard must not be able to get me off his mind, otherwise why should he come back like this? He may well have found me too much for him after all. I'll have to feel him out gradually."

Hurrying upstairs to:

Retouch her powdered face, and

Recomb her cloudy locks,

she changed into a more attractive outfit and proceeded to the doorway to welcome Wu Sung.

Bowing as she spoke, the woman said, "Brother-in-law, I don't know what sort of misunderstanding could have arisen to keep you from paying us a visit for such a long time. I've been at my wit's end over it. Every day I've told your brother to go to the yamen to look for you and try to make it up some way, but when he comes home he says you're nowhere to be found. I'm certainly glad you've stopped by again today, but what did you have to go and waste your money like that for?"

"There's something I particularly want to tell my brother," said Wu Sung.

"In that case," said the woman, "please come upstairs and sit down."

After the three of them had ascended the stairs, Wu Sung insisted that his elder brother and his wife take the seats of honor, while he pulled up a stool and sat to one side. The orderly served the wine and brought up a hot meal to go with

it.

Wu Sung urged his brother and sister-in-law to eat. As they did so the woman kept glancing at Wu Sung, but he paid no attention to anything but his wine. After several rounds of drinks, Wu Sung asked Ying-erh to bring a set of pledge cups and then told the orderly to fill one of them with wine.

Taking this cup in his hand, he looked at Wu the Elder and said, "My respects to you, Elder Brother. Earlier today His Honor, the district magistrate, commissioned me to carry out some business for him in the Eastern Capital that will require me to set out tomorrow. At the most I should be away for two or three months, and at the least I should be back in a month. There is something I have come here especially to tell you. You have always been of a meek disposition, and I fear that while I am away people may try to take advantage of you. If you normally sell ten trays of steamed wheat cakes in a day, starting tomorrow, make only five trays. Go out late and come back early, and don't stop to have a drink with anyone. Take down the blind and close the door as soon as you get home. That ought to put a stop to any idle chatter. If someone does try to take advantage of you, don't make an issue of it, but wait until I get back and let me handle it for you. If you're willing to do as I suggest, Elder Brother, drink this cup to the bottom."

Accepting the cup, Wu the Elder said, "Your suggestions are good, Brother. I'll do just as you say," and drained it to the bottom.

Wu Sung then filled another cup and said to the woman, "You are a clever person, Sister-in-law, so there's no need for me to say more than a few words. My brother is ingenuous by nature, and totally dependent on you where decisions are concerned. As the saying goes: Outer strength is no match for inner strength.⁵ If my sister-in-law does a good job of managing the household, what will my brother have to worry about? You must be familiar with the old saying: If the fence is secure dogs won't get in."⁶

No sooner did the woman hear these words than:

A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and
In an instant her whole face was purple.

Pointing her finger at Wu the Elder, she launched into a tirade of vituperation. "You muddleheaded creature! If you had anything to complain about, why did you have to go and spill it to someone else so he could take such a high tone with me?

I may not wear a turban, but I'm a match
for any man;
I may be only a woman, but I'm a real
dingdong dame.
I can lift a man on my fist,
Carry a horse on my arm, and
Trample on anyone else's face.⁷

I'm not the sort of:

Blood-sucking tick that buries itself in the skin
so you can't dig it out.⁸

Ever since I've been married to Wu the Elder not even an ant has dared to come into the house. What's all this about dogs getting in if the fence isn't secure? You'd better lay off that: Wild and nonsensical talk.

Every word of an accusation has got to have a basis in fact.

If you throw a brick into the air,
It will come down to earth every time."⁹

Wu Sung laughed and said, "If you take charge in that way, Sister-in-law, everything will be fine; just as long as: Your heart and your mouth are in agreement,¹⁰
but not if:

Your heart is not in harmony with your mouth.

In any case, if that's the way it is, Sister-in-law, I'll remember everything you've said. Please drain this cup."

Pushing the winecup aside with one hand, the woman jumped up and started to run downstairs, but before she had gotten half way down she stopped and said, "Since you're so smart you must know the saying that: An elder brother's wife is like a mother."¹¹

When I first married Wu the Elder I didn't hear anything about a brother-in-law. Where do you think you come off anyway: Acting like a relative whether you are one or not,¹²
and demanding to play the role of head of the family? It's just my luck to run into this kind of crap!"

She then proceeded the rest of the way down the stairs, crying as she went. There is a poem that testifies to this: Good advice proves bitter to the taste,

as do words of admonition;
Chin-lien resents him for this
and throws a tantrum.
So mortified, herself, that she can
scarcely remain at table;
She arouses the anger of the hero,
young Wu the Second.¹³

The woman succeeded in putting on quite a scene. Wu the Elder and Wu Sung felt so uncomfortable that after a few more cups of wine they came downstairs and bade each other farewell with tears in their eyes.

"After you've gone, Brother," said Wu the Elder, "come back and see me as soon as you can."

"Brother," said Wu Sung, "it would be just as well if you didn't do any business at all, but just sat at home. I could

send someone to provide you with living expenses.”

And just before he left Wu Sung said to him again, “Brother, don’t forget what I’ve told you. Be careful not to let anyone into your house.”

“I understand,” said Wu the Elder.

Wu Sung took leave of his brother and returned to his lodgings in front of the district yamen where he got together his luggage and the weapons he would need to protect himself on the trip. The next day he took charge of the district magistrate’s consignment of presents, checked to see that the gold and silver were properly packed in saddlebags, obtained the waybill authorizing the shipment, and set off on his way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after Wu the Elder allowed himself to be admonished by his younger brother, Wu Sung, he had to put up with three or four days of unrelenting abuse from his wife. There was nothing he could do but: Swallow his anger and keep his own counsel,¹⁴

letting her curse herself out. Meanwhile, he followed his brother’s advice by making only half as many steamed wheat cakes as usual every day. After making his rounds he came home before evening and put down his carrying pole, took down the blind, and closed the front door behind him before proceeding any further into the house.

When his wife realized what he was doing she was furious and cursed him, saying, “You ignorant nincompoop! Who ever heard of: Locking the jailhouse door while the sun is

high in the sky!

Our neighbors will laugh themselves silly over this futile attempt to keep out the ghosts. You’ll do anything your brother says. A lot of good your own cock and balls do you! Aren’t you ashamed to make such a laughingstock of yourself?”

“Let them laugh,” said Wu the Elder. “My brother’s advice is for our own good and ought to put a stop to any idle chatter.”

“Phooey!” the woman said, spitting right in his face, “you stupid clod! You call yourself a man, yet you can’t make up your mind about anything, but let yourself be manipulated by others.”

“So what?” said Wu the Elder with a negative wave of the hand. “As far as I’m concerned, my brother’s words are as immutable as if they were graven in bronze or stone.”

It so happens that from the time that Wu Sung left town Wu the Elder went out late, came back early, and closed the front door as soon as he got home. His wife was: So angry she scarcely cared whether she were

dead or alive,

and gave him a hard time about it more than once, but eventually she got used to it. From then on, around the time that Wu the Elder got home, she would take down the blind and close the front door herself. When Wu the Elder noticed this he was secretly pleased and thought to himself, “This way everything ought to be all right.”

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Careful as he is to lock the door
and come home early;
There is so little love between them
they are separated by peaks.

Once her desires are aroused
they weave a tangled web;
Even if she were shut up in a cage
it would not avail.

Time flies like a white horse galloping past a crack;¹⁵
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.
No sooner has the flowering plum blossomed
at winter's end;

Than warmer weather proclaims the
return of spring.

One day in the third month, when spring was at its most beautiful, Chin-lien dressed herself up alluringly and could hardly wait for Wu the Elder's departure before taking up her position behind the bamboo blind that hung over the front door. She had become accustomed to standing there until her husband was expected home and then taking down the blind and going inside to wait for him. But this particular day was one of those occasions on which: Something was destined to happen.

Just as she was about to take down the blind a certain person happened to walk by.

Without coincidences there would be no stories;¹⁶

It is those who are predestined to do so who meet.

The woman was in the very act of reaching up to take down the blind with a forked stick when a gust of wind dislodged it from her grip so that it fell, Neither correctly nor precisely, but right onto the hat of the passerby. As she hastened to put on an ingratiating smile she looked at him and saw that he was twenty-four or twenty-five years old and cut quite a dashing figure.



Beneath the Blind Hsi-men Ch'ing Meets Chin-lien

On his head he wears a tasseled hat,
 Gold openwork hairpins, and
 A pair of jade rings inlaid with gold;
 On his long torso, a green silk jacket;
 On his feet, fine-soled Ch'en-ch'iao¹⁷ shoes, and Pure cotton stockings;
 On his trouser legs, jet drawnwork kneepads.
 In his hand he sports a gold-flecked Szechwan fan,
 Enhancing a face as handsome as young Chang's,¹⁸
 A countenance as good-looking as P'an Yüeh's.¹⁹
 A man after my own heart,
 As romantic as can be,
 Beneath the screen he tips a wink at me.

This man, on whose head the forked stick had fallen, stopped in his tracks and was about to make trouble; but when he looked around to see who was responsible he found, to his surprise, that it was a beautiful and seductive woman. Behold, she has: Glossy, black, raven's feather tresses;

Dark, curved, new moon eyebrows;
Clear, cold, almond eyes;
Redolently fragrant cherry lips;
A straight, full, alabaster nose;
Thickly powdered red cheeks;
A handsome, silver salver face;
A light, lissome, flowerlike figure;
Slender, jade-white, scallion-shoot fingers;
A cuddlesome, willow waist;
A tender, pouting, dough-white tummy;
Tiny, turned-up, pointed feet;
Buxom breasts; and
Fresh, white legs.

And there is something else as well:

Tight and squeezey,
Red and wrinkly,
Pale and fresh,
Black and cushioned;
Who can tell what it might be?²⁰

The beauties of this woman were such that he could not look his fill. And how is she adorned? Behold: The glossy black chignon on her head is enclosed in a fret spangled with gold,

Setting off the fragrant clouds of her hair
and studded all round with hairpins.
The spit curl at her temple is embellished with
a double-headed flower;
A comb of aromatic wood holds her hair
in place behind.
Her arched willow-leaf eyebrows would be
hard to depict;
As would the pair of peach blossoms
that grace her cheeks.

Her openwork pendant earrings are
beyond praise;
A glimpse of her smooth creamy bosom is
beyond price.
A pale blue homespun blouse, with wide sleeves
and jacket to match,
Complements the embossed silk of her
beige skirt.

A figured handkerchief dangles
 from the mouth of her sleeve;
 A sachet of pomander hangs low
 at her waist.
 The rows of frogs on her bodice
 are neatly fastened;
 Her ankle leggings, concealed above,
 extend below.
 The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses
 are just visible;
 With a pattern of mountain peaks embroidered
 on the tips of their toes,
 Her raven-hued shoes, with high white satin heels,
 are made to order for tripping the fragrant dust;
 Her red silk ankle leggings are figured with
 orioles among the flowers;
 Whether walking or sitting, the breeze parts her
 skirts and reveals what lies below.
 From her mouth the fragrance of orchid
 and musk is constantly wafted;
 When her cherry lips open in a smile
 her face breaks into bloom.
 The mere sight of her makes one's "ethereal and material souls take flight";
 Shown off to such advantage, she is a
 beautiful, if heartless, lover.

No sooner did the man catch sight of her than:

His starch began to melt, and

His anger flew to Java,²¹

as the irate look on his face changed into a broad smile.

The woman knew that she was in the wrong and, folding her hands in front of her, bowed deeply in his direction as she said, "The wind blew it right out of my hand, sir, and it happened to land on you. Please don't hold it against me."

Adjusting his hat with one hand, the man made such a low bow that he almost scraped the ground, saying as he did so, "It doesn't matter at all! Please make yourself easy, miss."

This scene happened to be witnessed by Dame Wang, whose teahouse was situated next door. Breaking into a laugh, the old lady said, "And whatever induced you to walk under these particular eaves, sir? It serves you right."

"It's really my fault," the man replied with a smile. "I've put you out, I'm afraid. Don't hold it against me, miss."

"I do hope you won't take offense, sir," the woman said.

"How could I dream of such a thing?" the man responded with a smile, and he made another low bow, during which his mischievous eyes: Long experienced in sizing up the flowers;

Adept at assessing romantic possibilities,

never left the woman's body. As he made his departure he glanced back seven or eight times before proceeding to swagger on his way, concealing his face with his fan. There is a poem that testifies to this: In the cool breeze and genial weather

he has sauntered out for a stroll;
 By chance, beneath the blind he encounters
 a seductive beauty.
 Merely because, "on the point of departure,
 she gives him a meaningful glance";²²
 His desires are so aroused that he cannot
 call it quits.²³

The woman, for her part, had had a good look at the man and thought to herself, "He's dashing and romantic as well as soft-spoken, and he seems to be rather taken with me; but I don't even know his name, or where he lives. If he didn't care for me he wouldn't have glanced back at me seven or eight times before going his way. Who knows? This may turn out to be the very love-match I've been waiting for."

She fixed her gaze upon the man until he was out of sight before taking down the blind, closing the front door, and going back inside.

Gentle reader take note: It is scarcely likely that such a person should not turn out to be a man of some property. It so happens that he was the decadent scion of a family of considerable wealth from whom he had inherited a wholesale pharmaceutical business located on the street that ran in front of the district yamen. He had been a dissolute young scamp since his youth and had acquired some skill in such martial arts as boxing and fencing with the quarterstaff. He also liked to gamble, and there was little he didn't know about backgammon, elephant chess, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts. Now that he had come into his inheritance and had money of his own to spend, he had gone into cahoots with the officials and functionaries in the district yamen where he played the role of influence peddler, intervening in public business on people's behalf, for a fee. For this reason everyone in the whole district was rather afraid of him.

This man bore the double surname, Hsi-men, and the single given name, Ch'ing. He was an only son, so people had been in the habit of calling him Master Hsi-men, but now that he had come into his inheritance and had money of his own to spend they referred to him as the Honorable Hsi-men. Both his father and his mother were dead, and he had no siblings.

His first wife had died some time ago, leaving behind her only a single daughter. Recently he had been formally remarried to the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard, but he was not above availing himself of the four or five serving maids in his establishment. Moreover he had carried on an affair with a girl named Li Chiao-erh from the licensed quarter for some time, and he had just arranged to take her into his household. On top of this

he had also been maintaining an unlicensed prostitute called Cho the Second on South Street. This girl's professional name was Cho Tiu-erh, or Toss-off Cho, and he had now moved her into his household as well.

In fact, Hsi-men Ch'ing was a past master at:

Toying with the breeze and dallying with the moonlight.

Whenever he established a liaison with a woman, even one of good family, he was wont to take her into his establishment; but if she should then fail to please him in any way, however slight, he would call in a go-between and dispose of her without more ado. It was said that he sometimes resorted to the services of such brokers as often as twenty times in a single month. As a result, no one dared cross him.

Now this Honorable Hsi-men, once he had caught sight of that woman beneath the blind, went home and thought to himself, "What a fine filly! I wonder how I could get hold of her."

Suddenly he bethought himself of Dame Wang, who kept the teahouse right next door to her home. "She can surely do: Thus and thus, and

So and so,

and help me to pull this affair off successfully. If it costs me a few taels of silver to reward her for her pains, what does it matter?"

Thereupon, without even waiting to eat, he sauntered out onto the street again, made straight for Dame Wang's teahouse, slipped in unobtrusively, and took a seat inside the beaded portiere.

"That certainly was a fat bow you took just now, sir," said Dame Wang with a laugh.

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come here. There's something I want to ask you. Who does that filly next door belong to?"

"She is King Yama's²⁴ younger sister, the daughter of the General of the Five Ways,"²⁵ said Dame Wang. "What do you want to know about her for?"

"I'm serious," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Stop joking."

"How is it you don't recognize her, sir?" asked Dame Wang. "Her old man's the one who sells ready-cooked food in front of the district yamen."

"You don't mean to say she's the wife of Hsü the Third who sells date cakes!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Not him," said Dame Wang with a negative wave of her hand. "If it were him, they'd make a pair. Guess again, sir."

"She must be the wife of Li the Third who sells won-ton," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Not him," said Dame Wang with another wave of her hand. "If it were him, they'd be well matched."

"You don't mean to say she's the wife of Little Liu the Second with the tattooed arms, do you?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Dame Wang laughed uproariously and said, "Not him. If it were him, they'd make another pair. Guess again, sir."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the truth of the matter is I can't guess who it is."

"In that case," said Dame Wang with a sardonic smile, "I'll tell you, sir," and she burst out laughing again. "The man whose lot it is to cover her is Wu the Elder, who peddles steamed wheat cakes on the street."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he stamped his feet and laughed.

"You don't mean to say he's the Wu the Elder, whom everyone calls the Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, do you?"

"That's the man," said Dame Wang.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he groaned and said:

"How did a piece of fine mutton

End up in the mouth of such a dog?"

"It's the same old story," said Dame Wang. "It's always been true that:

The finest steed may be forced to carry

an unworthy rider;

The loveliest wife must often share her bed

with a clumsy clod.²⁶

That's just the way the Old Man under the Moon arranges things."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how much do I owe you in the way of tea money?"

"Not much," replied Dame Wang. "Let it go for a few days. It doesn't matter."

"Who is your son, Wang Ch'ao, working for these days?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I don't even want to talk about it," said Dame Wang. "He's gone off with a merchant from the Huai River region and hasn't come home to this day. I don't know whether he's dead or alive."

"Why doesn't he come and work for me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He's a likely looking lad."

"If you saw fit to favor him in such a way, sir," said Dame Wang, "it would certainly be handsome of you."

"Wait till he gets home and we can talk about it again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. When he had finished speaking he thanked her profusely, got up, and took his leave.

Before four hours had elapsed, however, he showed up again, slipping into a seat just inside the beaded portiere of Dame Wang's teahouse and directing his gaze at Wu the Elder's door. In a little while Dame Wang came out and said, "How about a damson punch, sir?"

"That would be great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Make it good and sour."

Dame Wang prepared an order of damson punch and served it to him with both hands. When he had finished drinking it Hsi-men Ch'ing put the cup down and said, "Mother, you really know how to fix a damson. How many more have you got in the house?"

Dame Wang laughed. "I've been fixing up damsels all my life, but what would I want with one for myself?"

"It was damsons I asked about," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, laughing in turn, "but you're talking about damsels. There's quite a difference between the two."

"All I heard, sir, was something about fixing damsels," said Dame Wang, "so I thought you were talking about the way I fix them up."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you're as good as all that at making matches, how about fixing one up for me? If you come up with a good one, I'll see that you're amply rewarded."

"You've got to be kidding, sir," said Dame Wang. "If the lady of your house found out about it, I'm afraid my head's a bit too old to stand up to being boxed about the ears."

"My wife has a most accommodating disposition," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already got a number of bedmates at home. It's just that none of them really tickles my fancy. If you've got anything good to propose, there's no harm in bringing it up. Even someone who's been married before would be all right, as long as she tickles my fancy."

"There was one that looked pretty good just the other day," said Dame Wang, "but I'm afraid you wouldn't be interested, sir."

"If she's really a good prospect, and you can bring it off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll reward you generously."

"She's as talented as she can be," said Dame Wang. "The only thing is she's a little along in years."

"It's always been true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that:

A mature beauty makes a worthy mate.²⁷

Even if she's been around a year or two longer than one might wish, it doesn't matter. Just how old is she anyway?"

"The lady in question," said Dame Wang, "was born in the year of the pig, so, come New Year's Day, she'll be just ninety-two."

"What a crazy old crone you are," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The only thing you're really any good at is pulling people's legs." And when he was through laughing he got up and took his leave.

Gradually it grew dark, and Dame Wang had just lit her lamp and was about to close her door, when who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing. Once again he slipped inside the beaded portiere, pulled over a bench to sit on, and proceeded to gaze fixedly at Wu the Elder's door.

"How about a concord punch, sir?" asked Dame Wang.

"That would be great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Make it good and sweet, Godmother."

Dame Wang promptly served him a cupful and Hsi-men Ch'ing drank it, but he continued sitting there until it was quite late before he stood up and said, "Put it on my bill, Godmother. I'll settle the whole account tomorrow."

"Don't worry about it," said Dame Wang. "Pray let the matter rest. Drop in again tomorrow and we can discuss it then."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and took his leave, but when he got home he was:

Too uncomfortable to sleep or eat in peace.

He couldn't get the woman off his mind. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

Early the following morning, when Dame Wang opened her door and looked outside, she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already there, pacing back and forth in the street. "This sucker is certainly impatient enough," she thought to herself. "Just watch me: Stick some sugar candy on the tip of his nose

Where he can't quite get at it with his tongue.²⁸

That bastard is always presuming on his connections in the yamen to take advantage of people. Now that he's fallen into my hands I might as well make him pay for his fun by lining my nest with a few strings of cash."

It so happens that this Dame Wang, the proprietress of the teahouse, was not the sort to abide by her lot. In fact, for years she had:

Played the procuress,

Made a living as a matchmaker,

Peddled human flesh,

Been a broker,

Meddled in midwifery,

Acted as accoucheur, and

Revealed a knack for every sort of knavery.

And she had yet another accomplishment that doesn't bear mentioning:

She could jab a needle through the chignon, and

Inject solder into the cranial cavity.

Truly, this old lady's skills were such as to evade easy detection. Behold: When she starts to speak,

she excels Lu Chia;²⁹

When she opens her mouth,

she surpasses Sui Ho.³⁰

She relies on the lethal lips that persuaded

the Six States;³¹

She depends on the trenchant tongue that won

the dominions of Ch'i.³²

The solitary male phoenix and its

female counterpart,

Are in a trice transformed into
a couple;

The lonely widow and
bereft widower,
Are by a single speech induced to
form a pair.
She knows how to inveigle the young lady
locked behind triple gates,
Into a tryst with the immortal
within his nine-tiered palace.
The Golden Lad who tends the incense within the halls
of the Jade Emperor,³³
She can drag hither
by the arm;
The Jade Maiden who transmits messages in the palace
of the Queen Mother of the West,³⁴

She can embrace
 around the waist.
 She has but to put in motion
 one of her crafty schemes,
 In order to induce an arhat
 to cosy up to a bhikshuni.
 She has but to resort to
 one of her devices,
 In order to cause Devarāja Li³⁵
 to embrace Hārītī.³⁶
 Once exposed to her sweet suasions
 and inviting arguments,
 Even such a paragon as Feng Chih³⁷
 would start to get ideas;
 When confronted with her winning words
 and beguiling promises,
 Even so chaste a goddess as Ma-ku³⁸
 would find her equanimity disturbed.
 "Concealing the head of the matter
 while revealing the tail,"³⁹
 She incites even the Weaving Maid⁴⁰
 to thoughts of love;
 "Playing the role of intermediary
 in passion's heats and chills,"⁴¹
 She prevails upon Ch'ang-o⁴² herself to take a lover.⁴³
 Truly, this old lady was:
 Adept at manipulating the breeze and the moonlight
 to her own advantage;
 Constantly to be seen in the law courts
 as an instigator of quarrels.

The old lady had just opened for business and was engaged in getting her teakettles ready when she caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. After pacing back and forth a few more times he slipped hurriedly inside the beaded portiere and proceeded to stare fixedly at the blind over Wu the Elder's door. Dame Wang pretended not to notice and continued to fan up the fire in her stove rather than coming out to take her customer's order.

"Godmother," called out Hsi-men Ch'ing, "make me two cups of tea."

"Oh, it's you, sir," responded Dame Wang. "Long time no see. Please have a seat."

In no time at all she brought two cups of strong tea and set them down on the table.

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come have a cup of tea with me."

"I'm not the one you're after," said Dame Wang with a laugh. "Why should I have a cup of tea with you?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing also laughed a while and then asked, "Godmother, what do your neighbors have for sale?"

"Their stock in trade," replied Dame Wang, "is fried doughballs, cured coney, stuffed patty-cake, baked buns, noodles with cockle sauce, and hot Schlag in cider."⁴⁴

"Why you crazy old crone," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "all you can do is joke."

"It's no joke," Dame Wang laughed back at him, "she's got an old man of her own."

"I'm serious," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If her husband can make good steamed wheat cakes, I'd like to buy forty or fifty of them to take home with me."

"If all you want to do is buy wheat cakes," said Dame Wang, "he'll be back in a while and you can buy them then. What need is there to pay a formal call?"

"You're right, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, who then drank his tea, sat a little longer, stood up, and took his leave.

Sometime later, as Dame Wang was tending her teashop, she looked out with a sardonic eye only to see another vision of Hsi-men Ch'ing. He was pacing back and forth in front of the door. First he would head east, then turn around and go west, only to repeat the process again and again. This happened seven or eight times in a row. Finally he came right into the teashop.

"This must be my lucky day, sir," said Dame Wang. "It seems like ages since I saw you last."

Hsi-men Ch'ing started to laugh and then fumbled for a tael of silver, which he handed to Dame Wang with the words, "Godmother, why don't you take this for the time being to cover my tea money?"

"Why so much?" asked Dame Wang with a smile.

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if it's too much, keep the difference."

"I've got him," the old lady thought to herself. "This is one sucker who's going to get what's coming to him. I might as well take his money. It'll come in handy to pay the rent."

Then she said out loud, "You look a little thirsty to me, sir. How about a well-steeped cup of tea?"

"How'd you guess what I wanted, Godmother?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"What's so hard to guess about that?" said the old lady. "It's always been true that: When someone comes in the door

don't bother to ask how he's doing;
One look at his face will suffice
to give you the answer.⁴⁵

I've guessed the answers to a lot of stranger things than that in my day."

"There is something I've got on my mind," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you can guess what it is, Godmother, I'll give you five taels of silver."

Dame Wang laughed. "There's no need for any:
Three conjectures and five guesses.

One conjecture will be quite enough for my guess to hit the bull's-eye. Come a little closer, sir, so I can whisper in your ear. The last two days: Your footsteps have been fidgety, and

Your inquiries incessant.

Surely it's because you've got my next-door neighbor on your mind. How's that for a guess?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing began to laugh. "Godmother," he said, "truly:

In intelligence you rival Sui Ho;

In resourcefulness you outdo Lu Chia.

There's no reason for me to deceive you. I don't know why it is, but ever since I caught sight of her when she was taking down the blind the other day, it's been just as though she had stolen away my three ethereal and my seven material souls. Day and night I can't get her off my mind. When I'm at home I don't even feel like eating or drinking and am far too distracted to work. I wonder if there's anything you could do to help me out?"

Dame Wang gave a cynical laugh. "There's no reason for me to deceive you either, sir. I get a customer in my teashop about as often as the devil plays night watchman. Three years ago, when it snowed so heavily on the third day of the sixth month, I sold a cup of tea, but I haven't been able to make a go of it since. The only thing that keeps me going is the occasional odd job."

"And what, may I ask, do you mean, Godmother, by the occasional odd job?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Dame Wang laughed. "When I was only thirty-five my old man kicked off and left me with this youngster, but without any means of livelihood. At first I tried my hand at matchmaking. Then I went round collecting people's old clothes to sell. I offered my services as an accoucheur and then as a midwife. When the occasion arises I dabble in pandering and procuring. I can also perform acupuncture, moxabustion, and other medical services. And, lastly, I treat the 'proper tea' of every customer as though it were my own."⁴⁶

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he burst into laughter. "I had no idea you were as talented as all that, Godmother. If you can actually pull this affair off for me, I'll give you ten taels of silver toward the cost of your coffin. All I want you to do is to arrange a meeting between this filly and myself."

This proposal elicited a hearty laugh from Dame Wang. There is a poem that testifies to this: That wastrel, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had the

wildest ideas;
He was willing to go to any lengths to get
his way with a woman.
But it was the proprietress of the teahouse,
old Dame Wang;
Who engineered the tryst between the Goddess of
Witches' Mountain and King Hsiang.⁴⁷

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

DAME WANG PROPOSES A TEN-PART PLAN FOR “GARNERING THE GLOW”; HSI-MEN CH’ING FLIRTS WITH CHIN-LIEN IN THE TEAHOUSE

Beauty does not delude people, they
delude themselves;¹
But if they become deluded they will
suffer the consequences.
Their vitality will be dissipated, their
countenances grow pale;
The marrow in their bones will dry up and
their strength will wane.
Those who engage in fornication find that
their families will break up;

Once venereal disease is contracted
it is difficult to cure.
As always, "A full stomach and warm body
give rise to disorder";²
Those for whom disaster is imminent
never seem to realize it.

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Dame Wang, "The only thing I'm interested in is a tryst with this filly."

"Godmother," he went on to say, "if you can really arrange this for me, I'll give you ten taels of silver."

"Listen to me, sir," said Dame Wang. "Generally speaking, the words 'garnering the glow' refer to a most difficult matter. Do you know what this term 'garnering the glow' means? It's just another way of referring to what is commonly known as an illicit affair. Now there are five prerequisites that must be possessed by anyone who wishes to consummate such an affair:

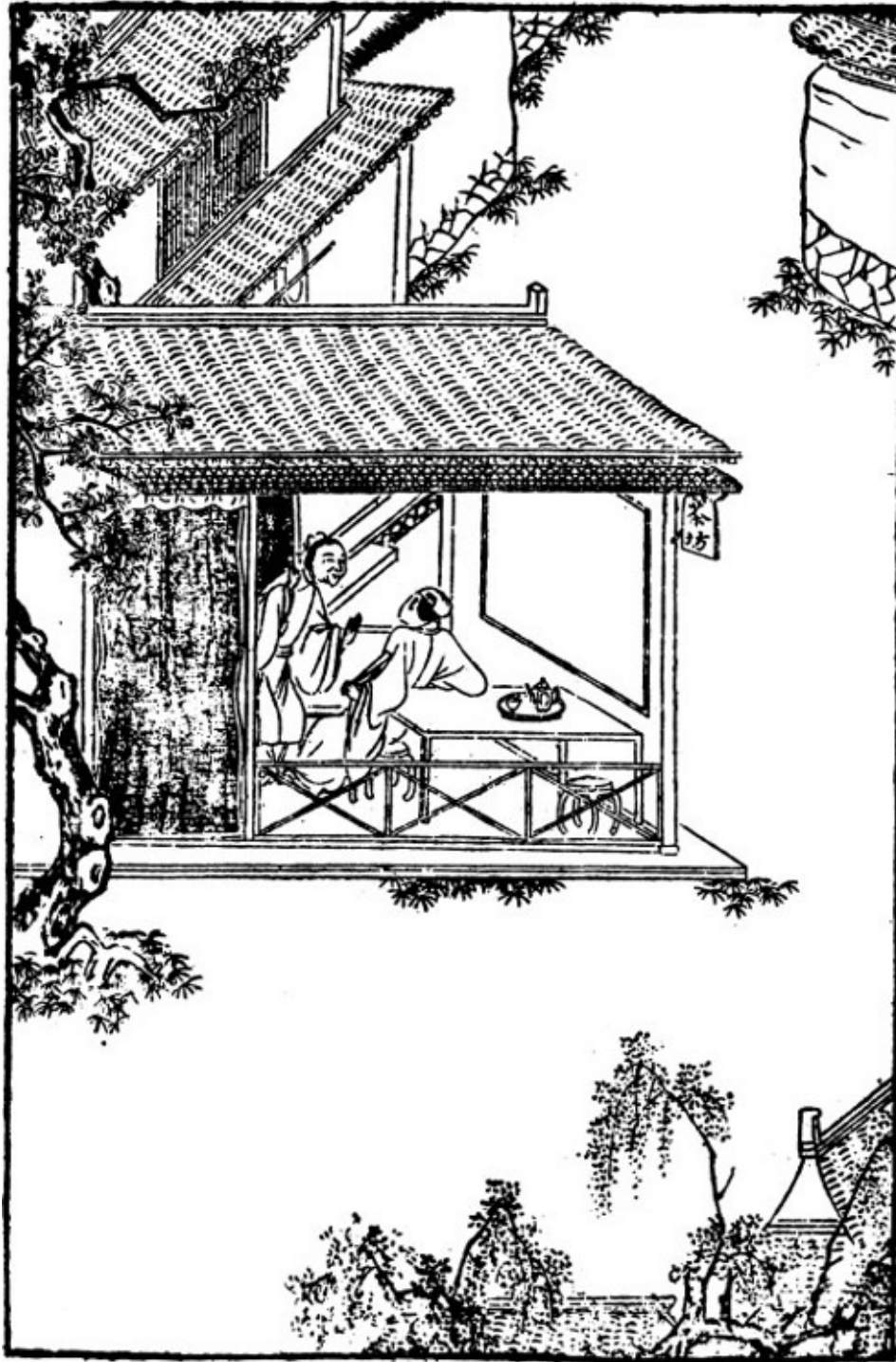
No. 1: He must have the looks of P'an Yüeh.

No. 2: He must have the member of a donkey.³

No. 3: He must have the wealth of Teng T'ung.⁴

No. 4: He must have youth, and the resilience of a
'needle in a wad of cotton.'⁵

No. 5: He must have leisure.



Dame Wang Proposes a Ten-part Plan for "Garnering the Glow"

Only if you possess all these prerequisites, which are known for short as 'looks, member, wealth, youth, and leisure,'⁶ can you hope to consummate such an affair."

"To tell you the truth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I happen to have all five. As for the first: although I may not be as handsome as P'an Yüeh, I can certainly pass muster. As for the second: in my younger days I frequented the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter and reared a 'turtle'⁷ of prodigious size. As for the third: I've got a few strings of cash laid away. Although I may not be in the same league as Teng T'ung, I've got more than enough to get by. As for the fourth: I've got the youth and resilience to take anything she can dish out. She could hit me four hundred times without my giving her a blow in return. As for the fifth: I've got leisure to spare. If I didn't, how could I spend so much time over

here? Godmother, if you can pull this off for me, I'll make it worth your while."

Hsi-men Ch'ing had now made his intentions explicit.

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "you say you've got all five prerequisites. I understand that. But there's still another problem that might get in the way and make success unlikely."

"Tell me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what might get in the way?"

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "don't take it amiss if I speak bluntly. The hardest thing about this business of 'garnering the glow' is getting you to commit yourself to it 100 percent. Even if you're willing to spend whatever it takes to complete 99 percent of the task, something might still stand in the way of success. I know you've always been a bit tight, unwilling to fling your money about with abandon. This is the only problem that might get in the way."

"That's easy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll just do whatever you tell me."

"If you're prepared to spend the money, sir," said Dame Wang, "I've got a splendid plan for getting you and this filly together. But I don't know if you'll be willing to go along with me or not."

"No matter what you say, I'll go along with it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What is this splendid plan of yours?"

Dame Wang laughed. "It's already getting late today. Why don't you go home for the time being. Come and see me again in half a year, or three months time, and we can talk about it then."

"Godmother," entreated Hsi-men Ch'ing, "stop joking. You've got to help me pull this off."

Your kindness will be amply rewarded."

Dame Wang broke into raucous laughter. "You're getting carried away again, sir. Although this plan of mine may not be worthy of commemoration in the Temple of Prince Wu-ch'eng, the God of War,⁸ it's certainly superior to that scheme of Sun Wu's which called for drilling the palace ladies.⁹ The odds are eight or nine to one that you shall have her."

"Let me give you the lowdown on this filly's background. Although she's only of humble origin she's as clever as can be. She's an excellent musician and singer. And as for needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, the standard repertory of popular songs, backgammon and elephant chess, and so forth, there's very little she doesn't know about any of them. Her given name is Chin-lien and her maiden name is P'an. Her father was the Tailor P'an whose shop used to be located outside the South Gate. After his death she was sold into the household of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant, where she learned to play musical instruments and sing. Later, because Mr. Chang was getting along in years, he released her from the terms of her contract and gave her to Wu the Elder as wife without demanding a candareen in return."

"That was several years ago. Now Wu the Elder is something of a simpleton. Every day he goes out early and comes home late and doesn't pay attention to anything but his business. Ordinarily this filly is not much given to gadding about. When I've got nothing better to do I often go over to her place to pass the time of day, and when she needs help with anything she asks me to take care of it for her. She addresses me as Godmother just as you do."

"The last few days Wu the Elder has been going out early. If you want to pursue this matter, sir, buy me a bolt of blue pongee and another of white, along with a bolt of white damask. I'll also need ten taels' worth of good-quality silk wadding. When you've brought all these things to me I'll go over and ask to borrow her calendar so I can get someone to pick out an auspicious day on which to engage a tailor to make them up for me. If she responds by picking out a lucky day but doesn't offer to do the work herself, then it'll be all over. But if she says, 'Let me do it for you':"

As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could

make her happier,

and doesn't want me to hire a tailor, then one-tenth of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"If I am successful in inviting her to come over to my place to do the work, then two-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"If she does come over to my place to do the work, at noontime I'll prepare some wine and a snack and ask her to have lunch with me. If she says it's inconvenient and insists on taking the work home with her, then it'll be all over. But if she doesn't say anything and agrees to eat lunch with me, then three-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"On the following day you mustn't show up. But on the third day, around noon, dress yourself up appropriately and cough outside my door as a signal. Then call out, 'It's been days since I've set eyes on you, Godmother Wang. I've come to buy a cup of tea.' I'll come out and invite you to come in and sit down while you drink your tea. If she gets up and retires to her own home when she sees you, I can't very well physically restrain her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she sees you come in and makes no effort to withdraw, then four-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"When you sit down I'll say to the filly, 'This is the very gentleman who was kind enough to give these materials to me. I'm greatly indebted to him.' Then I'll proceed to sing your praises and you can wax extravagant on the subject of her needlework. If she pays no attention and refuses to respond, then it'll be all over. But if she responds by engaging you in conversation, then five-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"Then I'll say, 'It's really kind of this young lady to have volunteered her services on my behalf. I'm greatly indebted to both of you benefactors; to one for providing the money and the other for providing her skills. If I hadn't:

Asked her a favor, as one trouper to another,¹⁰

there would scarcely be any reason for this young lady to grace us with her presence. Why don't you play the role of host, sir, and show this young lady how much her efforts are appreciated.' You then pull out some silver and ask me to buy whatever's needed. If she insists on leaving at this point, I can't very well physically restrain her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she makes no effort to withdraw, the situation will be promising, and six-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved."

"Then I'll accept your money and on my way out the door I'll say to her, 'Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady.' If she refuses and gets up and goes home instead, I can scarcely do anything to

prevent her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she doesn't budge, everything will be fine, and seven-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"When I've bought the things I'll put them on the table and say, 'Young lady, why don't you set your work aside for a minute and have a cup of wine? It's a rare treat this gentleman has provided for us.' If she refuses to drink at the same table with you and goes home instead, it'll be all over. But if she only talks about leaving and doesn't budge, everything will be going fine, and eight-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"After she's had enough wine to feel it, and the conversation has started to warm up, I'll say the wine has run out and suggest once again that you buy some. You pull out more silver and ask me to get it for you, along with some delicacies to go with it. I'll put the latch on the door so that the two of you are locked inside the room together. If she gets all hot and bothered and tries to run home, it'll be all over. But if she lets me put the latch on the door without getting hot and bothered, then nine-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"Only one-tenth will then remain, but this last step is the hardest. There in the room, sir, you'll have to move in with the sweet talk, but whatever you do, avoid any rough stuff that might wreck the whole affair. In such a case you'd be strictly on your own as far as I'm concerned. You might proceed by brushing a pair of chopsticks off the table with your sleeve and then giving her foot a pinch when you stoop down to pick them up. If she kicks up a fuss, I'll have to come to her rescue, and it'll be all over. That will be the end of the matter. But if she doesn't make a peep, the last tenth of this glow-game will have been achieved, for she will have given her consent to your conquest. If this glow-game is carried to a successful conclusion, how will you thank me?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard her out he was delighted and exclaimed, "Godmother, this plan of yours may not earn you a place in the Ling-yen Pavilion,¹¹ but it's certainly a splendid, first-class scheme!"

"Whatever you do," said Dame Wang, "don't forget those ten taels of silver you promised me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied:

"Whenever one gets so much as a
tangerine peel to eat;
One should never forget Tung-t'ing Lake¹²
from whence it came.¹³

Godmother, how soon can this plan of yours be put into operation?"

"I should have something to report this very evening," said Dame Wang. "I'll go over soon and ask to borrow her calendar, before Wu the Elder gets home, and then start to work on her as best I can. You'd better get cracking and send someone over with the pongee, damask, and silk wadding before it's too late."

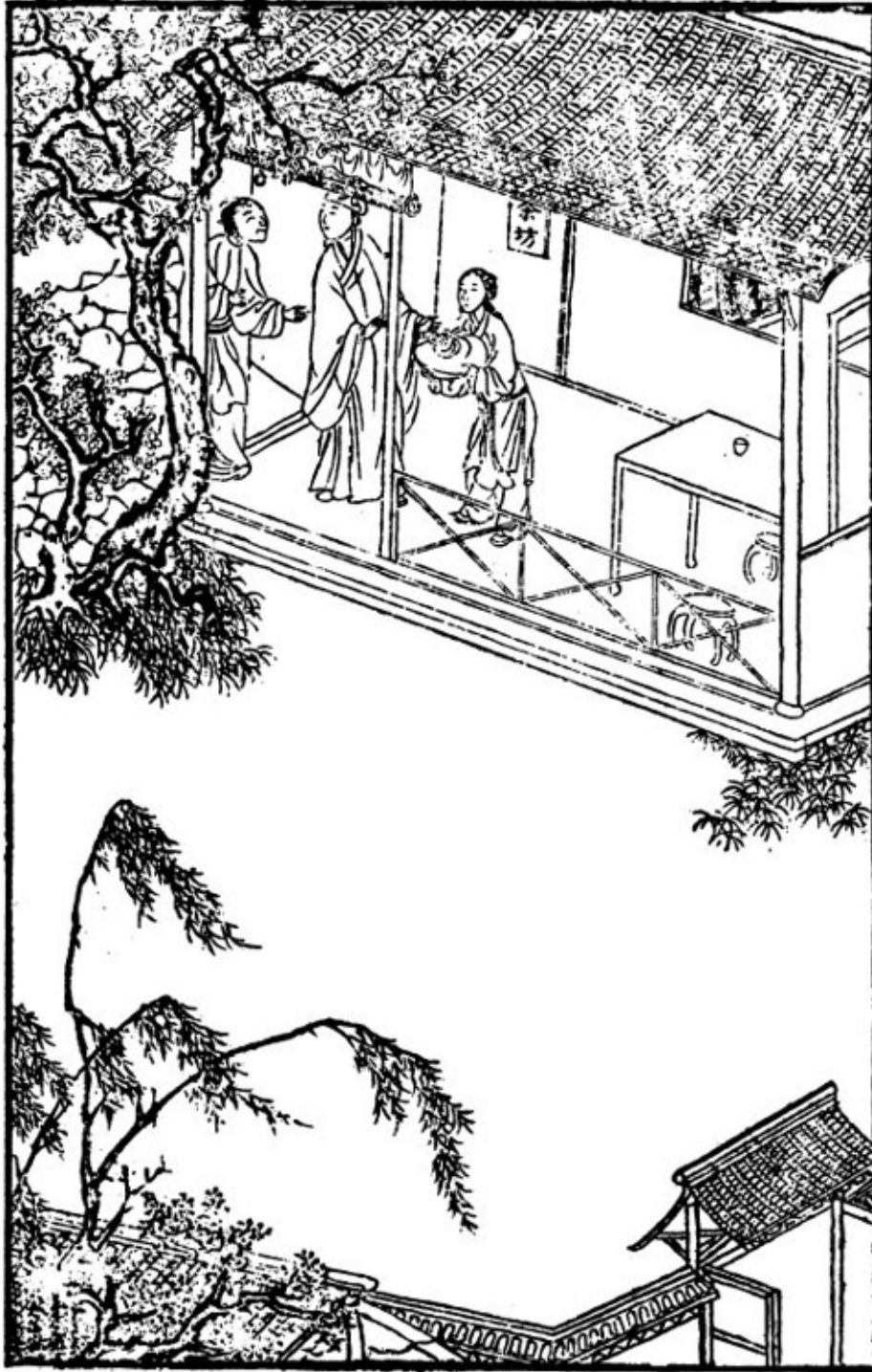
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you can pull this off, how could I ever let you down?"

Thereupon he took his leave of Dame Wang, walked out through the teahouse, and went to buy the three bolts of pongee and damask and ten taels' worth of the best-quality silk wadding. When he got home he instructed his young body servant, named Tai-an, to wrap them up in a bundle and deliver them to Dame Wang's house, where she was only too pleased to accept them and send the lad on his way. Truly:

Unless the clouds and rain come together
on Witch's Mountain;
King Hsiang of Ch'u will have erected
his terrace in vain.¹⁴

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The two of them feel an affinity
as sweet as honey;
The way Dame Wang brings them together
is remarkable indeed.
She devises a ten-part plan for
"garnering the glow";
To ensure that they will come together
without fail.¹⁵



Dame Wang Insists on the Proposed Remuneration for Her Plan

When Dame Wang had received the pongee, damask, and silk wadding she opened her back door and went over to Wu the Elder's house. The woman greeted her, invited her upstairs, and offered her a seat.

"Young lady," said Dame Wang, "how is it you haven't been over to my place for a cup of tea the last few days?"

"It's just that I've been out of sorts lately," the woman replied, "and haven't felt like doing anything at all."

"If you've got a calendar in the house, young lady," said Dame Wang, "lend it to me so I can get someone to choose a good day for me to have some tailoring done."

"What sort of tailoring do you have in mind, Godmother?" the woman asked.

"It's just because I seem to be suffering from all:

Ten aches and nine pains,"
said Dame Wang. "I'm afraid I could end up:
High as the hills or deep as the sea,
at any moment, and my son isn't even here to take care of things if anything should happen to me."

"Why haven't I seen Little Brother around for such a long time?" the woman inquired.

"That rascal is out on the road, traveling with a merchant," said Dame Wang, "and I never hear a word from him. I can't help worrying about him from one day to the next."

"How old is Little Brother this year?" the woman asked.

"That rascal's already sixteen," replied Dame Wang.

"Why don't you find him a wife, Godmother?" the woman said, "so she could lend you a hand?"

"It's just as you say," responded Dame Wang, "I've got nobody to help out. Sooner or later, someplace or other, I'll have to find him one all right. But I'm not going to worry about that till he gets home."

"Right now the problem is that, day and night, if I'm not coughing I'm short of breath; and I hurt all over, just as if I'd been beaten to pieces, so I can't even get any sleep. I've been wanting for some time now to prepare my burial garments, just in case. Fortunately a certain well-to-do gentleman who often drops into my place for a cup of tea—a man who has noticed how reliable I am as a medical practitioner, employment agent, and matchmaker, and insists on patronizing me in matters great and small—has made me a gift of all the materials I need for a complete set of burial garments, enough pongee and damask for both exterior and lining, along with a quantity of fine silk wadding. They've been sitting at home for over a year now without my having the time to get them made up."

"This year I really feel I may not be able to hang on much longer; and since it happens to be an intercalary month¹⁶ in which I've got a few days to spare, I thought I'd get this taken care of. But the tailor is giving me a hard time, claiming he's too busy right now to do it for me. I can't tell you what a hassle it's been."

On hearing this speech the woman smiled and said, "I don't know if I could do a satisfactory job, but if you're willing to risk it, I happen to have some spare time right now and could do it for you myself. What do you think, Godmother?"

When the old woman heard this she said with an ingratiating smile, "If you deign to do it with your own hands, young lady, I'll feel myself honored even in the grave. I've heard for a long time how good you are at needlework, but I haven't presumed to impose on you."

"It's nothing, Godmother," said the woman. "I've offered to do it, and I insist. Take the calendar along and get somebody to choose a lucky day so I can begin."

"Young lady," said Dame Wang, "there's no need to pretend with me. There can't be many words in the standard anthologies of poetry and drama that you can't read. What need is there to get someone else to consult the calendar?"

"I'm afraid I never received a proper education," demurred the woman with a faint smile.

"That's a fine way to talk!" said Dame Wang, as she picked up the calendar and handed it to her.

The woman took the calendar in her hand and examined it for a while. "Tomorrow is an unlucky day," she said, "and the day after tomorrow is bad too. The next good day for tailoring is not until the day after the day after tomorrow."

Dame Wang snatched the calendar away from her and hung it back on the wall, saying, "The fact that you're willing to do it for me, young lady, makes you my lucky star. What need is there to be particular about the date. I already asked someone to check for me and he reported that tomorrow is an unlucky day. But I, for one, see no reason to pay any attention to the taboo against doing tailoring on unlucky days."

"Actually," said the woman, "an unlucky day might be the most appropriate for making burial garments."

"As long as you're willing to do it," said Dame Wang, "I'll make so bold as to trouble you to come over to my place tomorrow."

"There's no need for that," said the woman. "It'll do just as well if you bring it over here for me to work on, won't it?"

"The fact of the matter is," said Dame Wang, "I want to see the way you go about it, but there's no one to tend the shop for me."

"In that case," said the woman, "I'll come over after breakfast tomorrow morning."

The old lady descended the stairs with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.

That evening she reported what had happened to Hsi-men Ch'ing and reiterated that he was not to turn up until the third day. Of the events of that night there is no more to tell.

The next day, bright and early, Dame Wang tidied up her room, laid out the necessary needles and thread, got the tea things ready, and sat down to wait for her visitor.

To resume our story, when Wu the Elder had eaten breakfast, shouldered his carrying pole, and gone off to work, the woman hung the bamboo blind over the door, told Ying-erh to look after the house, and went over to Dame Wang's place by the back door. The old lady, as pleased as could be, invited her in and offered her a seat. Then she poured her a cup of strong tea, flavored with walnuts and pine seeds, wiped the table clean, and got out the three bolts of pongee and damask. The woman took her measurements, cut up the material, and began to sew.

As the old lady looked on she kept up an unbroken stream of flattering commentary. "What exquisite skill! I've lived for sixty or seventy years without ever seeing needlework as fine as this."

The woman continued sewing until noon, when Dame Wang prepared some food and wine, along with a serving of noodles, and asked her to lunch. Afterward she continued sewing for a while, until late afternoon, when she put her work aside and returned home.

Wu the Elder happened to come home about the same time, and the woman put the latch on the door and took down the blind. When Wu the Elder came into the room he noticed that his wife's face was a little red and asked her, "Where've you been?"

"Just over at Godmother Wang's next door," the woman replied. "She asked me to make up a set of burial garments for her. At noontime she prepared some food and wine in the way of a snack and asked me to lunch."

"It would have been better not to accept her hospitality," said Wu the Elder. "We may need to call on her for help some time. Even though she asked you to make up these burial garments for her, you could just as easily have come home for a snack. It's not worth it, putting her to all that trouble. If you go back there to continue working tomorrow, take a little money along so you can buy some food and wine and return the treat. As the saying goes:

A distant relative is no match for a close neighbor.¹⁷

We mustn't fall behind in our social obligations. If she won't let you return the treat, bring the work home with you and give it back to her when you're done."

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The machinations of the old matron
are deep indeed;
But Wu the Elder is too ingenious
to catch their drift.
By supplying money to return the treat
he rewards her betrayal;
And by so doing gives his wife away
to another man.¹⁸

The woman agreed to go along with Wu the Elder's suggestion. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, after breakfast, Wu the Elder had no sooner shouldered his carrying pole and gone out than Dame Wang slipped over to press her invitation. The woman accompanied her back to her room, got out the unfinished work, and continued to sew. Dame Wang hastened to pour the tea and had a cup with her. As it drew near midday the woman pulled three hundred cash out of her sleeve and said to Dame Wang, "Godmother, let me buy you a cup of wine."

"Ai-ya!" said Dame Wang. "Who ever heard of such a thing? I asked you here to do something as a favor to me, young lady. How could I consent to let you put up the money? I hope the fare I provided hasn't disagreed with you."

"It's just what my husband told me to do," said the woman. "He said that if you raised any objections I was to take the work home with me and return it to you when I was through."

When the old lady heard this she said, "Wu the Elder really knows how to do things right, doesn't he? If that's the way you want it, young lady, I guess I'll have to accept, at least for the time being."

The old lady was afraid of interrupting the proceedings. Adding some money of her own, she went out to buy food and wine of good quality, along with some unusual delicacies, and waited upon her assiduously.

Gentle reader take note: Nine out of ten of the women of this world, no matter how smart they are, prove susceptible to flattery.

The old lady prepared an enticing repast of food and wine and invited her guest to partake of it. Afterward the woman continued sewing for a while, until late afternoon, when she returned home with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.

To make a long story short, the third day, after breakfast, Dame Wang waited until she had seen Wu the Elder go out and then went to her back door and called out, "Young lady, may I make so bold?"

"I'm on my way," the woman responded from the second floor.

After they had greeted each other they repaired to Dame Wang's room, where she got out her work in order to go on with the sewing. Dame Wang made haste to pour the tea and they had a cup together, after which the woman continued to sew until it was nearly noon.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly been able to wait for this day. Dressing himself up to befit the occasion, taking three or five taels of silver along with him, and sporting his gold-flecked Szechwan fan, he swaggered off in the direction of Amethyst Street.

When he arrived at the door of Dame Wang's teashop he coughed and called out, "Godmother Wang, why haven't I seen anything of you the last few days?"

Dame Wang caught on immediately and responded with the words, "Who is that calling after this old body?"

"It's me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The old lady bustled out to see who it was and then said, with a laugh, "I had no idea who it could be, but it turns out to be you, sir. You've arrived in the nick of time. Come into my room and see who's here."

Taking hold of Hsi-men Ch'ing by the sleeve, with one tug she pulled him into the room where, addressing herself to the woman, she said, "This is the very gentleman who was kind enough to give these materials to me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at the woman.

Her cloudy locks rose up like serried hills;

Her fair countenance evoked an air of spring.

She was wearing a white linen blouse with a peach red skirt and a blue vest as she sat there in the room, working on her sewing. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in she lowered her head.

Hsi-men Ch'ing quickly stepped forward and made her a bow as he uttered a word of greeting. The woman put down her work and returned his salutation.

Dame Wang then said, "It was rare generosity on this gentleman's part to give me these bolts of pongee and damask. They've been sitting at home for over a year now without my having time to get them made up. I'm greatly indebted to this young lady, my next-door neighbor, who has volunteered her services in making them up for me. Her needlework is as regular as any turned out on a loom, it's so close and fine. Such a thing is rarely to be seen. Just come take a look at it, sir."

Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up the garments and made appreciative noises as he examined them.

"Where could this young lady have learned to do such needlework?" he exclaimed. "It looks just like the work of a goddess or immortal."

"Don't make fun of me, sir," the woman said with a smile.



Hsi-men Ch'ing deliberately proceeded to inquire of Dame Wang, "Godmother, I hardly dare ask, but whose household does this young lady belong to?"

"Make a guess, sir," said Dame Wang.

"How could I hope to guess correctly?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Dame Wang laughed out loud and said, "Please sit down, sir, and I'll tell you all about it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down across the table from the woman and Dame Wang said, "Let me tell you, sir. Remember what happened to you when you were walking under the eaves here the other day? Well it served you right, sir."

"You mean to tell me she's the one whose forked stick fell on my hairnet¹⁹ the other day as I passed by her door?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I still have no idea whose household she belongs to."

"I'm afraid I may have unintentionally shaken you up a bit the other day, sir," said the woman. "Please don't hold it against me." As she said this she stood up and made him a bow.

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned her salutation with alacrity and said, "How could I dream of such a thing?"

"This same lady," said Dame Wang, "is the wife of Wu the Elder who lives next door."

"So you're Wu the Elder's wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I know your husband only as a hardworking family man who plies his trade in the streets. He has never given offense to anyone, high or low. He knows how to make a living and has a good disposition. Truly, men such as he are not easily come by."

"True enough," said Dame Wang. "Ever since the young lady has been married to Wu the Elder she's been:

Obedient to his every whim.

They really hit it off with each other."

"My husband is an utterly useless person," said the woman. "Don't make fun of me that way, sir."

"You're mistaken, young lady," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As the poet says:

Flexibility is the root of success;

Adamancy is the womb of misfortune.²⁰

When one has a husband as irreproachable as yours, who:

Though he possess ten thousand fathoms of water

will not suffer a drop to escape;²¹

And strives throughout his entire lifetime

to set an example of integrity,

how could he be anything but an asset?"

For some time Dame Wang kept up a steady drumbeat of praise for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Turning to the woman she said, "Young lady, do you know who this gentleman is?"

"No I don't," she replied.

"This gentleman," said Dame Wang, "is one of the more substantial citizens of the locality. Even His Honor, the district magistrate, consorts with him, and addresses him as the Honorable Hsi-men. He disposes of property worth tens of thousands of strings of cash and owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen. In his home:

The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,

The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary.

What is yellow is gold,

What is white is silver,

What are round are pearls,

What sparkle are jewels.²²

And he also possesses:

Horns off the rhinoceros's head, and

Tusks out of the elephant's mouth.²³

In addition to which:

He lends money to officials, and

Is very well connected.

At the time of his present marriage I played the role of go-between. His wife is Battalion Commander Wu's daughter, who's just as clever as can be."

Then, turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she asked, "Sir, how is it you haven't dropped in to my place for a cup of tea for lo these many days?"

"It's all on account of my daughter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She's just been betrothed to someone and I've been tied up for some time."

"Who has your young lady been betrothed to?" asked Dame Wang. "And why didn't you employ me as go-between?"

"She's betrothed to Ch'en Ching-chi,"²⁴ said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the son of that Ch'en family that's related by marriage to Yang Chien, the commander in chief of the 800,000 imperial guards in the Eastern Capital. He's only sixteen years old and is still going to school. In any other circumstances we would have asked you to represent us, Godmother, but they took the initiative by sending a certain Auntie Wen to propose the match; so we countered by asking that Auntie Hsüeh who is constantly to be seen around our place peddling costume jewelry to be coguarantor, and we have consented to the terms. If you would like to come, Godmother, I'll send someone to invite you over, one day soon, when they present us with the ritual gift of tea."

The old lady laughed uproariously. "I was only kidding, sir. We go-betweens are a pretty bitchy bunch. When they were conducting the negotiations I was nowhere to be seen. Why should I be entitled to a share of the feast they have earned by their own efforts? As the saying goes:

Fellow professionals can't abide each other.

It will be more appropriate if I wait until the bride has been carried over the threshold and then go pay a call on the third-day or fifth-day celebrations, with a present in hand, in hopes of getting a bite to eat. There's no point in antagonizing people."

The two of them carried on an animated dialogue for some time, in which the old lady pulled out all the stops in her exaggerated praise of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Meanwhile, the woman merely lowered her head and continued to sew. There is a poem that testifies to this:

It has always been the nature of women
to be like water;
Behind their husbands' backs they betray them
with other men.
In her heart Chin-lien hankers after
Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Once her desires are aroused she can
no longer control them.²⁵

Hsi-men Ch'ing sensed that Chin-lien was well-disposed toward him and could hardly wait to begin coupling with her. Dame Wang poured two cups of tea and served one to Hsi-men Ch'ing and one to the woman, saying, "Young lady, have a little tea with the gentleman."

By the time they had finished their tea they were already exchanging meaningful glances. Dame Wang looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing and stroked her cheek with a finger. Hsi-men Ch'ing understood that five-tenths of the glow-game had already been achieved. It's always been true that:

Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and

Wine is the go-between of lust.²⁶

"If you hadn't dropped by, sir," said Dame Wang, "I would not have presumed to visit your home in order to issue an invitation. In the first place:

This meeting was fated to occur;

and in the second place:

You've arrived in the nick of time.

As the saying goes:

One guest does not trouble two hosts.²⁷

You have provided the money, sir, and this young lady has provided her skills. I'm greatly indebted to both of you benefactors. If I hadn't:

Asked her a favor, as one troupier to another,
there would scarcely be any reason for this young lady to grace us with her presence. Why don't you play the role of host, sir, by coming up with the silver to buy some food and wine, in order to show this young lady how much her efforts are appreciated?"

"How stupid of me not to have thought of it myself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got some silver right here." He reached into his wallet, pulled out a lump of silver of about a tael's value, and gave it to Dame Wang to buy the food and wine with.

"There's no need to put the gentleman to all this trouble," said the woman, but, although she uttered the protest, she made no effort to withdraw.

Dame Wang accepted the money and on her way out the door said, "Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady. I'll be right back."

"Don't bother, Godmother," said the woman, but she made no effort to withdraw.

By now both of them had the same idea in mind. Dame Wang went out the door, leaving them in the room together. Hsi-men Ch'ing couldn't take his eyes off the woman, and she, too, stole surreptitious glances at him. When she saw what a handsome figure he cut she was more than half inclined in his favor, but again she merely lowered her head and continued to sew.

Before long Dame Wang returned from her shopping expedition with a plump cooked goose, a roast duck, baked meats, salted fish, and other delicacies.

When she had put them out on platters and plates she arranged them on the table in her room and said to the woman, "Young lady, why don't you set your work aside for a minute and have a cup of wine?"

"You keep the gentleman company if you like," said the woman. "It's not proper for me to do so."

"But all this has been provided for the sole purpose of showing you how much your efforts are appreciated," the old lady protested. "How can you say such a thing?" And she proceeded to set the platters of food down right in front of her.

When the three of them had sat down at their places the wine was poured. Picking up a cup of wine and holding it out to her in his hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed the woman with the words, "Please don't refuse me. Bottoms up."

The woman declined, saying, "You're very kind, sir, but I have so little capacity that I couldn't handle it."

"I know perfectly well you could swallow the ocean itself," said Dame Wang. "Please relax and have a cup or two."

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Since "Boys and girls are forbidden,

to occupy the same mat";²⁸
Flaunting one's beauty and inviting seduction
have perennial appeal.
Not only did Cho Wen-chün, once upon a time,
elope with Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju;²⁹
But, even today, a Hsi-men Ch'ing may enjoy
the favors of a Chin-lien.³⁰

The woman took the cup of wine and saluted each of the others in turn.

Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up his chopsticks and said, "Godmother, do me the favor of urging the young lady to have something to eat."

Dame Wang picked out the best tidbits and put them on the woman's plate. After the third round of drinks the old lady went to heat some more wine.

"I hardly dare ask," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how old you are, young lady?"

"I'm twenty-four," the woman responded. "I was born in the year of the dragon, on the ninth day of the first month, at two o'clock in the morning."

"You're the same age as my wife, then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was also born in the year *wu-ch'en*,³¹ the year of the dragon, but you're seven months older than she is. She was born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, at midnight."

"How can you compare Heaven to Earth?" said the woman. "You'll be the death of me yet."

"This young lady is an intelligent person," interjected Dame Wang. "She's as clever as can be. It's no wonder her needlework's as good as it is. As for the works of the hundred schools, backgammon, elephant chess, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, she's thoroughly versed in them all. She even writes a good hand."

"Where could one hope to find the like!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Wu the Elder is a lucky man, indeed, to have this young lady as his wife."

"I wouldn't want to make invidious comparisons, sir," said Dame Wang, "but you've got quite a few ladies in your own household, and which one of them is a match for this young lady?"

"That's no more than the truth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's a long story.

I guess it's just my bad luck not to have found a good one yet."

"Your first wife was all right, wasn't she, sir?" said Dame Wang.

"Don't talk to me about my first wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she were still alive, things wouldn't be the way they are.

When the family lacks a ruler,
The household is topsy-turvy.³²

I've got three, five, maybe seven bedmates around the place right now, but a lot of good it does me. All they can do is eat; none of them is willing to take charge of anything."

"If that's the way things are, sir," asked the woman, "how many years has it been since your first wife died?"

"I don't even like to talk about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "My first wife's maiden name was Ch'en. Although she was only of humble origin, she was as clever as could be. She was always able to act on my behalf whenever the occasion arose. But now, unfortunately, she's dead. It happened more than three years ago. Since my remarriage, my second wife has been sick so much of the time she hasn't been able to take charge. As a result, everything in the household is:

All at sevens and eights.³³

That's why I spend so much of my time out of the house. When I'm at home all I do is get upset."

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "don't take it amiss if I speak bluntly. Neither your first wife nor your present wife could match the needlework of Wu the Elder's lady, not to mention her looks."

"For that matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my first wife also lacked the romantic air of Wu the Elder's lady."

The old lady laughed. "Sir, what about that mistress you've been maintaining—the one who lives on East Street—why haven't you had me over for a cup of tea?"

"You must mean the ballad singer, Chang Hsi-ch'un," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When I realized she was nothing but a street musician I grew tired of her."

"Sir," said the old lady, "you've been carrying on with Li Chiao-erh, from the licensed quarter, for some time."

"As for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've already taken her into my establishment. If she had been able to run the household, I would have made her my legitimate wife."

"You're on good terms with Cho the Second too," said Dame Wang.

"I've also taken Cho Tiu-erh into my establishment as my Number Three," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But recently she's come down with an indisposition that she doesn't seem able to shake."

"If I ever came across anyone who might tickle your fancy to the extent that Wu the Elder's lady does," inquired Dame Wang, "would you have any objection if I paid you a call to broach the subject?"

"Both my father and my mother are dead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I'm my own master. Who would dare to say me nay?"

"I'm only joking," said Dame Wang. "Where could I ever find anyone who tickled your fancy to that extent?"

"It's not that there's none to be had," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's just that my meager matrimonial affinities have prevented me from encountering one."

The two of them had carried on an animated dialogue for some time when Dame Wang exclaimed, "Just when we're having such a good time, the wine has run out. Don't take it amiss, sir, if I seem to be ordering you about; but what would you think of buying another bottle of wine?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled out the three or four taels of loose silver remaining in his wallet and gave them to Dame Wang, saying, "You take these and use them to buy more if we run out of anything. If it's too much, keep the difference."

The old lady thanked him and got up to go. When she glanced at Chin-lien she saw that she had reached that state in which:

Three cups of wine in the stomach
ignite the flames of desire.

From the manner in which they were:

Talking back and forth,

it was obvious that by now both of them had the same idea in mind. The woman merely lowered her head, but didn't budge from her seat. Truly:

The natural beauty of the vista
remains unseen;
In spring the peach blossoms bloom
all by themselves.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The messages conveyed by her eyes and brows
have never ceased;
The love match is about to be consummated
with a romantic partner.
In her greed for reward Dame Wang
possesses no other skill;
Than flowery words and a cleverly
specious tongue.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

THE HUSSY COMMITS ADULTERY BEHIND WU THE ELDER'S BACK; YÜN-KO IN HIS ANGER
RAISES A RUMPUS IN THE TEASHOP

Wine and beauty frequently occasion
the ruination of the state;
From of old, good looks have been the undoing
of the loyal and the true.
The royal house of King Chou came to an end
because of Ta-chi;¹
The sacred altars of the state of Wu perished
on account of Hsi-shih.²
Those who care only for the joys of youth,
seeking pleasure where they may;

Remain oblivious to the disasters

 lurking beneath the powdered smile.³
Hsi-men Ch'ing allowed himself to become
 so enamored of Chin-lien's beauty;
That he abandoned the domestic doe
 to pursue the high-stepping hind.

THE STORY GOES that as Dame Wang started out the door with Hsi-men Ch'ing's money in hand she turned to the woman with an ingratiating smile and said, "I'm just popping out into the street to get a bottle of wine. Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady. There's a little wine left in the pot, so if you run out you can pour another couple of cups and share them with the gentleman. I'm going to go all the way to East Street, where I can be sure of getting a bottle of the best quality, so I'll be gone quite a while."

On hearing this the woman said, "Godmother, don't go. I've already had enough wine. I don't need any more."

"Ai-ya!" Dame Wang exclaimed. "Young lady, it's not as though the gentleman were anyone else. If you haven't anything else to do, why not share a cup with him? What is there to be afraid of?"

Although the woman said, "I don't need any more," she sat where she was and didn't budge from her seat. Dame Wang put the latch on the door and fastened it with a piece of cord so that the two of them were locked inside the room together. Then she sat down on the curb and devoted herself to spinning thread in order to pass the time.

To resume our story, inside the room Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the woman.

 Her cloudy locks were half askew, and

 Her creamy breasts slightly exposed.

On her powdered face the colors red and white formed a pleasing contrast. Picking up the pot, he continued to ply the woman with wine.

After a while, pretending to be hot, he took off his green silk jacket and said, "I wonder, young lady, if you would hang this over the bedrail of Godmother's bed for me?"

Nothing loath, the woman took it in her hand and disposed of it as directed. Hsi-men Ch'ing then deliberately brushed a pair of chopsticks off the table with his sleeve so that they fell to the floor. It is clear that: This meeting was fated to occur,

for the chopsticks came to rest right beside the woman's feet. Hsi-men Ch'ing quickly stooped down to pick them up. Behold: The up-turned points of her tiny golden lotuses,

 Barely three inches long,

 But half a span in length,

 Peeked out beside the chopsticks.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ignored the chopsticks but gave a gentle pinch to the embroidered tip of her shoe.

The woman laughed out loud. "There's no need to beat around the bush, sir.

 If you've got a mind to it,

 I've got the will.⁴

Are you actually trying to seduce me?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing got down on his knees with the plea, "Young lady, make a happy man of me."

The woman then embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My only fear is that Godmother may come back and catch us in the act."

"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she's already in on it."

At this juncture, right there in Dame Wang's room, the two of them: Took off their clothes, undid their girdles, and

 Enjoyed each other on the same pillow.

Behold:

 Their necks entwined, the mandarin ducks

 sport in the water;

 Their heads together, the phoenixes

 thread the flowers.



The Hussy Commits Adultery behind Wu the Elder's Back

How joyous their delight as the growing branches intertwine;
How sweet their pleasure as the lover's knot
is tied.
The one sticks tightly with his
ruby lips;
The other clings closely with her
powdered face.
Silk stockings in the air,

Two new moons rise above his shoulders;
Gold hairpins askew,
A black cloud piles up beside the pillow.
Swearing eternal fidelity,
He kneads her into a thousand shapes of compliance;
Bashful at the clouds and rain,
She submits with ten thousand forms of complaisance.
The pleasing cries of the oriole,
Are never absent from his ears;
Forever moist with sweet spittle,
She smiles as she sticks out her tongue.
Her willow waist droops with the weight
 of teeming spring;
Her cherry mouth is slightly split
 with panting breath.
As her starry eyes grow dim,
Tiny beads of sweat form on her fragrant jade body;
As her creamy breasts heave,
A stream of dewdrops drips into the heart of the peony.
Despite the fact that they are both well matched
 and compatible;
How true it is that "Stolen delights always
 taste the best."⁵

The two of them had just finished with the clouds and rain and were about to get dressed when they were interrupted by Dame Wang, who pushed open the door of the room and walked right in on them.

With a great show of consternation,
Clapping her hands and beating her palms,
she said, "A fine thing the two of you have been up to!"

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chin-lien were both caught by surprise. The old woman then addressed herself to the latter, saying, "Fine! Just fine! I asked you over here to do a job for me, not to do a job on a man. When Wu the Elder finds out, I'm going to be implicated. I might as well tell him about it before anyone else does." Having said which, she turned around and started out the door.

The woman was thrown into such a panic by this that she caught hold of her by the skirt and got down on her knees with the plea, "Godmother, forgive us!"

"You'll both have to agree to one condition if there's to be any hope of that," said Dame Wang.

"Don't talk about one condition," said the woman. "If you were to impose ten conditions, Godmother, I'd agree to them."

"Every day from now on," said Dame Wang, "you must agree to keep Wu the Elder in the dark and never to disappoint this gentleman, no matter whether he calls for you early or late. Then and only then will I agree to call it quits. If you refuse to come even once I'll tell Wu the Elder all about it."

"I'll do whatever you say," the woman replied.

Dame Wang then said, "As for you, sir, there's no need for me to remind you. All ten parts of this glow-game have been carried to a successful conclusion, so you can't very well renege on what you promised me. If you show bad faith by going away and not coming back again, I'll also tell Wu the Elder all about it."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can relax. I won't go back on my word."

"There's no way of holding the two of you to your word," said Dame Wang, "unless you exchange tokens of some kind as mementoes of your feelings."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then pulled a silver hairpin with a gold head out of his own hair and inserted it into the woman's cloudy locks. Fearing that Wu the Elder might suspect something if he saw it, she pulled it out and put it in her sleeve, from which she drew out a handkerchief which she gave to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who also put it away out of sight.

The three of them drank another few cups of wine together, by which time it was late afternoon. The woman then got up and said, "It's about time for that bastard, Wu the Elder, to be getting back. I'd better go home."

She then took her leave of Dame Wang and Hsi-men Ch'ing and slipped into her own house through the back door. Once there, she barely had time to take down the blind over the front door before Wu the Elder came in.

To resume our story, Dame Wang looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Now was that a good scheme, or wasn't it?"

"I'm greatly indebted to you, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Truly: In intelligence you rival Sui Ho;

In resourcefulness you outdo Lu Chia.

Not one woman out of ten could escape your designs."

"And did this filly live up to your expectations?" asked Dame Wang.

"Why:

'She's two under full four words!'"⁶

replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"She got her start in life as a privately owned singing girl," said the old lady. "There isn't much she doesn't know

about anything. And it was all my doing that has: Cast you in the roles of man and wife, and
Contrived to make you a couple.

Whatever you do, don't forget what you promised me."

"You really outdid yourself, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When I get home I'll pick out an ingot of silver for you and bring it over myself.

Whenever I promise anything,
I never fail to deliver."

Dame Wang said:

"My eyes are on the lookout for the flag of victory,
My ears are always on the alert for good tidings."⁷

Just don't leave me in the predicament of:

Trying to collect the fee for the professional mourners
after the coffin has already been interred."⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied:

"Whenever one gets so much as a
tangerine peel to eat;
One should never forget Tung-t'ing Lake
from whence it came."

Then, after checking to see that the coast was clear, he put on his eye shades, laughed, and departed. But no more of this.

The next day he returned to Dame Wang's shop and called for some tea. Dame Wang offered him a seat and hastened to pour out a cup for him. When he had finished his tea Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled a ten-tael ingot of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to Dame Wang.

Generally speaking, nothing moves the people of this world so much as money.

When the old lady's black eyes caught sight of this "snowflake" silver⁹ she tucked it away: As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could

make her happier,

and saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a double bow, saying, "Many thanks for your generosity, sir."

She then went on to say, "I haven't seen Wu the Elder go out yet. If you'll wait a minute, I'll step over there and ask to borrow a gourd dipper so I can see if he's still there."

And she proceeded to slip over to the woman's house by the back door. The woman was in the main room serving Wu the Elder his breakfast.

When she heard someone at the door she asked Ying-erh, "Who is it?"

"It's Granny Wang," Ying-erh replied. "She wants to borrow our gourd."

The woman hastened out to greet her, saying, "Godmother, the gourd's right here. You can have it whenever you want. Why don't you come in and sit down for a minute?"

"There's no one over there to tend the shop," said the old lady.

As she spoke she made a sign with her hand which the woman understood to mean that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come and was waiting for her.

As soon as her visitor had picked up the gourd dipper and gone out the door, the woman urged Wu the Elder to finish his breakfast, shoulder his carrying pole, and start on his way.

After going upstairs, redoing her makeup, and changing into an attractive new outfit, she said to Ying-erh, "I want you to look after the house for me. I'm just going over to your Granny Wang's place for a visit; I'll be back before long. If your daddy comes home, be sure to let me know. If you don't do as I say, you little wretch, I'll beat your bottom right off!"¹⁰

Ying-erh nodded her assent. But no more of this.

The woman went over to Dame Wang's teashop to keep her tryst with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Truly: The coupled halves of the peach stone

serve to evoke a chuckle;

Because inside, it will be found, lie

yet another couple.¹¹

There is a poem composed of double meanings that testifies to this: This gourd's a gourd, the mouth of which is small,

the body large.

When young, up in its breezy arbor,

it's high-slung;

But when it grows bigger, it becomes

hard enough to bite.

How could it have hung in there with Yen Hui,

content with privation for principle's sake;¹²

When all it wanted to do was bob about on the water

in the spring breeze?

When you really need it
it falls down on the job;
But whether you want it or not
it's always hanging about;
Until you feel you simply have to
take it in hand.

It contributes its stale share
to the work of the stable;
And is not infrequently called upon
in the teahouse.
You may not want it any more than Hsü Yu did,¹³
but can scarcely do without it;
And from its dark interior you never know
what nostrum will come out.¹⁴

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the woman come in he felt:

Just as though she had fallen from Heaven.

The two of them sat down:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,
while Dame Wang served them a cup of tea.

"When you went home yesterday," the old lady inquired, "did Wu the Elder raise any questions?"

"He asked whether I had finished the work on your burial garments yet," the woman said. "I replied that the garments themselves were finished, but that I was still working on the shoes and stockings."

As soon as this problem had been disposed of the old lady made haste to provide some wine. She served it to them in her own room and they immediately fell to exchanging cups and enjoying themselves without restraint. Hsi-men Ch'ing examined the woman closely and she looked even more beautiful to him than the first time he had seen her. After a few drinks, the colors red and white formed a pleasing contrast on her powdered face, the temples of which were adorned with two long spit curls. Truly: She was the equal of any immortal, and

Excelled even the goddess Ch'ang-o.

There is a song to the tune "Intoxicated in the East Wind" that testifies to this: How provocative are the red and white tints

of her flesh;
How lovable is this delectable maid.
Trailing a silk skirt of halcyon hue,
Beneath the gathered sleeves of a gold-flecked
blouse;
In her joyous abandon her chignon has fallen askew.
She is the very picture of Ch'ang-o come down
from the moon;
The like of which you could not buy for a
thousand pieces of gold.¹⁵

Hsi-men Ch'ing couldn't say enough in her praise. Taking her onto his lap, he lifted her skirt far enough to catch a glimpse of her pair of tiny feet, enclosed in black satin shoes, just half a span in length. His heart was filled with delight. The two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them and laughed and joked with each other.

The woman then asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-seven," he replied. "I was born in the year of the tiger on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month, at midnight."

"How many ladies do you have in your household?" the woman asked.

"Aside from my wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got three or four other bedmates at home. It's just that none of them really tickles my fancy."

"And how many sons have you got?" the woman asked.

"All I have is a young daughter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who's about to get married. I don't have any other children."

After they had laughed and joked with each other for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing reached into his sleeve and pulled out a cylindrical silver pillbox that contained breath-sweetening lozenges¹⁶ flavored with osmanthus. One at a time he proceeded to put these into the woman's mouth on the tip of his tongue. The two of them then fell to: Hugging and embracing each other,

Like snakes darting out their tongues.

The sound of their sucking was audible.

Dame Wang was so preoccupied with serving food and pouring wine that she could hardly concern herself with what went on between them, and left them in her room to enjoy themselves as they pleased.

In a little while, when they had both had enough wine to: Ignite the flames of desire, Hsi-men Ch'ing's lustful thoughts got the better of him. Exposing the organ that lay between his loins, he induced the woman to manipulate it with her slender fingers.

It so happens that ever since his youth Hsi-men Ch'ing had frequented the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter and patronized the women who dwelt there. About the base of his member he wore a clasp that had been: Beaten out of silver, and

Imbrued with drugs,
which had the effect of making that organ both large and long. It was: Dark red, with black whiskers;

Straight standing, firm, and hard;
a fine object, indeed! There is a poem about its characteristics that testifies to this: There is an object that has always been

about six inches long;
Sometimes it is soft and at other times
it is hard.
When soft, like a drunkard, it falls down
either to the east or the west;
When hard, like a mad monk, it runs amok

either above or below.
It makes it's living by traveling in and out of virgin territory;
It makes its home beneath the navel in the
Province of the Loins.
It has two sons who always accompany it
wherever it goes;
In how many skirmishes, with how many beauties,
has it emerged the victor?

It was not long before the woman had taken off her clothes and Hsi-men Ch'ing discovered, by both visual and tactile means, that her mount of Venus had been depilated of its pubic hair. It was: Pale and fragrant,

Plump to bursting,
Soft and yielding,
Red and wrinkly,
Tight and squeezey;
Beloved of thousands,
Craved by tens of thousands;
Who could tell what it might be?

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Warm and tight, fragrant and dry, it tastes
better than lotus root;
It knows how to be soft and yielding and to
make itself agreeable.
When happy, it sticks out its tongue, opens
its mouth, and smiles;
When tired, it collapses lazily into itself
and takes a nap.
The name of the place it makes its home
is Crotch County;
Its old garden is to be found beside the
sparsely wooded slopes.
If it should ever encounter a dashing
young gentleman;
It will engage him in battle, without a word,
on the slightest pretext.

To make a long story short, from that day on, the woman slipped over to Dame Wang's teashop every day to keep her tryst with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Their feelings for each other were like lacquer;
The love in their hearts was like glue.

It has always been true that:

Good deeds seldom become known beyond the gate; Bad deeds are quickly transmitted a thousand li.¹⁷

In less than half a month the whole neighborhood knew what was going on, with the sole exception of Wu the Elder, who remained in the dark. Truly: The only thing he knew was that it was his duty

to abide by his lot;
What did he know about defending himself from
deceit or foul play?

There is a poem that testifies to this:

As always, "Good deeds seldom become known
beyond the gate";
Whereas bad deeds and evil talk are quickly
noised abroad.
How pitiful it is that Wu the Elder's
lawful wife;

Should surreptitiously become the consort
of Hsi-men Ch'ing.¹⁸

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, there was in the same district a certain youngster who was just fourteen or fifteen years old and whose surname was Ch'iao. Because he had been born in Yün-chou, where his father was serving in the army at the time, people referred to him by the nickname Yün-ko, or Little Yün. The only remaining member of his family was his father, who was now well advanced in years. The lad was clever by nature and managed to scrape a living by peddling fresh fruits in the wineshops that were clustered near the front gate of the district yamen. Hsi-men Ch'ing was one of his patrons and often gave him a little extra to help with his expenses.

One day he set out to look for Hsi-men Ch'ing with a basket of snow pears for sale. As he was going his rounds a certain busybody said to him, "Yün-ko, if that's who you're looking for, I can tell you a place where you'll be sure to find him."

"Thanks, Uncle," said Yün-ko. "If you help me find him I can pick up thirty or fifty cash toward the expenses of keeping my old father alive. You'll be doing a good deed."

"Listen to me," said the busybody. "Hsi-men Ch'ing is carrying on an affair with the wife of Wu the Elder, who sells steamed wheat cakes. Every day he can be found sitting around in Dame Wang's teashop on Amethyst Street. He's almost certainly there at this very moment. You're still just a kid, so even if you walk right in on him it won't make any difference."

On hearing this Yün-ko said, "Thanks for your help, Uncle."

The little monkey then picked up his basket and headed straight for Dame Wang's teashop in Amethyst Street. When he got there he found Dame Wang sitting on a short bench, spinning hemp thread.

Yün-ko put his basket down and bowed to Dame Wang with the words, "Greetings to you, Godmother."

"What brings you here, Yün-ko?" asked the old lady.

"I'm looking for the gentleman in order to pick up thirty or fifty cash toward the expenses of keeping my old father alive," said Yün-ko.

"What gentleman is that?" asked the old lady.

"You know perfectly well who I mean," said Yün-ko. "That's the one."

"He may be a gentleman," said the old lady, "but even gentlemen have names."

"I mean the one who has two characters in his surname," said Yün-ko.

"And what two characters might they be?" inquired the old lady.

"All you ever do is joke, Godmother," said Yün-ko. "I want to have a word with the Honorable Hsi-men."

As he said these words he proceeded to walk in toward the interior of the shop. The old lady grabbed hold of him with one hand and said, "Little monkey, where do you think you're going!"

In every house there are areas that are private,
and areas that are public."

"If you'll just let me into your room," said Yün-ko, "I'll find him for you soon enough."

"You cocksucking little monkey!" Dame Wang cursed at him. "What would the Honorable Hsi-men be doing in my room?"

"Godmother," said Yün-ko:

"Don't try to keep it all for yourself;
Spare me a mouthful of leftover gravy."¹⁹

Do you think I don't know what's going on?"

"You little monkey!" cursed the old lady. "What do you know about anything!"

Yün-ko said, "You don't give much away do you? Truly:

You do your chopping in a wooden ladle
with a horseshoe blade."²⁰

Not one drop escapes;

Not even half a drop ever hits the floor.

If you make me tell the whole story, I fear our brother who sells steamed wheat cakes may kick up a fuss."

When the old lady heard these words, which struck her right on her sore spot, she was enraged and shouted, "You cocksucking little monkey! You think you can come farting around my place, do you!"

"If I'm a little monkey," said Yün-ko, "you're nothing but a procuress, a pandering old bitch!"



Yün-ko in His Anger Raises a Rumpus in the Teashop

The old lady tightened her grip on Yün-ko and gave him a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles.

"Who do you think you're hitting!" Yün-ko yelled at her.

"You lousy mother-fucking little monkey!" the old lady cursed. "If you raise your voice again I'll drive you out of here with a couple of good boxes on the ear!"

"You lousy old bloodsucker!" responded Yün-ko. "You think you can start a fight with me over nothing, do you!"

Pushing him before her with one hand around his neck, and rapping him on the head as hard as she could with the knuckles of her other hand, the old lady drove him right out into the street and threw his basket of snow pears after him. The snow pears went rolling hither and yon all over the street.

The old lady had been too much for the little monkey to handle. Cursing and crying and scurrying all over the street after his pears, he pointed at Dame Wang's teashop and unleashed a flood of imprecation.

"Don't you worry, you old bloodsucker! Just wait and see whether I tell him what's up and blow this whole thing wide open or not! By the time I'm through your shop will be a shambles and you'll have no way to make a living!"

At this point the little monkey picked up his basket and ran off to search the streets for a certain person, but he couldn't find him. If Yün-ko should find this person, truly: Though Dame Wang's deeds were done in the past,

Today the chickens would come home to roost.²¹

As a result of this event:

The Spirit of the Perilous Paths²² would strip himself for action;

The little monkey's revelations would lead
to disaster.²³

If you don't know who Yün-ko set out to look for, and

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

YÜN-KO LENDS A HAND BY CURSING DAME WANG; THE HUSSY ADMINISTERS POISON TO WU THE ELDER

If you ever apprehend the Ch'an enigma
 posed by the word "romance";
You'll find that good affinities often
 turn out to be bad affinities.¹
In the heat of passion, everyone
 becomes enamored of it;
Looked at dispassionately, everyone
 comes to despise it.²
The flowers by the wayside ought not
 to be plucked;

Natural beauty and sound substance
are safer by far.
A rustic wife, your own children,
and everyday fare;
Are unlikely to lead to either
lovesickness or penury.³

THE STORY GOES that Yün-ko, after his rough treatment at the hands of Dame Wang, had no place to vent his spleen. When he picked up his basket and ran off to search the streets it was Wu the Elder that he was looking for. He hadn't gone more than two blocks when whom should he see but Wu the Elder, shouldering his load of steamed wheat cakes, coming along the very street he was on.

As soon as he saw him Yün-ko stopped in his tracks and said to Wu the Elder, "I haven't seen you for ages. You're really putting on the fat aren't you?"

Wu the Elder put down his carrying pole and said, "I'm just the same as I've always been. Since when am I putting on any fat?"

"The other day," said Yün-ko, "I wanted to buy some bran, but couldn't find any, no matter where I looked. Everyone said you had some at home."

"I don't raise geese or ducks," said Wu the Elder. "What would I want with bran?"

"You say you've no use for bran," said Yün-ko. "In that case, how did you get so overstuffed yourself? Even if I picked you up by the feet and put you in a pot to boil, you wouldn't let off any steam?"

"You cocksucking monkey!" said Wu the Elder. "That's a fine suggestion to make! My wife isn't playing at ducks and drakes with anyone, so why should you call me a 'duck'?"⁴

"If your wife isn't playing at ducks and drakes with anyone," said Yün-ko, "she's playing at drakes and ducks."

Wu the Elder grabbed hold of Yün-ko and said, "Tell me who it is then."

"You're laughable," said Yün-ko. "You may be brave enough to grab hold of me, but I'll bet you aren't brave enough to bite off his left one for him."

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Elder, "Just tell me who it is and I'll give you ten steamed wheat cakes."

"Steamed wheat cakes alone won't do the trick," said Yün-ko. "But if you treat me to three cups of wine I'll tell you."

"I didn't know you could drink," said Wu the Elder. "Follow me."

Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and led Yün-ko to a small wineshop. When they got there he put down his load, took along a few steamed wheat cakes, and then ordered up some meat and a jug of wine.

When Yün-ko had finished these off he said, "Don't bother with any more wine, but I could use a few more slices of meat."

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Elder, "please! Tell me who it is."

"Don't worry," said Yün-ko, "I'll tell you as soon as I've finished eating. And don't get too upset. I'll help you to nab him."

When Wu the Elder had watched the monkey finish off the meat and wine he said, "Now, tell me who it is."

"If you want to know," said Yün-ko, "take your hand and feel these lumps on my head."

"Where did you ever get such lumps from?" asked Wu the Elder.

"I'll tell you," said Yün-ko. "Today I took this basket of snow pears and set out to look for the Honorable Hsi-men, in the hope of getting a little something out of him. But I couldn't find him anywhere I looked. Someone on the street told me, 'He's probably in Dame Wang's teashop. He's carrying on an affair with Wu the Elder's wife and hangs around there all the time.'"

"I had hoped that if I ran into him I could pick up thirty or fifty cash to spend, but that intolerable old pig and dog, Dame Wang, not only wouldn't let me into her room to look for him, but drove me out of her place with a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles. So I set out especially to look for you. When I ran into you just now I needed you a few times, deliberately. If I hadn't needed you, you never would have asked anything about it."

"Really," said Wu the Elder.

"Can such things be?"⁵

"There you go again," said Yün-ko. "I was afraid you might be just such a fart of a fuck-off! The two of them are certainly having an easy time of it. All they have to do is wait until you're out of the way and then make out together in Dame Wang's room. And you ask me if it's true or if it's false! Do you think I'm just kidding you for the fun of it?"

When Wu the Elder heard this he said, "Brother, there's no reason for me to deceive you. That woman of mine has been going over to Dame Wang's place every day, allegedly to help her with some sewing of clothes, or shoes and stockings. When she comes home her face is red. My first wife left a daughter behind, and whenever that woman feels like it she:

Beats her in the morning and curses her at night,⁶ or doesn't give her any food to eat. Moreover, the last couple of days she's been acting rather peculiar, as if she wasn't any too happy to see me. In fact, I've been wondering what was wrong myself. What you've told me would explain it. Now then, I'd better leave my load in a safe place and go catch them in the act. What do you say?"

"For a man of your age," said Yün-ko, "you haven't any sense. That old bitch, Dame Wang, is not to be trifled with. If you have a run-in with her you're not likely to escape unscathed. Moreover, the three of them must have a prearranged signal, so if the old lady sees you come in to nab them, your wife will have time to hide. That Hsi-men Ch'ing is a pretty tough customer. He can handle twenty of the likes of you. If you fail to catch them in the act you may end up getting a

good drubbing for your pains. On top of which, he's got both money and influence. If he were to lodge a complaint against you, and you were dragged into court without anyone to take your side, you could easily end up losing your life for nothing."

"Brother," said Wu the Elder, "everything you say is true; but how can I let off this head of steam?"

"I took a beating at Dame Wang's hands," said Yün-ko, "and I too have no place to vent my spleen. Let me suggest a move to you. Today, when you go home, don't kick up a fuss or say anything about it. Just act the same way you do every day. Tomorrow morning, make a smaller number of steamed wheat cakes than usual and come out to sell them. I'll be lying in wait at the mouth of the alley, and when I see Hsi-men Ch'ing go in I'll come and tell you. You can then shoulder your carrying pole and wait nearby while I go in and distract the old bitch, who's sure to pick a fight with me. At that point I'll throw my fruit basket out into the middle of the street as a signal for you to come charging in. I'll pin the old lady against the wall with my head while you dash into the room and raise the hue and cry. How's that for a plan?"

"If it goes as you say, Brother," said Wu the Elder, "I'll be greatly indebted to you. I've got several strings of cash here which I'll give you. Be sure to be there first thing in the morning to wait for me at the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street."

Yün-ko collected his few strings of cash and some steamed wheat cakes and then went his way. Wu the Elder, for his part, paid the bill, shouldered his carrying pole, and made another round before heading for home.

It so happens that the woman, accustomed as she was to railing at Wu the Elder and abusing him in every way, had been sufficiently troubled in recent days by a bad conscience to go out of her way to be nice to him. That evening when Wu the Elder came home, shouldering his carrying pole, he acted just the way he always did and didn't bring anything up.

"Darling," said the woman, "how about a cup of wine?"

"I've just had three cups with another vendor," said Wu the Elder.

The woman then prepared supper and they ate it together. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, after breakfast, Wu the Elder made only two or three trays of steamed wheat cakes and loaded them on his carrying pole. The woman was too preoccupied with Hsi-men Ch'ing to notice how many wheat cakes he made. Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and went out to ply his trade. The woman could hardly wait until he was out the door before slipping over to Dame Wang's teashop to wait for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

To resume our story, Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and headed straight for the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street, where he found Yün-ko already on the lookout, with his fruit basket in hand.

"Has anything happened?" asked Wu the Elder.

"It's early yet," said Yün-ko. "You might as well make one of your regular rounds. By the time you're through that bastard will probably have shown up. You just wait nearby, don't go too far away."

Like a cloud scudding before the wind, Wu the Elder completed one of his regular rounds and came back again.

"You just watch for my fruit basket," said Yün-ko. "When it comes flying out, you go charging in."

Wu the Elder stowed his load in a safe place. But no more of this.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Tigers deploy the revenants of their prey,⁷
birds are snared with decoys;
Victims remain in the dark until the trap is sprung,
while predators do as they please.
Yün-ko exposes Hsi-men Ch'ing's crime
for all to see;⁸
But Dame Wang's handling of the affair
is remarkable indeed.

To resume our story, Yün-ko picked up his basket and headed straight for the teashop, where he opened fire on Dame Wang with the words, "You old pig and dog! Just who did you think you were hitting yesterday?"

The old lady's character remained unaltered. Jumping to her feet, she shouted at him, "You little monkey! I've never had anything to do with you. What are you coming around here to abuse me again for?"

"If I curse you," replied Yün-ko, "for being a procuress and a pandering old bitch, it matters about as much as my prick!"

The old lady was enraged and, grabbing hold of Yün-ko, started to beat him with her fists.

With the shout, "You dare to strike me, do you!" Yün-ko threw the fruit basket in his hand out into the middle of the street.

The old lady tried to get a firmer grip on him, but the little monkey, with another cry of "You dare to strike me, do you!" put both arms around Dame Wang's waist, buried his head in the pit of her stomach, and pushed for all he was worth. He nearly knocked her over, but she backed into the wall, which prevented her from falling down. The monkey held her pinned against the wall with all his strength.

At this point Wu the Elder lifted up his clothes and came charging into the teashop in giant strides. When the old lady saw who it was and realized that he meant business, she tried to block his path, but the little monkey continued to hold her pinned against the wall with all his strength and wouldn't let her budge. All the old woman could do was to yell out, "Wu the Elder has come!"

Inside Dame Wang's room the woman, who was already entwined with Hsi-men Ch'ing, was barely able to extricate herself fast enough to rush to the door and hold it fast. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, proceeded to dive under the bed.

Wu the Elder charged up to the door and gave it a shove, but he was unable to push it open and could only call out,

"That's a fine thing you're up to!"

The woman was in a state of panic. Continuing to hold the door shut she said, "You're always shooting off your fucking mouth, boasting about how good you are at the martial arts, but when it comes to the crunch you're no use at all! Even a paper tiger can scare you to death!"

The woman's words were clearly intended to get Hsi-men Ch'ing to confront Wu the Elder and fight his way out of the predicament. Hsi-men Ch'ing was still under the bed, but when he heard these words they had the effect of stimulating him to action.

Crawling out from his hiding place he said, "Lady, it's not that I don't have what it takes. It's just that, for the moment, I couldn't think what to do." Then, unbarring the door, he called out, "Come in, if you dare!"



Wu the Elder made a grab at him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing countered with a swift kick, and his assailant was so short that Hsi-men Ch'ing caught him squarely in the solar plexus with his foot and knocked him flat on his back.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Wu the Elder was down and out he took advantage of the confusion to beat a hasty retreat. Yün-ko also, seeing that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, abandoned Dame Wang and took to his heels. The neighbors in the area all knew that Hsi-men Ch'ing was a tough customer, and none of them wanted to interfere in the matter.

At this point Dame Wang attempted to get Wu the Elder back on his feet. When she saw that he was spitting blood and that his face had turned as sallow as wax, she called the woman out to fetch a bowl of water, with the help of which they succeeded in reviving him. Putting his arms over their shoulders, the two of them managed to help him through the back door and up to the second story room of his own house, where they put him to bed. Of the events of that night there is nothing more to tell.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing found out that nothing had come of the incident, he showed up at Dame Wang's place to keep his tryst with the woman as usual. Their only hope was that Wu the Elder would die.

The injuries he had sustained were serious enough to keep him from getting up or going out for five days. On top of which:

When he wanted soup, there was none to be had;

When he wanted water, there was none to be had.⁹

Every day he called on his wife for help, but she refused to respond. He had to lie there and watch as she dolled herself up before going out, and when she returned her face was red.

The woman even prohibited his daughter, Ying-erh, from coming to his aid, threatening her with the words, "You little wretch! If you give him so much as a cup of water to drink without telling me, you'd better look out."

Ying-erh was so intimidated by this that she didn't dare serve her father a mouthful of soup. On several occasions Wu the Elder fainted away from sheer indignation, but there was no one to pay any attention.

One day Wu the Elder told his wife he had something important to say to her and addressed her as follows: "As for what you've been up to, I caught you red-handed in the act of adultery, and you turned around and egged your lover into kicking me in the solar plexus, so that now:

Though I seek to live, I cannot live;

Though I seek to die, I cannot die,¹⁰

while all the time the two of you are off enjoying yourselves together. If I die it scarcely matters. I don't have the strength to contend with you any longer. But my younger brother, Wu the Second—you know what sort of a person he is—when he returns—as he will, sooner or later—he'll scarcely be willing to call it quits. If you consent to take pity on me, and help me to recover as soon as possible, when he comes back I won't say anything about it. But if you refuse to look after me, when he comes home he'll have something to say to you."

When the woman heard this speech she made no reply but slipped over to Dame Wang's place and repeated it, word for word, to the old woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard what she had to say it was:

Just as though he had been dunked in a

tub of ice water.¹¹

"That's bad!" he said. "I understand that Captain Wu who killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge is the number one stout fellow in Ch'ing-ho district. But right now:

Having been lovers for many a day;

Our feelings and thoughts are one,

We can never agree to be separated.¹²

If what you say is true, what are we to do? It's a bad situation all right!"

Dame Wang laughed sardonically and said, "I've never seen anything like it. You're the helmsman and I'm merely a sculler, but I'm not worried about it while you're in a state of panic."

"I may be a man," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but for all that, when it comes to situations like this, I don't know what to do. If you've got any ideas, please do whatever you can to protect us."

"If you want me to protect you," said Dame Wang, "I've got a plan that should do the trick. Do you want to be 'long-term man and wife' or 'short-term man and wife'?"

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what do you mean by 'long-term man and wife' and 'short-term man and wife'?"

"If you want to be 'short-term man and wife,' " said Dame Wang, "you should separate from each other this very day, wait until Wu the Elder has recovered, and offer him an apology. Then, when Wu the Second comes back, he won't say anything about it, and you can wait until he's sent away on another mission to get together again. That's what I mean by 'short term man and wife.' But if you want to be 'long-term man and wife,' to spend every day together without having to:

Anticipate surprise and suffer fear,¹³

I've got a splendid plan for you. The only thing is it's not an easy subject to broach."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "please help us out. The only thing we want is to be 'long-term man and wife.' "

"This plan," said Dame Wang, "requires something that no one else has got, but which you, sir:

As Heaven begets so Heaven disposes,¹⁴

happen to possess."

"Even if it were my eyes you wanted," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'd gouge them out and give them to you. What is this

thing anyway?"

"Right now," said Dame Wang, "this 'knockabout'¹⁵ is in pretty bad shape. This presents you with the opportunity to take action against him while he's incapacitated. You, sir, should go home and pick up some arsenic from your pharmaceutical shop and then get the young lady to buy a dose of heart medicine, mix the arsenic in with it, and polish off this runt once and for all. If you cremate the body afterward you'll have gotten him completely out of the way, without leaving a trace behind. Then, even if Wu the Second comes back, what will he be able to do about it? It's always been the case that:

In one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;

In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.¹⁶

Your brother-in-law will have nothing to say in the matter. You can continue to see each other clandestinely, and after half a year or a year the dust will have settled. Then, as soon as the mourning period for your husband expires, the gentleman can pop you into a sedan chair and take you into his household as a concubine. Then you can be 'long-term man and wife' and:

Live happily ever after.

How's that for a plan?"

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this plan is splendid indeed. It's always been true that:

If one wants to be able to enjoy life,

One has to be prepared to risk death.¹⁷

Enough! Enough! Enough! One must either:

Refuse to do something;

Or not stop at anything."¹⁸

"That's the spirit," said Dame Wang. "This is a situation in which:

One must cut the weeds and pull up the roots,

So that new sprouts will not grow;

If one cuts the weeds without pulling up the roots,

When spring comes new sprouts will grow."¹⁹

The only problem remaining is how to proceed. You, sir, should go straight home and bring this ingredient as quickly as possible. I'll instruct the young lady on what she is to do. When the affair is accomplished I expect to be amply rewarded."

"Naturally," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that goes without saying."

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Obsessed with thoughts of clouds and rain,
the two of them are inseparable;
Yearning for beauty, hankering after flowers,
he will not call it quits.
In the final analysis, in this world
such things do happen;
Wu the Elder will lose his life
at the hands of a painted face.²⁰

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had not been gone for long when he returned with a packet of arsenic, which he handed over to Dame Wang, who put it away.

Turning her attention to the woman, she said, "Young lady, I'll tell you how to administer the medicine. Didn't Wu the Elder say to you, this very day, that he wanted you to help him recover? You must take advantage of this opening by playing up to him with every trick at your disposal. If he asks you for any medication, mix this arsenic in with some heart medicine before administering it to him. If he realizes that something is wrong and starts to struggle, just pour the rest of it down his throat before you jump off the bed. When the poison starts to take effect his stomach and intestines will burst and he may cry out. You must muffle his cries with a quilt so no one will hear, holding the quilt in place as tightly as you can. You must also heat a pan of hot water beforehand and put a rag to soak in it. When the poison takes effect there may be hemorrhaging from all his seven apertures as well as telltale marks where he has bitten his lips. After he stops breathing you must remove the quilt, take the rag that you have soaked in hot water, and wipe away any signs of blood. Then he can be popped into a coffin, carted out of town, and cremated. There's nothing to it."

"That's all very fine," said the woman, "but I'm afraid, when the time comes, I may lose my nerve and be unable to handle the corpse."

"That's no problem," said the old lady. "Just knock on the wall and I'll come over to help you."

"Do the best you can," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow morning at the fifth watch I'll come by to see what's happened." Having said which, he made his way home.

Dame Wang took the arsenic and rolled it between her fingers into a fine powder, after which she gave it to the woman to take home and hide away in a safe place. The woman went upstairs to see how Wu the Elder was and found him:

With barely two breaths left in his body,²¹
manifestly on the brink of death. The woman sat down on the side of the bed and pretended to weep.

"What are you weeping about?" asked Wu the Elder.

The woman wiped away her tears and said, "In a moment of weakness I let that Hsi-men Ch'ing take advantage of me, but I never expected he would end up kicking you in the solar plexus. I've heard of a place that has good prescriptions for sale, and I'd like to go buy one for you, but I'm afraid you might be suspicious, so I haven't ventured to go and get it."

"If you help me to recover," said Wu the Elder, "so I'm all right again, I'll:

Wipe the slate clean with a single stroke,²²

and won't even hold a grudge against you. When Wu the Second comes back I won't say anything about it. Please go buy the medicine as quickly as possible and help me to recover."

The woman picked up some copper cash and went directly to Dame Wang's place, where she sat down and got the old lady to buy the medicine for her.

Then she took it back upstairs and showed it to Wu the Elder, saying, "This is a dose of heart medicine. The doctor said if you take it late in the evening and then get a good night's sleep, with a couple of quilts over you to make you sweat, you can be up and about tomorrow."

"That's wonderful," said Wu the Elder. "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble. If you're willing to sacrifice a little sleep tonight, you can stay up and fix it for me when the time comes."

"Just relax and try to get some sleep," said the woman. "I'll take care of everything for you."

Gradually darkness began to fall. In the house the woman lit a lamp and heated a large pan of hot water, into which she put a rag to soak. She listened for the sound of the drum that signaled the night watches and eventually heard the third watch struck. First the woman poured the arsenic into a cup and then she scooped up a bowl of boiling water and took them upstairs.

"Darling, where did you put the medicine?" she called out.

"It's under the bed mat, beside my pillow," said Wu the Elder. "Hurry up and fix it for me."

The woman lifted up the mat, shook the medicine into the cup, and set the packet aside. Then she poured the hot water into the cup and, pulling a silver hairpin out of her hair, used it to stir the contents until it was all dissolved. With her left hand she helped Wu the Elder sit up in bed while with her right hand she held the medicine to his mouth.

Wu the Elder swallowed a mouthful and said, "Darling, this medicine really tastes awful."

"As long as it cures what ails you," the woman said, "what difference does it make whether it tastes awful or not?"

While Wu the Elder was swallowing his second mouthful the woman took advantage of the situation to pour the entire contents of the cup down his throat in one gulp. Then she laid him back down and hastily jumped off the bed.

Wu the Elder gave a groan and said, "Darling, no sooner did I swallow the medicine than my stomach began to hurt. It's bad! It's bad! It's more than I can take."

The woman then proceeded to take two quilts from the foot of the bed and put them hugger-mugger over his head and face.

"I'm suffocating," called out Wu the Elder as loudly as he could.

"The doctor told me," the woman responded, "that if I really made you sweat you'd get better that much faster."

Wu the Elder tried to say something more, but the woman was afraid he might put up a struggle so she jumped onto the bed, sat astride Wu the Elder's body,²³ and pressed down on the edge of the quilt with all her might, not letting up to the slightest degree. Truly:

Hot grease sears his chest and lungs;
Flames scorch his liver and intestines.
His heart cavity is encroached upon
by gleaming blades;

His entrails are rudely invaded
by steely knives.
His whole body feels as cold as ice;
His seven apertures all begin to hemorrhage.
His teeth are tightly clenched;
His three ethereal souls flee to the
City of the Unjustly Dead.
His throat is dry and parched;
His seven material souls head for the
Terrace of Homeward Gazing Spirits.²⁴
The legions of Hell are further augmented
by one poison-eating ghost;
The world of the living is diminished
by one adulterer-seizing man.²⁵

At this point Wu the Elder groaned twice and panted for a little while. Then his stomach and intestines burst and:

Alas and alack,
he was no longer able to move.

When the woman removed the quilt and saw that Wu the Elder had been:

Grinding and gnashing his teeth,²⁶
and that he had hemorrhaged from all seven apertures, she was afraid. It was all she could do to jump off the bed and knock on the wall. When Dame Wang heard the knock she came over to the back door and gave a cough, at which the woman came downstairs to let her in.

“Is it all over or not?” asked Dame Wang.

“It’s all over all right,” said the woman, “but I’ve lost my nerve and can’t handle it.”

“What’s so hard about it?” said Dame Wang. “I’ll help you take care of everything.”

The old lady rolled up her sleeves, scooped up a bucketful of hot water, threw the rag into it, and lugged it upstairs. Then she rolled up the quilts, wiped away all traces of coagulated blood from around Wu the Elder’s lips and seven apertures, and placed his clothes on top of the body. The two of them then carried him downstairs, one step at a time, and laid him out on the leaf of an old door. Once there, they combed his hair, placed a turban on his head, dressed him, and put on his shoes and stockings. Then they stretched a strip of white damask over his face and covered the corpse with a clean quilt. After they had gone back upstairs and cleaned everything up, Dame Wang went home and the woman commenced the charade of loudly bewailing the loss of her provider.



The Hussy Administers Poison to Wu the Elder

Gentle reader take note: It so happens that, generally speaking, the women of this world have three ways of weeping. If there are tears as well as sound, it is called weeping. If there are tears but no sound, it is called sobbing. If there are no tears but there is sound, it is called howling.²⁷

The woman howled, without shedding a tear, for the remainder of the night.

The next morning at the fifth watch, before it was light, Hsi-men Ch'ing hurried over to find out what had happened. When Dame Wang had told him all the details he pulled out some silver and gave it to her to cover the cost of a coffin and the other funeral arrangements. Then they called the woman over for a conference.

When the woman arrived she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Now that Wu the Elder is dead I'm completely dependent on

you, sir. Don't put me in the position of:

The rings that hold your hairnet in place: always
at the back of your head."²⁸

"What need is there for you to trouble yourself about that?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"And if you should betray me," the woman asked, "what then?"

"If I ever betray you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I suffer the same fate as your Wu the Elder."

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "that's enough idle chatter for the time being. Right now there's only one thing that's important. Later this morning the local constable must supervise the encoffining ceremony, and if the coroner's assistant notices anything suspicious, what will we do then? The head coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth, doesn't miss a trick. My only fear is that he may not permit the encoffining."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "I'll simply tell Ho the Ninth what to do. He wouldn't dare refuse a request from me."

"You'd better go speak to him immediately," said Dame Wang, "before it's too late."

Having turned the silver over to Dame Wang to buy the coffin, Hsi-men Ch'ing then went off to deal with Ho the Ninth. Truly:

The three luminaries cast shadows, but
who can catch them;
The ten thousand things have no roots, they
just arise of themselves.²⁹
Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets
is not seen until they fly;
Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots
is not known until they speak.³⁰

If you don't know what Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Ho
the Ninth, and
If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

HSI-MEN CH'ING SUBORNS HO THE NINTH; DAME WANG FETCHES WINE AND ENCOUNTERS A DOWNPOUR

How reprehensible is the wanton fellow, enamored
of the flowers by the wayside;
It is because of his insatiable lust that he
brings troubles on his head.
His body will perish and his life be lost
solely on this account;
His property will be destroyed and his family ruined
for this reason alone.
Romantic passion lasts but a moment; what value
does it have?
Its taste is quite ordinary; it is
nothing to boast about.
One day "catastrophe will arise within the
screen-wall of the house";¹
And it will owe its inception to the
machinations of Dame Wang.²

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to deal with Ho the Ninth.

To resume our story, Dame Wang took the silver and set out to buy a coffin and appropriate objects to bury with the dead. She also bought incense, candles, paper money, and so forth. After she had returned she consulted with the woman, and they lighted a vigil lamp and placed it before Wu the Elder's spirit tablet.

The neighbors from the locality all came to see what was going on, and the woman pretended to hide her painted face as she shed crocodile tears.

"What illness did Wu the Elder die of?" the neighbors asked.

"My husband suffered from severe pains in the region of the heart," the woman replied. "Who could have anticipated that they would grow worse and worse as the days went by, until it became apparent that he was unlikely to recover? Unfortunately last night, during the third watch, he died. It's really terrible!" And she commenced once more the charade of loud weeping and wailing.

The neighbors were perfectly well aware that the deceased had died under suspicious circumstances, but they did not venture to inquire into them any too closely. They all attempted to comfort her with the words, "The dead are dead. The living must get on as best they can. Try to control your grief, young lady. The weather's too hot for it."

The woman had no choice but to pretend to thank them all, and they went their separate ways.

When Dame Wang had supervised the delivery of the coffin she went out again to request the attendance of the head coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth, and to buy everything that was required for the encoffining ceremony and other household needs. Then she went to the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, and engaged two Ch'an monks to come that evening to keep vigil and perform a mass for the dead. It was not long before Ho the Ninth sent a couple of coroner's assistants ahead of him to take care of the preliminaries.

To resume our story, at about 10:00 A.M. Ho the Ninth himself set forth at a leisurely pace. When he arrived at the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street he encountered Hsi-men Ch'ing, who called out to him, "Ho the Ninth, where are you headed?"

"I'm just going down the street here," replied Ho the Ninth, "to encoffin the corpse of Wu the Elder, who sold steamed wheat cakes."

"Walk a few steps with me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got something to say to you."

Ho the Ninth followed Hsi-men Ch'ing into a small wineshop on the corner, where they occupied a private booth.

"Old Ninth, please take the seat of honor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Who am I," said Ho the Ninth, "to presume to sit down in your presence, sir?"

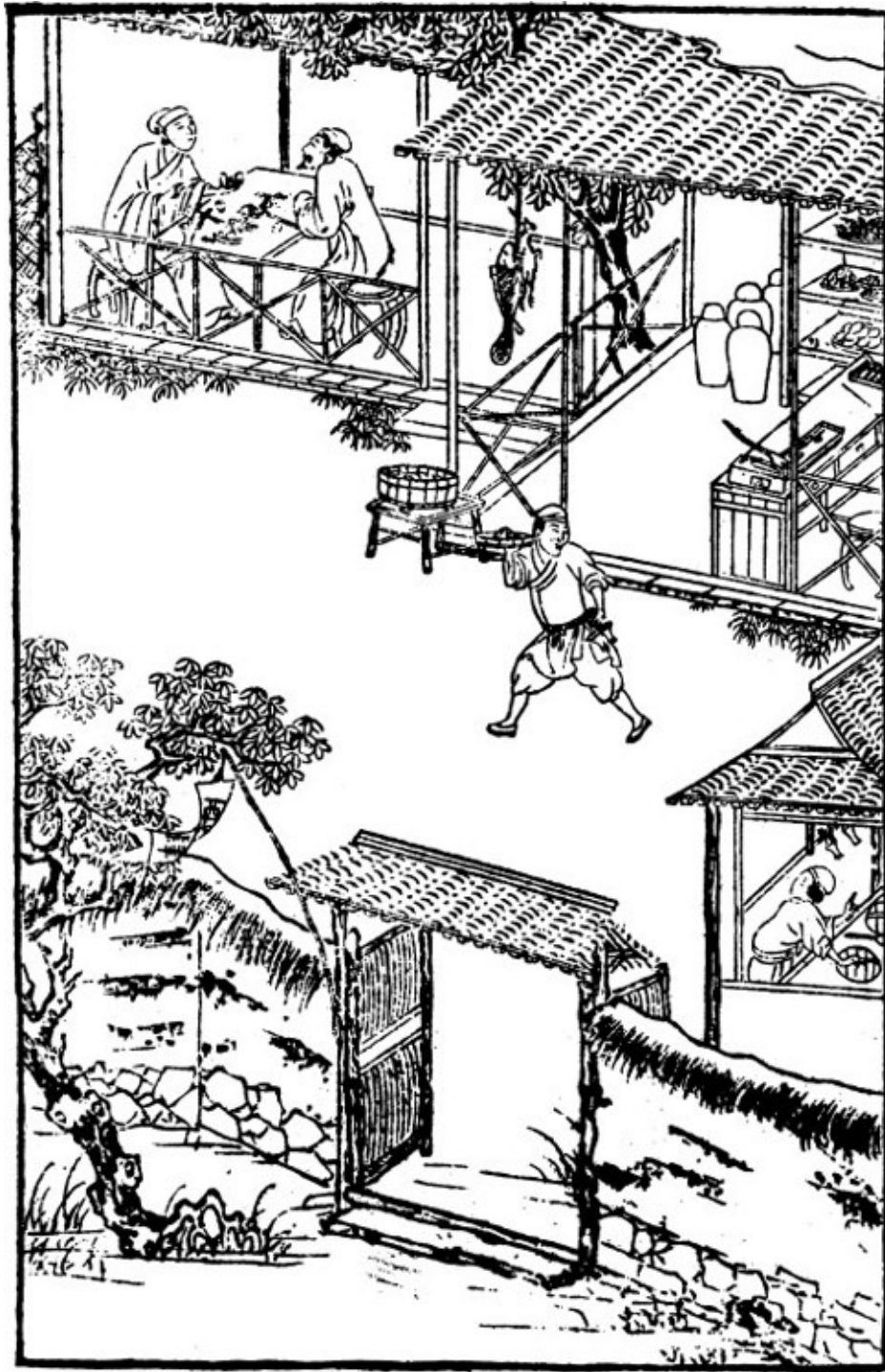
"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why be so standoffish? Please, have a seat."

The two of them dickered politely for a while and then sat down. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the waiter to bring a bottle of their best wine. The waiter set out an array of appetizers, nuts, and so forth, suitable to accompany a drinking party, and then heated the wine for them.

Ho the Ninth was somewhat apprehensive. "Hsi-men Ch'ing has never bothered to have a drink with me before," he thought to himself. "This cup of wine today is sure to have something funny behind it."

The two of them had been drinking together for some time when, lo and behold, Hsi-men Ch'ing fumbled in his sleeve, pulled out an ingot of "snowflake" silver, and placed it in front of him, saying, "Old Ninth, please don't despise this, insignificant though it may be. I'll give you a further expression of my gratitude another day."

Ho the Ninth folded his hands in front of him and said, "Having never done the slightest thing to deserve it, sir, how could I possibly accept this silver from you? But if you have a command, sir, I could scarcely presume to refuse."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Suborns Ho the Ninth

"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't be so standoffish. Please take it."

"Tell me what you have in mind, sir," said Ho the Ninth, "no matter what it is."

"It isn't anything much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and in a little while the family will also give you something for your pains. The only thing is, right now, when you encoffin Wu the Elder's corpse, I'd be much obliged if you'd take care of everything, and: Draw an embroidered quilt over it,³ that's all. Need I say more?"

"I thought you were going to ask me to do something demanding," said Ho the Ninth. "What does a little thing like that matter? How could I possibly accept your silver for that, sir?"

"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you don't accept it, you'll be refusing me."

Ho the Ninth had always been rather afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing for his unscrupulousness and his influence in official quarters, so he felt that he had no recourse but to accept the proffered silver.

After they had finished another few cups of wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned the waiter and said, "Put it on the tab and come to my shop to collect the money tomorrow."

The two of them then went downstairs and out the door of the wineshop.

As they were on the point of parting Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Old Ninth, be sure to remember. If you keep your mouth shut I'll reward you further on another day."

Having issued his instructions, he then went about his business.

Ho the Ninth was somewhat apprehensive. "It's my responsibility to encoffin Wu the Elder's corpse," he thought to himself. "Why should he give me these ten taels of silver? There's sure to be something funny about this business."

When he arrived at the door of Wu the Elder's house he found the pair of coroner's assistants that he had sent ahead waiting for him there. Dame Wang had also been waiting for a long time and had been questioning them about his whereabouts.

Ho the Ninth asked the coroner's assistants, "What illness did Wu the Elder die of?"

"His family says he died of heart trouble," said the coroner's assistants.

Ho the Ninth approached the door, pulled the hanging blind aside, and went inside.

Dame Wang greeted him with the words, "We've been waiting for you a long time. The Yin-yang Master's already been here half the day. Old Ninth, what's been keeping you so long?"

"Something came up that prevented me from getting here any sooner," said Ho the Ninth. "I'm afraid I'm a little late."

At this point he caught sight of the woman who came out from the interior of the house dressed in plain white clothes, with a white paper cap over her chignon, feigning tears.

"Try to control your grief, young lady," said Ho the Ninth. "Your husband is surely in Heaven by now."

The woman pretended to wipe away her tears, saying, "I can't tell you how terrible it is. My husband was stricken with heart trouble and in only a few days lost his life, just like that. It's really terrible to be so bereaved."

Ho the Ninth looked the woman over from top to toe and thought to himself, "Hitherto I've only heard tell of Wu the Elder's wife without ever having set eyes on her myself. So this is the sort of woman Wu the Elder managed to keep in his house. Hsi-men Ch'ing's ten taels of silver have not been spent for nothing."

Then he went over by the spirit tablet and prepared to examine Wu the Elder's corpse. As soon as the Yin-yang Master had finished reciting his text, Ho the Ninth lifted aside the funeral banderole and removed the strip of white damask that had been stretched over the face of the deceased. No sooner did he concentrate the gaze of those vigilant organs of his, with their: Five concentric rings,

Eight precious attributes, and

Two spots of magic liquid,⁴

than he perceived that Wu the Elder's:

Fingernails were black,

Lips were purple,

Face was sallow,

Eyes protruded,⁵

and knew he had been poisoned.

The two coroner's assistants who were standing to either side asked him, "Why is it that his face is purple, there are toothmarks on his lips, and signs of bleeding around his mouth?"

"Don't talk such nonsense!" said Ho the Ninth. "The weather's been extremely hot the last couple of days. A certain amount of deterioration is unavoidable under the circumstances."

He then proceeded, hugger-mugger,⁶ to go through the motions of a formal examination of the corpse, presided over the encoffining, and directed his subordinates to drive the two "longevity nails" into either side of the lid of the casket.

Dame Wang did her best to expedite the proceedings and when they were finished produced a string of cash for Ho the Ninth and his men and sent them on their way.

"When will the interment take place?" he asked.

"The lady of the house," replied Dame Wang, "wants the funeral procession to take place on the third day, after which the body will be cremated outside the city wall."

The coroner's assistants then went their separate ways.

That evening the woman laid on a feast and invited guests. The second day four monks were engaged to recite sutras. Early on the morning of the third day, during the fifth watch, the coroner's assistants came to carry the coffin. There were also a few neighbors from the locality who put on mourning and joined in the funeral procession.

The woman donned her mourning attire, sat in a sedan chair, and all along the way continued the charade of loudly bewailing the loss of her provider. When they arrived at the crematorium outside the city walls a fire was ignited, the coffin, along with Wu the Elder's corpse, was completely incinerated, and his bones were scattered in the pond provided for that purpose.

It so happens that the refreshments provided for the guests at the funeral ceremony that day were all paid for by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When the woman returned home she set up a spirit tablet in the upstairs room on which were inscribed the words "Spirit Tablet of My Deceased Husband, Wu the Elder." In front of the spirit tablet she lit a glass lamp, hung up some

gilded funeral streamers, and made offerings of paper money, imitation gold and silver ingots, and the like.

That day when Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman got together they sent Dame Wang back to her own home. The two of them then went upstairs and enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content. It was no longer the way it had been in Dame Wang's teashop when they had been confined to the furtive pleasures of: Snitching chickens and filching dogs.⁷ Now that Wu the Elder was dead there was no one in the house to hinder them and they were able to: Give free rein to their desires, and

Sleep together all night long.⁸

At the outset Hsi-men Ch'ing had been worried that the neighbors would realize what was going on, so he had always made a point of sitting around in Dame Wang's place for a while to keep up appearances. But now that Wu the Elder was dead he brought his body servant with him and went straight into the woman's house through the back door.

From this time on, he and the woman were inseparable.

Passion pervaded their breasts;

Their mutual love was like glue.⁹

He often stayed over with her for three or five nights in a row without going home. As a result, the members of his household, both high and low, were: All at sevens and eights, and became increasingly unhappy about the situation.

It so happens that the allure of feminine beauty ensnares men in such a way that: Where there is initial success,

There will be ultimate disaster.¹⁰

There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:

With lustful daring as big as the sky they can
no longer control themselves;
Their passions deep, their love fast, the two
are inseparable.¹¹
In their greed for pleasure they no longer care
whether they live or die;
When infatuated who bothers to engage in
self-cultivation?

As affection grows deeper,
The passions cloy;
The greater the love, the more long-lasting
the resentment.
If one wished to dispel the enmity between
the states of Wu and Yüeh;¹²
Earth might age and Heaven waste away
before it could be accomplished.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly;

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

More than two months had now elapsed since Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman first consummated their affair. One day the Dragon Boat Festival, on the fifth day of the fifth month, rolled around. Behold: The swaying branches of the green willows

hang like emerald threads;

The spots of color formed by the pomegranate blossoms
are as red as rouge.

Ever so slightly, the breeze disturbs the curtains;

In whispering gusts, its coolness invades the doors.

Far and near, when the Dragon Boat Festival comes round;

In every house, goblets are raised in celebration.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his way back from a visit to the fair at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak¹³ when he stopped in at Dame Wang's teashop and sat down.

The old woman hastily poured out a cup of tea and asked, "Where are you coming from, sir; and why don't you go over and look in on the young lady?"

"I've been at the temple fair today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "On a festive occasion like this she's very much on my mind, so I thought I'd come pay her a visit."

"Her mother, old Mrs. P'an, is here today," said Dame Wang. "I doubt if she's left yet. I'll run over there for a look and then report back to you, sir."

When the old lady went over to her neighbor's house by way of the back door she found her drinking wine with old Mrs. P'an, just as she had expected.

As soon as the woman saw who it was she hastened to offer her a seat and said, with a smile, "Godmother, you've arrived in the nick of time. Keep my mother company, and: If you drink a cup of wine on entering the door,

You'll bear a bonny baby some day."¹⁴

"I haven't any old man," laughed the old lady, "so how could I produce a baby? But you're young and strong, perfectly fitted to produce one."

To which the woman replied, "As the saying goes:

Young flowers bear no fruit;

It's the old flowers that bear the fruit."

At this, Dame Wang turned to old Mrs. P'an and said, "Just look at the liberties your daughter takes with me. She's

calling me an 'old beggar.'¹⁵ But she'll find a use for this 'old beggar' yet."

"She's been sharp-tongued like that ever since she was a child," said old Mrs. P'an. "You've got to make allowances for her, Godmother."

It so happens that Dame Wang, having brought Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman together, and enabled them to consummate their affair, devoted herself, early and late, to running errands for them, going out with the jug to buy wine, and so forth, and was dependent for her living on what she could make out of these transactions.

So she said to Chin-lien's mother, old Mrs. P'an, "This daughter of yours is just as clever as can be. She's a fine woman, make no mistake about it. I wonder what sort of man will have the luck to possess her in the future?"

"Godmother," said old Mrs. P'an, "since you're a matchmaker we must count entirely on you to bring that matter to a happy conclusion."

In the meantime the woman provided another place setting and poured out a cup of wine for her. Dame Wang drank a few cups with them until her face became bright red, but she was worried about keeping Hsi-men Ch'ing waiting too long, so she took the first opportunity to tip the woman a wink, said goodbye, and went home.

The woman realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come and did her best to expedite her mother's departure. Then she tidied up the room, lit some exotic incense, removed the remains of the repast she had been sharing with her mother, and prepared a brand new supply of wine and delicacies for the entertainment of Hsi-men Ch'ing. When that gentleman appeared on the terrace at the back of the house the woman came down the stairs to meet him, led him upstairs, greeted him with a bow, and offered him a seat.

It so happens that ever since Wu the Elder's death the woman had shown no inclination to wear mourning. She had put her husband's spirit tablet in a corner of the upstairs room and covered it with a sheet of white paper, and she neglected to set any offerings of soup or rice before it. Every day she dolled herself up, put on bright-colored clothing, made herself as attractive as possible, and enjoyed herself with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had not visited her for the last two days, so the woman started out by giving him a hard time. "You unfaithful scoundrel! What do you mean by abandoning me like that? You must have found another sweetheart somewhere to think you can just leave me in the cold and neglect to pay any further attention to me."

"One of my concubines died the other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I've been busy with the funeral arrangements for the last two days. Today I went to the temple fair and bought some hair ornaments, jewelry, clothes, and the like for you."

The woman was delighted by this. Hsi-men Ch'ing called in his page boy, Tai-an, and then took the gifts out of the felt bag he had been carrying and showed them to her one at a time. Not until he was finished did the woman bow in thanks and put them away.

The woman had beaten her stepdaughter, Ying-erh, into such a state of terrified submission that she no longer felt it necessary to conceal anything from her and actually ordered her to serve tea to Hsi-men Ch'ing. The woman herself set the table in order to keep him company while he drank his tea.

"There's no need for you to bother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already given the money to Godmother to go out and buy wine, meat, appetizers, nuts, and so forth. On a festive occasion like this I wanted to spend a little time with you."

"This was originally prepared for my mother," said the woman, "but I saved enough of it to make a complete meal. If we wait until Godmother gets back it may be quite a while. Why don't we go ahead and start?"

The woman sat down next to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Cheek to cheek,

Thigh to thigh, and

Shoulder to shoulder,

and they began to drink wine together.

To resume our story, Dame Wang had picked up a basket, taken along an eighteen-ounce steelyard, and gone out into the street to buy wine and meat.

It happened, at that time, to be early in the fifth month, when heavy rains were a frequent occurrence. Though the red sun might appear to dominate the sky, a thunderhead might appear at any moment and release a downpour like an overturned basin. Behold: Black clouds arise on all sides;

Dark fog immures the far heavens.

With a rushing sound,

It flies along, filling the heavens and

blocking out the sun;

With pattering drops,

It beats a tattoo, as it strikes against

the leaves of the plantain.

Assailed by a wild wind,

Skyscraping old cypresses
are overturned;
Battered by thunderclaps,
The peaks of Mounts T'ai, Hua, Sung, and Ch'iao
are shaken.
It quenches the flames and dispels the heat;
It moistens and nurtures the sprouts in the fields.
It quenches the flames and dispels the heat,
So that beauties are prone to appreciate it.
It moistens and nurtures the sprouts in the fields,
So that travelers are willing to forget the mud.

Truly:

The waters of the Yangtze, Huai, Yellow, and Chi rivers
are newly augmented;
The emerald bamboo and the red pomegranate blossoms
are rendered pristine.¹⁶

The old lady had picked up a bottle of wine, bought a basketful of fish, meat, chicken, goose, vegetables, fruit, nuts, and the like, and was returning along the street when she encountered this downpour. She ducked under the eaves of a house as quickly as she could and wrapped a kerchief around her head, but her clothes were completely soaked. She waited a while, until the rain let up a bit, and then raced for home like a cloud scudding before the wind.

Once inside the door, she put the provisions in the kitchen and then went upstairs, where she found the woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing drinking wine together.

"While you and the young lady have been living it up, sir," she said with an ingratiating smile, "just look at what's happened to my clothes. They're completely soaked. I'll have to ask you to replace them for me, sir."

"Just look at the old lady," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Did you ever see such an inveterate scrounger?"



Dame Wang Fetches Wine and Encounters a Downpour

"I'm no inveterate scrounger," said the old lady, "but at the very least, sir, you'll have to provide me with a bolt of aquamarine material."

"Godmother," said the woman, "what you need is some hot wine."

The old lady drank three cups with them and then said, "I'm going down to the kitchen to dry out my clothes."

After she had suited her actions to her words she cut up the chicken and goose, prepared the appetizers, put the fruit and nuts and so forth onto plates and saucers, and set them out in the upstairs room, together with some newly heated wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman:

Poured out some more of the superior wine,
Shared with each other the rare repast, and
Fell to exchanging cups, thigh over thigh.

As he was drinking Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that there was a *p'i-p'a*, or balloon guitar, hanging on the wall, and said, "I've heard for some time what a fine musician you are. Today, whatever happens, you'll have to entertain me with a song while I drink my wine."

"I only picked up a few lines when I started to study music as a child," laughed the woman. "I'm really not very good. You mustn't laugh at me, sir."

Hsi-men Ch'ing took the *p'i-p'a* down from the wall, lifted the woman onto his lap, and watched her as she placed the instrument on her knees: Deftly extended her slender fingers,

Gently manipulated the icy strings,
and played a languid accompaniment as she sang a song to the tune "Liang-t'ou nan": Without her headdress, too indolent

to perform her toilet,
Her clouds of black silk coiled in a chignon
and gleaming over her temples,
She fastens them in place with a slanting
gold hairpin.
She calls out, "Maid servant,
Open the clothes chest for me,
So I can put on an outfit of plain white silk."
So attired, she rivals Hsi-shih herself
in loveliness.
Emerging from her boudoir,
She calls out, "Maid servant,
Roll up the blind for me,
So I can burn a stick of evening incense."¹⁷

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was so delighted he scarcely knew what to do with himself.

Putting an arm around her powdered neck, he gave her a kiss as he praised her performance, saying, "Darling, whoever would have thought you were as smart as all that? Not one of the singing girls I've known in the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter can play or sing as well as you do."

"After all you've done for me," laughed the woman, "I'm content, for the present, to be: Obedient to your every whim. Just be sure you don't forget me in the future."

Hsi-men Ch'ing pinched her cheeks and said, "How could I ever forget you, darling?"

The two of them were:

Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,¹⁸
Laughing and joking at each other's expense.

After a while Hsi-men Ch'ing took off one of her embroidered shoes, held it in his hand while he put a little cup of wine in it, and then drank a "shoe cup"¹⁹ for the fun of it.

"My feet aren't as small as all that," said the woman. "Don't make fun of me, sir."

It wasn't long before the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, whereupon they closed the door of the room, took off their clothes, got into bed, and began to play with each other.

Dame Wang put the crossbar on the front door and joined Ying-erh in the kitchen, where they made short work of the leftovers.

The two lovers in the upstairs room:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,²⁰
As inseparable as fish from water,²¹

as they gave themselves over completely to pleasure. The woman's mastery of the arts of the bedchamber was equal to that of any prostitute, and she pulled out all the stops in her endeavors to please her partner. Hsi-men Ch'ing, too, was on his mettle and eager to: Display his spearsmanship,²² to best advantage.

A woman of beauty and a man of talent,
Both of them were in the prime of life.

There is a poem that describes the picture they presented:

In the seclusion of the nuptial chamber
the pillow and mat are cool;
The man of talent and woman of beauty
approach the climax of their game.
No sooner have they embarked on "dipping the red candle upside down";²³
Than they suddenly switch to "punting
the boat by night."²⁴
Rifling its fragrance, "the butterfly nibbles at
the calyx of the flower";²⁵
Sporting with the water, "the dragonfly
darts, now high, now low."
When pleasure reaches its height passions are
intense, and feelings know no bounds;
As the mouth of the "divine turtle"
disgorges its "silvery stream."²⁶

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing dallied in the woman's house until evening fell. As he was about to go home he left behind a

few pieces of loose silver²⁷ to take care of her expenses. The woman did her best to keep him a while longer, but to no avail. Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his eye shades, walked out the door, and departed. After the woman had taken down the blind, closed the front door, and drunk a little more wine with Dame Wang, they went their separate ways. Truly: Linger at the door she saw young Master Liu

upon his way;

Amid the misty waters and the peach blossoms he was
soon lost to sight.²⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 7

AUNTIE HSÜEH PROPOSES A MATCH WITH MENG YÜ-LOU; AUNT YANG ANGRILY CURSES CHANG THE FOURTH

I play the role of matchmaker and am really
rather good at it;
Entirely owing to the assiduity with which
I ply my two legs.¹
My lethal lips are practiced at persuading
widowers to remarry;
My trenchant tongue is capable of stirring
the chaste widow's heart.
Lucky ribbons of festive red constantly
adorn my head;
Party favors from wedding feasts are always
present in my sleeves.
There is only one thing wrong
with what I do;
Half my clients are helped but
the other half are ruined.

THE STORY GOES that one day the same Auntie Hsüeh who was constantly to be seen around Hsi-men Ch'ing's household peddling costume jewelry set out with her box of trinkets and looked everywhere for Hsi-men Ch'ing but was unable to find him. Chancing to meet his page boy, Tai-an, she asked, "Where is your master?"

"Father's in the shop," replied Tai-an, "going over the accounts with Uncle Fu the Second."

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing's family were the proprietors of a wholesale pharmaceutical business, the hired manager of which was named Fu Ming. His courtesy name was Tzu-hsin, and he was the second sibling in his generation of the family, which is why he was referred to as Uncle Fu the Second.

Auntie Hsüeh went straight to the door of the shop, pulled the hanging blind aside, and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was indeed inside, going over the accounts with his manager. She nodded to him and motioned for him to come outside. On seeing that it was Auntie Hsüeh, Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately abandoned his manager and came out to meet her, the two of them walking to a secluded spot where they could talk in private.

Auntie Hsüeh bowed to him with a word of greeting, and Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her what she had to say.

"I've come about a match that I'd like to propose to you, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I guarantee she'll tickle your fancy, and she can take the place left by the death of your Third Lady. I've just been in the First Lady's quarters. She bought some of my trinkets and detained me for a cup of tea. I was there for an age, but I didn't dare bring up this subject. I thought it would be better if I found you first and broached it directly to you."

"The young lady in question is someone you probably already know about, sir. She's the legitimate widow of the owner of the Yang family's textile business outside the South Gate, and she's got a tidy sum of money at her disposal. She owns two Nanking beds, with retractable steps; four or five trunks full of clothing for all four seasons, figured gowns and so forth, packed so tightly you can't stick your hand into them; and pearl headbands and earrings, gold jewelry set with precious stones, and gold and silver bracelets and bangles, it goes without saying. In ready cash alone, she has more than a thousand taels of silver at her disposal. And she has two or three hundred bales of fine cotton drill² as well.

"Unfortunately, her husband died far away from home while he was out on the road selling textiles. She has been observing mourning for him for over a year now. She doesn't have any children of her own to worry about, only a young brother-in-law, who's just nine years old. There wouldn't be any point in maintaining her widowhood just for him. Her husband's paternal aunt is trying to persuade her to remarry."

"This year the young lady's no more than twenty-four or twenty-five. She's tall of stature and good-looking; in fact, when she's properly done up, she's as pretty as a figure on a decorative lantern. She's romantic and quick-witted, just as clever as can be, and as for the ability to take charge of a household, needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, backgammon and elephant chess, and so forth, that goes without saying. There's no reason for me to deceive you, sir. Her maiden name is Meng, she's the third sibling in her generation, and she lives on Stinkwater Lane. Also, she's an expert performer on the moon guitar. If you consent to see her, sir, I guarantee you'll:

Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow.³

How could anyone be as lucky as you, sir, to get all that dowry and a young lady to boot?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the woman could play the moon guitar it struck a responsive note in his heart, so he asked Auntie Hsüeh, "How soon can I arrange to have a look at her?"

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh, "having a look at her is not the first order of business. Right now the senior member of the Yang family is her husband's paternal aunt. There's also a maternal uncle of her husband, named Chang the Fourth, but since he's on the distaff side, he's:

Like the meat of the hickory nut: there's
always a husk in between.⁴

This old lady was originally married to Crooked-head Sun and lives in a house belonging to Eunuch Director Hsü on

Halfside Street in the northern quarter of the city. Since Crooked-head died, the old lady has maintained her widowhood for thirty or forty years. She doesn't have any children of either sex and depends on her nieces and nephews for support.

"It's too late to do anything about it today, but tomorrow I'll come meet you, sir, and we'll go dump the whole proposition in her lap.

If you appeal for help, appeal to Chang Liang;

If you appoint a general, appoint Han Hsin.⁵

"The only thing this old lady cares about is money. She knows perfectly well that her nephew's widow is well provided for. She doesn't really care whom she marries as long as she can make a few taels of silver out of it. Promise her a little extra silver, sir, and throw in a bolt of that thin satin you have so much of at home. Then, if you go talk it over with her in person, and present her with a bearer's load of appropriate gifts, you'll:

Knock her over with one blow.⁶

If anyone else raises any objections, as long as you've got this old lady behind you, there isn't much they'll dare do about it."

This single conversation with Auntie Hsüeh had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that:

Joy manifested itself about his temples

and between his brows;

Delight spread itself across his cheeks

and smiling face.⁷

Gentle reader take note: The matchmakers of this world are not really interested in anything but making money for themselves. What do they care whether their clients end up dead or alive? They will describe a marriage prospect who holds no office as an officeholder, and a position as concubine as though it were a position as legitimate wife. They are such inveterate liars they would attempt to deceive Heaven itself, and there is no truth whatever to be found in their asseverations. Truly:

Though the matchmaker did her utmost
to promote the union;
Meng Yü-lou had already decided
to marry a rich man.
Those with affinities will meet though
separated by a thousand li;
Those without affinities will miss each other
though face to face.⁸

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed with Auntie Hsüeh that the next day would be a good time to buy some presents and go to the northern quarter of the city to pay a visit to Aunt Yang. When Auntie Hsüeh finished her spiel she picked up her box of trinkets and departed. Hsi-men Ch'ing went back into the shop and continued to go over the accounts with Manager Fu. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing rose early and dressed himself to befit the occasion. Then he picked out a bolt of material, bought four trays of preserved fruit, and hired a bearer to carry them. Hsi-men Ch'ing rode on horseback, accompanied by his page boy, and Auntie Hsüeh led the way straight to the door of Aunt Yang's dwelling in the house belonging to Eunuch Director Hsü on Halfside Street in the northern quarter of the city.

Auntie Hsüeh went in first to alert Aunt Yang to the fact that she had a visitor.

"A man of property from hereabouts," she told her, "is respectfully waiting outside your door. He is interested in discussing a match with the young lady. I told him that you were the senior member of the Yang family and suggested that he should pay you a visit and discuss the matter before I would presume to take him outside the gate to see the lady herself. I brought him along with me today, and he has already dismounted and is waiting outside your door at this very moment."

"Ai-ya!" the old lady exclaimed when she heard this. "Matchmaker, why didn't you let me know ahead of time?"

On the one hand, she ordered her maidservant to sweep the parlor, tidy it up, and brew some good tea, while on the other hand, she said, "Please, invite him to come in."

Auntie Hsüeh lost no time in taking charge of the proceedings. First she had the load of gifts brought in and properly displayed, and it was only after the bearer had been dispatched with his empty containers that she invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to come in.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a large palmetto hat, a long gown fastened at the waist with a sash, and white-soled black boots. When he entered the door and met the old lady he bowed to her four times. Leaning on her staff, the old lady made haste to return his salutation.

Hsi-men Ch'ing would not let her proceed, protesting again and again, "Aunt, please accept my salutation."

The two of them dickered politely for a while until the old lady agreed to accept a half kowtow from him. They then sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host while Auntie Hsüeh took her place to one side.

"What is the gentleman's name?" the old lady asked.

"I just told you," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but you've already forgotten. This is the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Ch'ing-ho district. He owns the large wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen. He also engages in moneylending to both officials and functionaries. In his home:

The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,

The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary,

but he lacks a wife with the ability to take charge of the household. On hearing that the young lady from your family

who lives outside the South Gate wishes to remarry, he has come especially in order to discuss this match with you."

"As long as the two of you relatives-to-be are both here," Auntie Hsüeh continued:

"The holes in the water clock let it all spill out;⁹

If you have anything to say, now's the time to say it.

There's no call for you to complain about the lies of us matchmakers. Since you're the senior member of the family on the bride's side, if anyone who had anything to say didn't come talk to you first, Aunt, who else should they talk to?"

"If you wanted to discuss a match with my nephew's widow," the old lady said, "all you needed to do was drop by for a chat. What need was there to go to the trouble of buying all these presents? You put me in a position in which it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and

Embarrassing to accept."

"Worthy Aunt," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm afraid these presents are hardly worthy of the name."

The old lady bowed to him twice, expressed her gratitude, and had the presents put away, after which Auntie Hsüeh took the trays outside to where the bearer was waiting and then returned to keep them company.

Tea was served, and after they had finished drinking it, the old lady started the conversation by saying, "As far as I'm concerned:

Not to speak up when you ought to is to be a coward.¹⁰ When my nephew was alive he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself, and now that he has, unfortunately, died it has all fallen into the hands of his widow. At the very least she is worth more than a thousand taels of silver. Whether it is your wish, sir, to make her your concubine or your legitimate wife is no concern of mine. All I care about is that a proper sutra-reading should be performed on my nephew's behalf. As his paternal aunt I am related to him by blood; it is not a distaff or marriage relationship. If you were to provide me with the cost of a coffin, it would not be as though I had made any exorbitant demands on you. In return, I'm prepared to hazard whatever face I've got left in this matter. I'll:

Cast myself in the role of a stinking rat,¹¹

for the benefit of that old dog, Chang the Fourth, and stick up for the two of you, come what may. After she has been carried over your threshold, sir, if you were to permit her to pay me a visit now and then on birthdays and such occasions, and acknowledge me as a poor relation, I would endeavor not to inflict my poverty upon you."

"Madam," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can relax on that score. I fully understand everything you've just said. Since you've broached the subject, madam, the cost of a single coffin is nothing to me. Even if it were ten coffins you wanted, I could afford it."

As he spoke, he reached inside the leg of his boot and drew out six ingots of five taels each, making a total of thirty taels of "snowflake" government silver.

Setting these down in front of her, he said, "This may not amount to much, madam, but I hope you will use it to buy a cup of tea. In the future, when the bride has been carried over my threshold, I will provide another seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin toward your funeral expenses. You will always be a welcome guest in my home at any time of the year."

Gentle reader take note: In this world, money is like the brain and spinal cord of man in that it is the one indispensable thing that governs his every move.

When the black pupils of the old vixen's eyes saw the twenty or thirty taels of shiny government silver, she said with an ingratiating smile, "Worthy sir, I don't wish to be thought avaricious, but it has always been true that:

If the terms are settled at the outset,

Misunderstandings can be avoided later on."

"Madam," interjected Auntie Hsüeh from the side, "you're being more fastidious than you need to be. Such considerations are quite unnecessary in this case. The honorable gentleman is not that sort of person. After all he:

Sought to make your acquaintance with presents in hand.

You may not know it, madam, but even His Honor, the prefect, and His Honor, the district magistrate, consort with him. He is acquainted with people in many walks of life from all over the empire. You're not likely to make much of a dent in his resources."

This single conversation had such an effect on the old lady that she was ready to:

Fart ferociously and pee in her pants,¹²

in her excitement. After she had entertained her guests a while longer and they had drunk a second serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing indicated that he was ready to be on his way. The old lady politely endeavored to detain him, but to no avail.

Auntie Hsüeh said, "Since we've been able to see you today, Aunt, and discuss this matter, tomorrow we can proceed to go outside the South Gate and take a look at the young lady."

"There's no need for the gentleman to take the trouble to pay a call in order to size up my nephew's widow," said the old lady. "Matchmaker, just tell her that I said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?'"

Hsi-men Ch'ing said his farewells and got up to go.

"Sir," said the old lady, "I didn't know you were coming, and I was unable to make proper preparations on the spur of the moment. Please forgive me for not offering you anything better."

Leaning on her staff, she accompanied him out the door and saw him several steps along his way before Hsi-men Ch'ing succeeded in persuading her to go back inside. Auntie Hsüeh remained outside to see Hsi-men Ch'ing into his saddle.

"Wasn't I right to propose this way of going about it?" she said. "It's much better to have started out by dumping the whole proposition in the old lady's lap than it would have been to rely on the good offices of anyone else. You go on home, sir," she continued. "I'm going to stay here and have another word with her. We've already agreed to meet and go outside the South Gate together first thing tomorrow."

Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled out a tael's worth of silver and handed it to Auntie Hsüeh to cover the hire of a donkey. After she had accepted the money he got on his horse and went home, while she remained behind at Aunt Yang's house, chatting and drinking wine until dark, before going home herself.

To make a long story short, the next day Hsi-men Ch'ing dressed himself to befit the occasion, slipped his betrothal gifts into his sleeve, and mounted a large white horse. Then, accompanied by his two page boys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, and by Auntie Hsüeh, riding a donkey, he proceeded outside the South Gate to the door of the Yang family compound on Stinkwater Lane off Hogmarket Street. This establishment consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis.

Hsi-men Ch'ing reined in his horse at the gate, and Auntie Hsüeh disappeared into the interior for some time before coming out to usher him in. After he had dismounted, the first thing he confronted was a two-story structure housing the main gate, which was situated on the south side of the street, facing north. Just inside the gate stood a gray screen-wall. Inside the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard the entrance was screened by a hedge of crape myrtle and a fence of woven bamboo splints. The courtyard itself was decorated with pomegranate trees and potted miniature plants. Along a raised platform there stood a row of indigo vats for dyeing and two benches for fulling cloth.

Auntie Hsüeh pushed open the red latticework doors of the eighteen-foot-wide, south-facing reception hall, on the center of the back wall of which there hung in the place of honor a scroll depicting the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of the Water Moon, accompanied by her attendant, Sudhana.¹³ Landscape paintings by well-known artists hung on the other walls. There was also a marble standing screen, to either side of which stood tall, narrow-necked, bronze vases of the kind used in the game "pitch-pot."¹⁴ All in all:

The chairs and tables were shiny, and

The screens and lattices were posh.

Auntie Hsüeh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to take one of the seats reserved for distinguished guests and then disappeared into the interior once again.

After a while she came out and whispered in Hsi-men Ch'ing's ear, "The young lady hasn't finished her toilet yet. Please have a seat and wait a little longer, sir."

At this juncture a young servant brought out a cup of tea flavored with fruit kernels, and after Hsi-men Ch'ing had drunk it, she took the cup and its raised saucer away again.

Auntie Hsüeh, after all, was a matchmaker by profession, so she kept up an animated monologue:

Gesticulating with both hands and feet,¹⁵
for Hsi-men Ch'ing's benefit.

"Aside from Aunt Yang," she said, "the most important person in this family is the young lady. Of course there is her husband's younger brother, but he's still a minor and doesn't understand anything. Originally, when her late husband was still running the enterprise, in a single day, not even counting the silver, they sold enough blue cotton cloth of the kind used for making shoes to take in two large basketfuls of copper cash. He used to charge thirty cash a foot for the stuff. I've seen with my own eyes that on a given day they often had to feed as many as twenty or thirty dyers, and everything was managed by the young lady.

"She has two maidservants and a page boy at her beck and call. The older one, who's fourteen, and already dresses her hair in adult fashion, is called Lan-hsiang. The younger one's just eleven and is called Hsiao-luan. In the future, when she's carried across your threshold, they'll all come with her.

"If I succeed in bringing off this match for you, sir, I hope to be able to take out a mortgage on a couple of rooms in a better location than that out-of-the-way corner in the northern quarter where I'm living now. It's not convenient for me to get to your place from there. When you bought Ch'un-mei last year, sir, you promised me several bolts of muslin that you still haven't given me. I'll forget about that when this is all over if you'll compensate me for both occasions at once.

"On your way in just now, sir," she continued, "you must have noticed those two cabinets for displaying cloth. When Mr. Yang was still alive, I don't know how much money he put into the improvement of the retail shop that opens onto the street. This compound must also be worth seven or eight hundred taels of silver. It contains five interior courtyards and extends all the way back to the street that runs behind it. When she gets married, I'm afraid she'll have to leave it all to her young brother-in-law."

Auntie Hsüeh was still talking when a maidservant came out to summon her. Some time passed and then, lo and behold:

To the tinkling of girdle pendants,

Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,

the woman herself appeared. She wore a kingfisher blue surcoat of figured silk, emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin*,¹⁶ over a wide-cut gown of figured scarlet silk. On her head:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;

A phoenix hairpin was half askew.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at the woman. Behold:

She is tall and slender in build;

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.

Her figure is neither plump nor thin;
Her stature is neither short nor tall.
On her face, though barely visible,
Are several inconspicuous pockmarks,
That give her an air of natural beauty;
Hidden beneath her skirt,
Are a pair of tiny golden lotuses,
That are well-formed and attractive.
Two gold rings, set with pearls,
Hang low beneath her ears;
A pair of phoenix hairpins,
Juts aslant at either temple.
She has only to move,
In order to make her openwork jade pendants tinkle;
Wherever she sits,
The reek of orchid and musk assails the nostrils.
It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down
from her palace in the moon;
She is exactly like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain
descending her jasper steps.¹⁷

Hsi-men Ch'ing no sooner saw her than his heart was filled with delight. Auntie Hsüeh made haste to hold aside the portiere over the doorway in order to facilitate her entrance. The woman came in and:

Neither correctly nor precisely,
bowed and uttered a word of greeting, after which she sat down in a seat directly across from that occupied by her visitor. Hsi-men Ch'ing scrutinized her from head to toe with such intensity that the woman lowered her head.

Then he opened the conversation by saying, "My wife has been dead for some time and I would like to make you my legitimate wife and put you in charge of the household. What do you think of this proposal?"

"How old are you, sir," the woman asked, "and how long has your wife been dead?"

"I'm twenty-seven," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I was born on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month, at midnight. Unfortunately my former wife has been dead now for more than a year. I hardly dare ask how old you are, young lady?"

"I'm twenty-nine," the woman replied.

"So you're two years older than I am," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Auntie Hsüeh interjected from the side:

"When the wife is two years older,
Yellow gold never molders;
When the wife is three years older,
Yellow gold piles up like boulders."¹⁸

As she was speaking, a young maidservant came in carrying three servings of tea flavored with candied kumquats in carved lacquer cups inlaid with silver and provided with silver teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves. The woman got up, brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the first cup with her slender fingers, and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing. As he took the proffered cup in his hand, she bowed to him and expressed her good wishes.

Auntie Hsüeh seized the opportunity to step forward and lift the woman's skirt with her hand, revealing:

The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses,
Barely three inches long,
But half a span in length,
Peeking out beneath her skirt.

She was wearing scarlet shoes that had tips decorated with cloud patterns of gold brocade and high white satin heels. As he beheld this sight, Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart was filled with delight.

The woman took the second cup of tea and handed it to Auntie Hsüeh, after which she took the remaining cup for herself and sat down again to keep them company while they drank.



Auntie Hsüeh Proposes a Match with Meng Yü-lou

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Tai-an to present the square box containing his betrothal gifts, which consisted of two embroidered handkerchiefs, a pair of jeweled hairpins, and six gold rings. When these had been transferred to a tray and taken inside, Auntie Hsüeh prompted the woman to express her gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow.

"When are you planning to hold the ceremony, sir," the woman went on to ask, "so that I can make the necessary preparations?"

"Since you have deigned to accept my proposal," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll present you with some further insignificant gifts on the twenty-fourth day of this month, and hold the ceremony proper on the second day of the sixth month."

"If that's the way it's to be," the woman said, "I'll send someone tomorrow to inform my late husband's paternal aunt,

who lives in the northern quarter of the city."

"Yesterday," said Auntie Hsüeh, "the gentleman paid her a call in order to discuss this matter."

"What did she say?" the woman asked.

"When she heard that the gentleman was interested in this match," Auntie Hsüeh replied, "she was as happy as could be, and suggested that I should bring him here so the two of you could meet. She said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry? I'll support this match, come what may, and even undertake to act as guarantor.'"

"If that's really what Aunt said, everything will be fine," the woman said.

"My dear young lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "surely you don't mean to suggest that a matchmaker such as myself would dare to fabricate a speech like that, do you?"

When she had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing said his farewells and got up to go.

Auntie Hsüeh accompanied him as far as the mouth of Stinkwater Lane and said, "Now that you've seen the young lady, sir, what do you think?"

"Auntie Hsüeh," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I am indeed deeply indebted to you."

"You go ahead, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I want to have another word with the young lady before I leave."

Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and headed back into the city, but Auntie Hsüeh turned around and went inside again, where she said to the woman, "Young lady, with a husband like that you'll never have anything to worry about."

"Does Hsi-men Ch'ing have any women in his household or not?" the woman asked. "And what does he do for a living?"

"My dear lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "even if he does have a few women about the place, none of them amount to anything. If what I say isn't true, when you get there you'll find out for yourself. His reputation is known to everyone. He is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Ch'ing-ho district, and he is renowned as the Honorable Hsi-men who owns a wholesale pharmaceutical business and lends money to both officials and functionaries. Even the district magistrate and the prefect consort with him. And recently he has become related to Commander Yang of the Eastern Capital, who recognizes him as a kinsman by marriage at four removes. No one dares to cross him."

The woman entertained Auntie Hsüeh with wine and a meal. Just as they were enjoying this repast together, who should turn up but Aunt Yang's page boy, An-t'ung, bearing a gift box containing sweetmeats that came from the country, including four slices of date cake made of glutinous millet flour, two pieces of candy, and several sugar dumplings made of glutinous rice flour.

"I've been sent to ask whether you've accepted that person's betrothal gifts or not," he reported. "My mistress says, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?'"

"Please thank your mistress for her concern on my behalf," the woman said. "I have in fact already accepted his betrothal gifts."

"My Heavens!" said Auntie Hsüeh. "How lucky it is we matchmakers never tell anything but the truth. And now the good lady has sent her servant to confirm it."

The woman took the date cake and other sweetmeats out of the gift box and refilled it with a full complement of appetizers and cured meat. Then she gave it to An-t'ung along with fifty or sixty cash for himself and said, "When you get home, give my compliments to your mistress, and tell her that the other party has decided to make the formal presentation of his gifts on the twenty-fourth day of this month and to hold the wedding ceremony on the second day of the next month."

When the page boy had left Auntie Hsüeh said, "How about giving me a little something of whatever the lady sent you to wrap up and take home with me for the children?"

The woman gave her a piece of candy and ten sugar dumplings and she went out the door with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand

expressions of gratitude.

But no more of this.

To resume our story, Chang the Fourth, the maternal uncle of Meng Yü-lou's deceased husband, had hopes of being able to exploit his relationship with his young nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, as a means of laying his hands on some of her property. He had a candidate of his own as a matrimonial prospect for her, for whom he was prepared to act both as advocate and guarantor. This was the widower Provincial Graduate Shang, the son of Prefectural Judge Shang who lived on Main Street. If someone else of no particular distinction had been proposed as a rival candidate he would have had a case to make; but when he heard, unexpectedly, that she was betrothed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, the owner of the wholesale pharmaceutical business in front of the district yamen, whom he knew to be possessed of clout in official circles, he felt himself to be stymied. After devoting much thought to the problem he decided that:

Of the thousand schemes and hundred plans,

The best plan is a frontal assault.

Chang the Fourth, therefore, paid the woman a visit and said to her, "Young lady, you really oughtn't to have accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's betrothal gifts but should have gone along with my suggestion and married the son of Prefectural Judge Shang, the provincial graduate. He comes from a cultivated family that not only values poetry and propriety, but also possesses enough landed property for you to live on quite comfortably.

"He would certainly be preferable to Hsi-men Ch'ing. That bastard has been throwing his weight around in official circles for years. He's a tough customer. Moreover, he's already got a legitimate wife who's the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu. You're used to being a legitimate wife, and if you marry him you'll only be a concubine; won't that be

quite a comedown for you? Moreover, he's already got three or four other bedmates about the place as well as maidservants who aren't old enough to put their hair up yet. If you enter his household, as the saying goes:

When people are many, mouths are many,
and you're likely to have a hard time of it."

"It's always been true," the woman said, "that:

A multitude of boats need not clog the channel.¹⁹

If there's already a First Lady in his household, I'm willing to acknowledge her seniority and be a younger sister to her. Even if he does have a few other bedmates about the place, if my husband takes a fancy to me, do you think I'll try to keep him to myself? And if he doesn't take a fancy to me, I can't very well physically restrain him, can I? I'm not afraid; even if there are a hundred people to contend with, I can scull my own boat. To say nothing of the wealthy and prominent, among whom there is hardly a household without four or five concubines, when you get right down to it, even the beggars in the streets:

With boys in hand and girls in arms,
often have three or four concubines tagging along at their heels. You're really making much ado about nothing. When I enter his household I'll know how to handle the situation so it won't be a problem for me."

"Young lady," said Chang the Fourth, "I've heard that this man is given to trading in human flesh and is an old hand at:

Beating his women and abusing his wives.

Whenever one of them fails to please him in any way, however slight, he calls in a go-between and disposes of her without more ado. Are you willing to expose yourself to this temper of his?"

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mistaken. No matter how rough a man may be, he won't beat a wife who is diligent and knows what she's about. As a member of his household, if I manage to run a tight ship, so that:

Words spoken inside do not get out, and

Words spoken outside do not get in,²⁰

what can he do to me? If a wife:

Likes to eat but hates to work,

Has a big mouth and a long tongue, and

Devotes herself to stirring up trouble,

then:

If her husband doesn't beat her,

Should he beat the dog instead?"²¹

"But that's not all," said Chang the Fourth. "I've also heard he has a thirteen-year-old daughter at home who isn't married yet. I'm really afraid that if you enter his household you'll end up having to:

Make three nests where there's only room for two."²²

Just remember that:

When people are many, mouths are many.

How will you ever be able to handle it?"

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you don't know what you're talking about. As a member of his household I'll remember that:

Seniors are senior, and

Juniors are junior;

and that:

The state of the river depends on what comes

downstream from the source."²³

If I treat his children well, there's no reason to fear that my husband will think ill of me, or that his children will be disrespectful. To say nothing of a single child, even if there were ten of them, it wouldn't be a problem for me."

"As I see it," said Chang the Fourth, "this is the sort of man whose:

Conduct is lacking in rectitude.

He's always away from home:

Sleeping among the flowers and lolling

beneath the willows."²⁴

Moreover, he's:

Solid without, but hollow within,

and is up to his neck in debt. I'm only afraid he'll be the ruination of you."

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mistaken again. Even if he does, sometimes, go out on the town and:

Careen about rather recklessly,²⁵

as a woman:

I can only concern myself with what goes on

within the triple gates;

I can't concern myself with whatever may happen

without the triple gates.

You don't really expect me to follow him about all day long, do you? As the saying goes:

Money, in this world, is but a

sometime thing;²⁶
Where is the family that is long rich
or forever poor?²⁷

In fact, when you get right down to it, even His Majesty the Emperor himself, when he suffers from a temporary shortage of cash, has been known to appropriate the funds realized by the sale of brood mares from the Court of the Imperial Stud.²⁸ To say nothing of merchants, which of whom would ever be content to let his money sit idly at home, or scruple to:

Depend upon his wife's connections for his daily bread,²⁹
if the need should arise? There's really no need for you to be so concerned about me."

Chang the Fourth saw that the only effect his arguments were having on the woman was to bring down her counter criticisms on his own head. Feeling that he had lost face, he finished his second cup of plain tea, got up, and departed. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Chang the Fourth, in uttering his hurtful words,
was only wasting his breath;
Marriage affinities, whatever one may think,
are predetermined.
The woman of beauty felt herself predisposed
in favor of Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Though he had talked himself hoarse
it would have been to no avail.

Chang the Fourth went home in a state of mortification and discussed the situation with his wife. They decided that the only thing to do was to wait until the day when the woman's trousseau was to be delivered to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in advance of the wedding and then, making a pretext of protecting the interests of their nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, attempt to appropriate whatever they could of the woman's belongings.

To make a long story short, on the twenty-fourth day of the fifth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for the "presentation of the gifts." He invited his sister-in-law, who was married to his wife's eldest brother, to ride in the sedan chair and take charge of the gift-bearing procession. What with clothing and jewelry, formal gowns for all four seasons, preserved fruit, tea and pastries, bolts of cotton and silk, supplies of pongee and silk floss, the procession included more than twenty loads of gifts. On Meng Yü-lou's side, she invited Aunt Yang and her own elder sister to accept the gifts formally on her behalf and help to entertain the visitors, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

On the twenty-sixth, Meng Yü-lou engaged twelve Buddhist monks of high repute to recite a sutra and perform a "land and water" mass for the benefit of her deceased husband, after which his spirit tablet was burned. It was Aunt Yang who insisted on these observances.

As the day approached on which the trousseau was to be delivered to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, Chang the Fourth recruited a number of neighbors from the locality to join him in coming to have a word with the woman. That day Auntie Hsüeh showed up with a few idlers who had been hired for the purpose by Hsi-men Ch'ing and ten or twenty soldiers that he had borrowed from the commandant's yamen.

As they started inside to move the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks in which her trousseau was packed, Chang the Fourth intercepted them and said, "Matchmaker, don't carry them away yet. I've got something to say about it."

After he had invited the neighbors to come inside and sit down, Chang the Fourth opened the parley by saying, "Distinguished neighbors, listen to me. The young lady is here, and I, Chang Lung, oughtn't to have to say it, but your husband, Yang Tsung-hsi, and your young brother-in-law, Yang Tsung-pao, are both my nephews, my elder sister's sons. Now, unfortunately, your husband is dead, but he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself while he was alive. There are people who are trying to tell you what to do in this situation, and I, as a relative on the distaff side of the family, am not in a position to interfere in your affairs. Enough said. Nevertheless, my second nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, is a young karmic encumbrance, the weight of which will fall entirely on my shoulders. He and your husband were born of the same womb. Do you mean to maintain that he is not entitled to a portion of the family property?"

"Now that all these distinguished neighbors are here today to act as witnesses—and, after all, whether you've got a tidy sum of money in your hands or not, there's no way I can prevent you from marrying someone if you want to—just open up your trunks and let everyone see for themselves what you've got in there, before letting them be carried off the premises. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you, but only in clarifying the situation. Young lady, what do you say?"

When the woman heard these words she started to cry and said, "Neighbors, listen to me. You are mistaken, sir. It's not as though I plotted with evil intent to murder my husband. Isn't it enough today that I have to bear the opprobrium for entering into another marriage? Whether or not my husband was successful in making money is public knowledge. But what few taels of silver he accumulated were all plowed back into this house. And the house I'm not taking with me. I'm leaving it all to my young brother-in-law. All the furnishings are being left absolutely intact. In fact, there are three or four hundred taels worth of outstanding debts, the papers for which have already been turned over to you to collect as they become due. Since when has there been any excess of silver over and above the expenditures required to maintain the establishment?"

"If you haven't any silver, then that's all there is to it," said Chang the Fourth. "All I'm asking you to do, now, is to open up your trunks in front of these witnesses so they can see for themselves whether you do indeed have any or not. Then you can carry it all off as you like. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you."

"No doubt you want to have a look at my shoes and footbindings too!" the woman said.

Just as they were beginning to wrangle, who should emerge from the rear of the house, leaning on her staff, but Aunt Yang.

"Aunt Yang is here," everyone said with one voice as they bowed to her in greeting.

After Aunt Yang had returned their salutation and sat down to keep them company, she addressed them as follows, "Distinguished neighbors: As the paternal aunt, I am related by blood; this is not a distaff or marriage relationship. Would anyone suggest that I have no say in this matter? The one who is dead was my nephew; the one who is alive is also my nephew.

Every one of the ten fingers,

Hurts equally if bitten.³⁰

Quite aside from the fact that her husband really didn't have any money laid by; even if he had a hundred thousand taels of silver, you wouldn't be entitled to do anything more than take a look at it. She has no children and is still:

A young and delicate lass.

If you interfere and try to prevent her from remarrying, just what do you want to keep her around for, may I ask?"

In a chorus of loud voices the neighbors responded, "What Aunt Yang says makes sense."

"You don't mean to retain what she brought with her by way of a dowry from her own family, do you?" demanded the old lady. "She hasn't given me a thing behind anybody's back, yet you suggest that I'm being partial to her. Let's be fair about it. There's no reason for me to deceive any of you. This nephew of mine was so kind and just in everything he did that his loss is hard for me to bear. He was always so considerate to me. If that were not the case I wouldn't bother to concern myself about the matter."

Chang the Fourth eyed the old lady from one side and said, "Are you out of your mind?"

The phoenix doesn't deign to alight where
there's no treasure to be had."

These words struck the old lady right on her sore spot. In an instant her face became purple with rage. Grabbing hold of Chang the Fourth, she started to curse him in earnest.

"Chang the Fourth," she said, "you'd better lay off that:

Wild and nonsensical talk.

I may be neither able nor talented, but at least I'm a certifiable member of the Yang family. You old oily mouth! What Yang family prick were you sired by?"

"I may have a different surname," said Chang the Fourth, "but my two nephews are the offspring of my own elder sister. You old bloodsucker! Don't you know that:

A girl faces outward from the moment she's born?³¹

You're engaged in:

Setting fires with one hand, and

Pouring water on them with the other."³²

"You lousy, shameless, old dog-bone!" retorted Aunt Yang. "She's still:

A young and delicate lass.

Just what do you have in mind in wanting to keep her at home, may I ask? If you aren't hoping to slake your lust with her you must be plotting to fatten yourself at her expense."

"I'm not out for anybody's money," said Chang the Fourth. "But my nephew is my own sister's child, and if anything goes wrong, it's going to be me that's out of pocket, not you. You old gallows bird! You're out to:

Snatch the big, and

Snitch the little.

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail."³³

"Chang the Fourth!" Aunt Yang retorted. "You old beggar! You old slave! You old mealymouth! If you keep on talking such rot with your:

Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue,

you'll die so poor your family won't be able to afford the rope to hoist your coffin with!"

"You waggle-tongued old whore!" replied Chang the Fourth. "You've had to work so hard for your money you've burnt out your tail. No wonder you don't have any children."

This sally really got under Aunt Yang's skin. "Chang the Fourth, you louse!" she cursed at him. "You whoreson old dog! I may have no children, but I'm still better than your mother. She divides her time between Buddhist and Taoist temples, humping the bonzes and fucking the priests, while you're:

Still asleep in dreamland!"

At this point the two of them would have come to blows if the neighbors had not intervened, saying, "Old Fourth, let the lady have her say."

Meantime, Auntie Hsüeh, who had noticed that the two of them were preoccupied with their quarrel, took advantage of the confusion by placing herself at the head of Hsi-men Ch'ing's servants and hired hands, along with the soldiers who had been sent from the yamen. At her direction, they swooped down, hugger-mugger, on the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks containing her trousseau and carried them all off, any which way, like a gust of wind.

When Chang the Fourth realized what had happened his eyes swelled with rage, but:

Though he dared to be angry,

He dared not speak.³⁴

The neighbors, for their part, seeing that there was nothing further to be done, attempted to smooth things over for a

while and then went their separate ways.

On the second day of the sixth month Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched a large sedan chair and four pairs of red silk lanterns to fetch the bride. Her elder sister, Mrs. Han, acted as her escort, and she was also accompanied by her young brother-in-law, Yang Tsung-pao, who had his hair done up in a topknot, wore a long green gown, and rode on horseback as he escorted his sister-in-law on her way to the wedding ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with a bolt of satin brocade and a jade belt buckle. The bride was accompanied by her two maidservants, Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, whose job it was to:

Make the beds and fold the quilts.

She also brought along to wait on her the page boy, Ch'in-t'ung, who was just fourteen years old.

On the third day Aunt Yang and the woman's two sisters-in-law, the wives of her brothers, Meng the Elder and Meng the Second, came to participate in the "third-day celebrations." Hsi-men Ch'ing presented Aunt Yang with seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin, and from that time on the families enjoyed uninterrupted relations.

Hsi-men Ch'ing prepared three rooms on the western side of the rear courtyard to serve as his new bride's living quarters. She was designated as the Third Lady in the hierarchy of his wife and concubines and bore the appellation Yü-lou, or Tower of Jade. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that all the members of his household, from top to bottom, should address her as Third Lady.

Beginning with the evening of the wedding day he spent three successive nights in her room. Truly:



Aunt Yang Angrily Curses Chang the Fourth

Within the bed-curtains of gold lamé,
 Two new partners performed their perennial roles;
 Beneath the quilt of red brocade,
 Two used objects were brought into play.³⁵
 There is a poem that testifies to this:

To encounter close up such a paragon
 of feeling and romance;
 Is a consummation that: "Without good fortune
 one cannot enjoy."³⁶

Wherever has Lieh-tzu allowed the wind
to carry him;³⁷
When night after night the beauty of the moon
shines in the willow branches?³⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 8

ALL NIGHT LONG P'AN CHIN-LIEN YEARNS FOR HSI-MEN CH'ING; DURING THE TABLET-BURNING MONKS OVERHEAR SOUNDS OF VENERY

In the silent bedchamber, all by herself,
she wonders;
The mandarin ducks are separated, no news
of him has come.
Before the fragrance of her powder has
vanished from his arm;
The *p'i-p'a* at the head of her bed is
covered with dust.
Her face has grown so thin it scarcely registers
in the phoenix mirror;
Her clouds of hair are so loose the jade hairpins
are falling out.
His mettlesome steed does not come; her gazing
eyes are tired;
All alone with her mandarin duck pillow, tears
flood her cheeks.

THE STORY GOES that from the time that Hsi-men Ch'ing took Meng Yü-lou into his household he: Enjoyed himself with his new wife.¹

They were:

Like glue and like lacquer.²

Moreover, the Ch'en family sent Auntie Wen to announce that they would like to have his daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, carried across their threshold in marriage on the twelfth day of the sixth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing found himself so: Pushed and pressured,

that he was unable to procure a bed for his daughter's trousseau in time for the occasion and had to supply her with one of the gilt lacquer Nanking beds with retractable steps that had formed part of Meng Yü-lou's dowry. What with the "third-day celebrations" and "ninth-day celebrations" attendant on this event, he was kept busy for more than a month and was unable to pay a visit to P'an Chin-lien.

As a consequence of this, every day found her:

Leaning against one doorjamb after another,

Wearing out her eyes with constant gazing.

She twice sent Dame Wang to inquire about Hsi-men Ch'ing, but the servants at his gate, who were familiar enough with the old lady and knew that she had been sent by P'an Chin-lien, paid scant attention, merely reporting that their master was busy.

The woman was frantic with longing. When the old lady reported the results of her mission, the woman vented her wrath on her stepdaughter, driving her out into the street, in her turn, to look for him. How could that little chit have dared to penetrate his: Vast courtyards and secluded mansions?

All she did was to lurk in the vicinity of his gate a couple of times without catching sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. When she returned home her stepmother spat in her face, slapped her, and abused her for being of no use. She even made her kneel on the floor until noon without giving her anything to eat.

At that time the summer solstice had already passed and the weather was extremely hot. The house was so uncomfortable the woman could hardly bear it and ordered Ying-erh to heat some water and prepare the tub so she could take a bath. She also put a tray of meat dumplings into the steamer so she would have something to offer him if Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to show up.

Wearing nothing but a short shift of thin floss silk, she sat on a low stool longing in vain for Hsi-men Ch'ing to come. Pouting with her lips, she cursed him a couple of times for a fickle scoundrel.

Bereft of thought or feeling,

Depressed and silent,

with her slender fingers she took off her two red embroidered shoes and used them to cast a "love hexagram"³ in the hope of ascertaining whether Hsi-men Ch'ing would come or not. Truly: In front of others she is reluctant to declare

herself too loudly;

Secretly she casts her lot with coins inquiring after

her distant lover.⁴

There are two songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testify to this: Clad in "wave-tripping" silk stockings,

Looking almost natural,
Divested of their red-tipped shoes, which
now form a "love diagram,"



All Night Long P'an Chin-lien Yearns for Hsi-men Ch'ing

They are like lotus roots that have begun to sprout, Like lotus pods that have shed their blossoms.
 How were they ever bound tightly enough to make them
 so very tiny?
 Measured with a willow wand, they are
 but half a span in length.
 As for him,
 He doesn't think of me;
 As for me,
 I think longingly of him.

Quietly taking down the bamboo blind,
 Leaving the door to creak,
 All I can do is lie underneath my quilt,

cursing his name.
How can you care so much for "misty willows,"
That you won't come to my place anymore?
"My eyebrows have lost their color; who will
repaint them for me?"⁵
Before whose house has he tethered his horse
to the green willows?
As for him,
He is unfaithful to me;
As for me,
I am yearning for him.⁶

At that time, after the woman had tried casting "love diagrams" for a while and realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not going to show up, she felt herself overcome by drowsiness, stretched out on her bed, and dozed off. When she woke up, about two hours later, she was not in the best of moods.

"I've heated the water, Mother," Ying-erh said. "Are you going to take a bath or not?"

"The dumplings must be done by now," the woman said. "Bring them in here so I can have a look."

Ying-erh hastened to obey and brought them into the bedroom. The woman counted them off, one by one, with her slender fingers. She had made a full tray of thirty dumplings, but now, though she counted them back and forth a number of times, she could only count twenty-nine. There was one dumpling missing.

"What could have happened to it?" she asked.

"I haven't any idea," said Ying-erh. "You must have counted wrong, Mother."

"I counted them myself, twice," the woman said. "I made thirty dumplings so I'd have something to offer your father if he comes by. Why did you have to go and snitch one? You're spoiled rotten, you wanton little slave! I suppose you were suffering from such: Acute consumption or avid craving, that you simply couldn't help eating this particular dumpling, while the rice I feed you: Whether in large bowl or in small, you can barely manage to choke down. What I'm going to do next is intended to teach you a lesson."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, she stripped the clothing off the little chit's body and picking up a riding crop proceeded to give her twenty or thirty strokes with it. She whipped the girl until she: Howled like a stuck pig.

"If you don't confess," she threatened, "I'll certainly give you a hundred strokes."

When the girl could stand the beating no longer she cried out, "Don't whip me any more, Mother. I was desperately hungry and took one of them to eat."

"If you took it," the woman said, "why did you claim that I had counted wrong? You're nothing but a confirmed, mischief-making little whore! When that cuckold was still alive you may have gotten away with: Telling tales and embroidering on the facts; but where is he now? You think you can continue to be:

Up to your preternatural pranks, right under my nose, do you? You mischief-making little whore! I'm going to beat your bottom right off for you!"

The woman whipped her a while longer and pulled her drawers back on before letting her up. Then she ordered her to stand beside her and cool her with a fan.

After she had fanned her for a while the woman said to her, "You lousy little whore! Stick your face over here, so I can give your cheeks a good scratching!"

Ying-erh really did stick her face out, and the woman gouged two bloody scratches in her cheeks with her sharp fingernails before letting her off.

After a while Chin-lien went over to her mirror stand to get dressed and put on some new makeup and then came out and stood inside the blind in the doorway. It just so happened that: As providence would have it, what should she see but Hsi-men Ch'ing's page boy, Tai-an, who was riding past her door on horseback with a package wrapped in felt tucked under his arm.

The woman called him to a halt and asked, "Where are you going?"

Now this page boy had always been glib with his tongue and had often accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing when he visited the woman's house. She was in the habit of tipping him generously and always spoke up on his behalf when he was in hot water with Hsi-men Ch'ing. For this reason he was already on easy terms with the woman.

Dismounting from his horse, he said, "Father sent me to deliver a gift to the commandant's yamen."

The woman invited him inside and asked, "What's your father been up to at home? Why hasn't he come to see me or given me so much as a glimpse of his shadow for so long? It must be that he's found another sweetheart somewhere and put me in the position of: The rings that hold his hairnet in place: always at the back of his head."

"Father hasn't taken up with any sweetheart," said Tai-an. "It's just that the last few days he's had so much to do at home that he hasn't been able to get away and come to see you."

"Even if he has been busy at home," the woman said, "that's no reason to neglect me for half a month at a time without sending me so much as a word of news. It's obvious that I haven't been very much on his mind. Just what is it that's keeping him so busy, anyway?" she demanded of Tai-an. "Tell me all about it."

The page boy giggled but wouldn't tell her anything.

"There's been something to preoccupy him, that's all," he said. "Why do you insist on: Blowing aside the hairs only to

look for trouble?"⁷

"My dear little oily mouth," the woman said, "if you don't tell me I'll never forgive you."

"If I tell you," the page boy said, "you mustn't tell Father that it was I who told you."

"I won't tell him, that's all," the woman said.

Tai-an then proceeded, thus and so, to give a full account, from beginning to end, of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken Meng Yü-lou into his household. Nothing might have happened if the woman had not heard about this, but having heard about it, she could not prevent the teardrops in her eyes from coursing down across her fragrant cheeks.

Tai-an was thrown into a panic by this response, and said, "It's precisely because you're so sensitive that I didn't want to tell you about it, and now that I have, look at the way you're carrying on."

The woman leaned against the doorjamb and gave a long sigh, saying, "Tai-an, you don't know how much love I've lavished on him, from the first day we met, and now, how can he just abandon me like this?"

As she spoke she was unable to prevent a copious fall of tears.

"Why should you torment yourself so?" said Tai-an. "At home, Mother doesn't even try to keep him in hand."

"Tai-an," the woman said, "listen to my plaint." There is another song to the previous tune that testifies to this: My naughty lover is fickle;

He hasn't come for a month.
I've been alone beneath the mandarin duck quilt
for thirty nights.
His feckless affections are otherwise engaged,
While I remain an infatuated fool.
I never should have allowed myself
to become so involved.
"What is easily acquired is
easily relinquished."⁸
As for him,
His passion has cooled;
As for me,
It's just my luck.⁹

No sooner was she done than she started to cry all over again.

"Don't cry," said Tai-an. "I shouldn't wonder if Father turned up during the next couple of days, on his birthday. If you write a few words to him, I'll make sure that Father sees them, and he's certain to come."

"I'll really be beholden to you," the woman said. "If you can induce him to come, I'll make a pair of nice shoes for you to wear. I'll wait for him here in order to offer my birthday congratulations. If he doesn't come, I'll hold you accountable, you little oily mouth. And if he asks you what you were doing here, how will you answer him?"

"If Father asks me," said Tai-an, "I'll say that I was watering the horse in the street when you sent Granny Wang to ask me over and gave me this note, along with the injunction to tell him how much you wanted to see him."

"You little oily mouth," the woman laughed, "you're really:

A second Hung-niang: always able to
bring people together."¹⁰

When she had finished speaking she ordered Ying-erh to serve Tai-an a plateful of the steamed dumplings on the table, along with some tea. While this was being done she went inside, fetched a sheet of flowered notepaper, and: Lightly grasping the jade tube, and

Gently toying with the sheep's hair brush,
dashed off a lyric to the tune "Mistletoe," which read as follows:

I'm taking my heartfelt words and
Sending them to you on this flowered notepaper.
I remember the time I first cut off
a lock of my black tresses for you.
I leaned against one doorjamb after another
and took down the bamboo blind,
Anticipating surprise and suffering fear for you,
trivial though they may have been.
And now you're actually betraying
my love.
If you're not going to come, return my
fragrant silk handkerchief.¹¹

When she had finished composing her note she folded it into a lozenge-shaped lover's knot, sealed it, and gave it to Tai-an with the words, "Be sure to tell him, whatever he does, to come pay me a visit on his birthday. I'll be here waiting for him."

When Tai-an had finished eating his snack the woman also gave him several tens of cash.

As he was about to go outside and mount his horse she said to him, "When you get home and see your father, tell him, 'She really cursed you out.' And if he refuses to come, tell him, 'She's threatening to get into a sedan chair one of these days and come to pay you a visit herself.'"

Tai-an replied, "I feel just like:

A clapper-sounding southern salesman who runs into
a dung-cake peddler and exclaims:
'Don't bother to run through your inventory;
it only gives me the creeps!'
You'd crack melon seeds astride the wooden mule¹²

en route to your own execution:
 How superfluous can you get?"
 When he had finished speaking he mounted his horse and departed.
 Every day the woman spent her time:
 Waiting for long periods as well as short,
 but it was just as though he were:
 A stone sunk in the vast sea.¹³
 She never caught so much as a glimpse of Hsi-men Ch'ing's shadow.
 Seven days went by in this way until, finally, it was the day of his birthday. To the woman: Each day was like three months of autumn;
 Each night seemed like half a summer.¹⁴
 She:
 Waited all day,
 Without any news of him;
 Watched for a long time,
 But caught not a glimpse of him.
 Before she became aware of it she began to:
 Silently gnash her silvery teeth, as
 Tears overflowed her starry eyes.
 When evening came she invited Dame Wang over, plied her with food and wine, and then pulled a silver hairpin with a gold head out of her hair and gave it to her, entreating her to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house on her behalf and press her invitation.
 "If I show up this late in the day," said Dame Wang, "he'll already be:
 Anticipating tea or recovering from wine,
 and will certainly not consent to come. I'd do better to wait until first thing tomorrow morning to go to the gentleman's mansion and extend your invitation."
 "Godmother," the woman said, "be sure you don't forget."
 "Since when," the old lady asked, "have I ever undertaken anything for you without carrying it through?"
 At this juncture the old lady, who was the sort who:
 Wouldn't do anything except for money,¹⁵
 having accepted the hairpin for her pains and drunk until her face was bright red, proceeded to make her way home.
 It so happens that, in her bedroom, the woman:
 Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, and
 Deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick,
 but could not get to sleep. Giving vent to:
 Long sighs as well as short,
 she:
 Tossed first this way and then that.
 Truly, it is a case of:
 She who is wont to diligently strum her *p'î-p'a*
 late into the night;
 When all alone in her deserted chamber can scarcely
 bear to play it.¹⁶
 At this juncture, accompanying herself on the *p'î-p'a*, she sang a suite of four songs to the tune "Making Silk Floss," which testifies to this: In the beginning I loved you for
 being so romantic;
 We exchanged locks of our hair and
 burned incense together.
 When we sported with the clouds and rain
 we were perfectly suited;
 Behind my husband's back I carried on
 an affair with you.
 What did I care when people said, "Spilt water
 can never be recovered?"¹⁷
 If you are really betraying
 my true love,
 You're: "Climbing a tree in search of fish,"¹⁸
 and deserve whatever you get.
 Who would have thought you'd have
 found another sweetheart?
 It makes me so mad I'm:
 "Half drunk and half crazy."
 Leaning against the standing screen, I
 try to figure it out;
 I don't understand it, how could you
 abandon me this way?
 Though I: "Send letters and post notes,"
 you still refuse to come.
 If you are really betraying,
 my affections,
 If no one else gets to you first,
 Heaven will destroy you.

I certainly never loved you
just for your money;
I loved you because I found you
such an appealing lover.
You knew just how to handle me;
you were always so clever.
I was a lovely flower that had
just blossomed in the garden;
But once the butterfly had supped its fill
it did not return.
Love of the kind that we once
felt for each other,
Must have been predestined in a former life
to be fulfilled in this.

I turn things over in my troubled heart
until I'm depressed.
As the sayings go, "Women are
easily infatuated,"
And, "Lovers alone are
never satisfied."
The affair I had with you
was my first;
It was a fresh flower I brought you;
how could you give it up?
Now that you've found yourself
another soul mate;
In the Temple of the God of the Sea¹⁹
I'll bring an action against you.²⁰

It so happens that all night long the woman:
Tossed first this way and then that,
but could not get to sleep.

The next morning she said to Ying-erh, "Go next door and see if Granny Wang has gone to invite your father or not."

Ying-erh did as she was told and, before long, came back and reported, "Granny Wang left a long time ago."

To resume our story, the old lady got up early in the morning and set out as soon as she had combed her hair and washed her face.

When she arrived at Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate she asked the servants on duty, "Is the gentleman at home?" but they all said, "We don't know," so she went over and waited by the wall across the street.

Before long, Manager Fu showed up to open the shop. The old lady went up to him, bowed and uttered a word of greeting, and then said, "May I trouble you with a question? Is the gentleman at home?"

"What do you want with him," said Manager Fu, "that you should be asking me so early in the morning? If you had asked anyone else, they wouldn't have known, but I'll tell you. Yesterday was the gentleman's birthday, and he spent the day entertaining guests in his home. They had been drinking all day long, and when evening came he took his friends off to the licensed quarter, where they must have made a night of it because he hasn't come home yet. That's where you ought to look if you want to find him."

After the old lady had bowed in gratitude and bade him farewell, she crossed the square in front of the district yamen and started along East Street in the direction of the lane that led into the licensed quarter. At this point, what should she see in the distance but Hsi-men Ch'ing coming toward her on horseback. He was accompanied by two page boys and was sufficiently the worse for wear so that: His eyes were bleary with drink,
and he was:

Rocking backward and forward,
in the saddle.

"Sir!" the old lady hailed him in a loud voice. "Why don't you have a little less to drink?"

As she spoke, she stepped forward and brought him to a halt by taking hold of the horse's bit with her hand.

"You're Godmother Wang, aren't you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired drunkenly. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

The old lady had whispered no more than a few words in his ear when Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "The page boy gave me the message when he got home. I know she must be angry with me. I'll go to her place right now."

Hsi-men Ch'ing followed the old lady, and the two of them carried on an animated dialogue all the way to their destination.

When they got to the woman's door, Dame Wang went in first and reported, "Young lady, I've got good news for you. Thanks to my efforts, in less than an hour I've succeeded in bringing the gentleman here with me."

When the woman heard that he had come, she hastily ordered Ying-erh to tidy up the room and then went out to welcome him. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was still: More than a little addled with wine,
swaggered right in, fanning himself as he came, and bowed to the woman as he uttered a word of greeting.

The woman returned his salutation and said, "Sir:

The more eminent you are, the harder you are to see."²¹

How could you simply drop me like this, without giving me so much as a glimpse of your shadow for so long? No doubt, with your new bride to keep you company at home, you're: Like glue and like lacquer,
and scarcely have any reason to think of me. How can you still claim, sir, that you haven't had a change of heart?"

"You shouldn't pay any attention to the nonsense people talk," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What would I want with a new bride anyway? It's only because my young daughter got married that I was kept busy for a few days and didn't have the time to pay you a visit. That's all there is to it."

"You think you can pull the wool over my eyes, do you?" the woman said. "If you haven't: Become enamored of the new and abandoned the old, or found yourself a new sweetheart somewhere, you'll have to swear an oath on that all too vigorous body of yours before I'll believe you."

"If I ever betray you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I be afflicted with:

Boils as big as bowls,

Three to five years of jaundice,²² and A bite on the balls by a centipede
as big as a carrying pole."

"You lousy two-timer," the woman said, "what does:

A bite on the balls by a centipede

as big as a carrying pole,

have to do with you?"

As she spoke she reached out with her hand, snatched the hat off his head, and threw it on the floor. Dame Wang saw that it was a brand-new, tasseled, "tile-ridge" hat, shaped like the roof of a pavilion with flaring eaves,²³ and hastily picked it up and put it on the table for him.

"Young lady," she said, "you've been complaining about my failure to invite the gentleman here for you; and now look how you're treating him! If you don't put his hat back on for him he'll catch cold."

"Fat chance!" said the woman. "If that fickle ruffian died of a venereal chill, I wouldn't care."

As she spoke she pulled a pin out of his hair and held it in her hand while she examined it. It was a polished gold hairpin with two rows of characters engraved on it that said: The horse with the golden bridle neighs

amidst the fragrant verdure;

The visitor to the jade tower is drunk

at apricot blossom time.²⁴

It had been given to him by Meng Yü-lou, but the woman assumed that it was a gift from some singing girl, so she put it in her sleeve and refused to return it, saying, "And you claim not to have had a change of heart! Where did the hairpin I gave you get to, that you should be wearing this one from someone else?"

"As for that hairpin of yours," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the other day I got drunk and fell off my horse, so hard that my hat was knocked off and my hair came undone. When I looked for your pin I couldn't find it."

"You wouldn't fool a two-year-old child with that story," the woman said. "You mean to tell me you were so befuddled with drink that you couldn't even see a hairpin when it fell on the ground?"

"Young lady," interjected Dame Wang from one side, "you can't hold the gentleman to blame.

He can detect a bee defecating forty li outside the city,

But trips over a mangy elephant on his own doorstep:

He can see things at a distance,

But not close to home."

"It's bad enough to have her giving me a hard time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "without your joining in the fun."

The woman saw that he held in his hand a fine gold-flecked Szechwan fan, with red slats and a gold hinge-joint,²⁵ and proceeded to snatch it away from him and hold it up to the light.

It so happens that the woman was an old hand where anything about the relations between the sexes was concerned. When she saw that there were traces of tooth-marks all over the fan, confirming her suspicion that it had been given to him by some light-of-love: Without permitting any further explanation, she broke it in two. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing attempted to rescue it, it had already been torn to tatters.

"That fan was given to me by a friend named Pu Chih-tao,"²⁶ he protested. "I've only had it for three days, and you've torn it to tatters."

The woman had been harassing him for some time when Ying-erh came in with a cup of tea. Her stepmother told her to put it down and kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You've been nagging away for half the day already," said Dame Wang. "Enough is enough. Don't let yourselves miss the boat. I'll go downstairs and see to things in the kitchen."

The woman told Ying-erh to set up the table in the room where they were. In no time at all the wine and delicacies that had been prepared in advance for the celebration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, including, as might be expected, roast chicken, cooked goose, fresh fish, potted meat, fruits, and the like, were gotten ready, brought into the room, and set out on the table.

The woman opened a trunk and took out the things she had prepared for Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday. She then arranged these on a tray and set it down in front of him, so he could see what she was giving him. There were: a pair of jet satin shoes; a pair of scent bags with the drawnwork inscription: In secret tryst a lover's vow,

I'll follow you where'er you go;

a pair of russet satin kneepads, the borders of which were decorated with a motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends"; a sand-green waistband of Lu-chou pongee, decorated with the motifs of auspicious clouds and the symbolic representations of the "eight treasures," lined with watered-silk, fastened with purple cords, and enclosing a pocket filled with aromatic lysimachia and rose petals; and a hairpin in the shape of a double-headed lotus blossom, engraved with a pentasyllabic quatrain that read: I have a lotus blossom with two heads;

To help keep your topknot in place.

As they grow from the same stem on your head,

So may we never abandon each other.

No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing see her gifts than his heart was filled with delight.

He pulled her into an embrace with one arm and gave her a kiss, saying, "Who would have thought you were as clever as this? Such skills are a rare thing."

The woman told Ying-erh to hold the winepot and pour a cup of wine for Hsi-men Ch'ing. Then: Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she kowtowed to him four times. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to pull her to her feet and the two of them: Sat down shoulder to shoulder,

Exchanging cups as they drank.

Dame Wang took several cups of wine with them, until her face became bright red, and then said good-bye and went home, leaving the two of them to enjoy themselves as they pleased. After Ying-erh had seen Dame Wang on her way she locked the front door and went in to sit in the kitchen. The woman continued drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing for some time.

Little by little evening began to fall. Behold:

Dense clouds obscure the evening peaks;

Dark mists streak the distant heavens.

Hosts of stars vie with the white moon

in their brilliance;

Green waters contend with the blue sky

in shades of aquamarine.

Monks make their way toward old temples;

Where, deep in the woods, they elicit

the cawing of crows.

Travelers head for desolate villages;

Where, among the lanes, they arouse

the barking of dogs.

Perched on his branch, the cuckoo cries

at the night moon;

Within the garden, the powdered butterfly

flirts with the flowers.²⁷

At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing told his page boys to take the horse and go home since he had decided to spend the night at the woman's house. That evening the two of them were: Just like cavorting sparrow hawks;

Exhausting themselves to please each other,

Indulging their lusts without restraint.

As the saying goes:

When joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow;

When prosperity is at its height, adversity follows.²⁸

Light and darkness alternate swiftly.

Let us now return to the story of Wu Sung. After taking charge of the district magistrate's letter and the consignment of presents, he set out from the district of Ch'ing-ho and escorted the shipment all the way to Defender-in-chief Chu Mien's establishment in the Eastern Capital. Once there, he duly turned over the consignment and engaged in several days of idle sightseeing; after which, having obtained a reply, he set out with his companions once again on the highway that led back to Shantung.

He had started out on his journey during the third or fourth month, but by now, on his return trip, the heat of summer had diminished and it was already early autumn. It rained continuously along the way, and the delays that this occasioned prevented him from returning in the expected time. What with one thing and another, the round trip was going to end up taking him more than three months. Held up as he was by the rains and flooding along the route, his spirit was troubled and he felt uneasy in mind and body.

Anxious to hurry back as fast as he could in order to see his elder brother, he dispatched one of the local recruits in his party to travel ahead and inform the district magistrate of their situation. He also privately entrusted him with a family letter for his brother, Wu the Elder, in which he said he would be home before long, no later than sometime in the eighth month.

The local recruit delivered his report to the district magistrate and then set out to look for Wu the Elder's house. It just so happened that: As providence would have it,
Dame Wang was in the front of her shop at the time.

When the local recruit saw that the door of Wu the Elder's house was shut, he was about to call for someone to open up when the old lady asked him, "Who are you looking for?"

"I've been sent by Captain Wu," replied the local recruit, "to deliver a letter to his elder brother."

"Wu the Elder's not at home," the old lady said. "They've all gone out to pay a visit to the family graves. If you've got a letter for him, you might as well give it to me. As soon as he comes home I'll see that he gets it. It's all the same whether he gets it from you or from me."

Bowing to her with an expression of gratitude, the local recruit pulled out the family letter and handed it over to Dame Wang; after which he hurriedly leapt onto his horse and flew on his way.

Dame Wang took the letter and went over to the woman's house by way of the back door, which Ying-erh opened to let the old lady in. It so happened that the woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing had been at it for half the night and were sleeping late. It was almost lunchtime, but they weren't up yet.

"Sir! And young lady!" Dame Wang called out to them. "Get up! There's something urgent I need to tell you about." She then proceeded: Thus and thus, and

So and so,
to relate what had happened. "Wu the Second has sent a local recruit to deliver a letter to his elder brother, saying that he'll arrive back before long. I accepted the letter on his behalf and managed to fob off the messenger with a few words. This matter will brook no delay. You must decide on the best thing to do as soon as possible."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, nothing might have happened, but having heard these words, truly, it was just as though: The eight-boned structure of his skull had been split asunder;

Only to have poured into it half a bucketful
of icy snow.²⁹

As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman had gotten up and put on their clothes, they invited Dame Wang into the room and offered her a seat. She took out the letter and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to read. Wu Sung said in the letter that he would arrive home no later than the Mid-autumn Festival, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. This threw both of them into a panic.

"What are we going to do about this?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Godmother, please do whatever you can to protect us.

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

We will never dare to forget it.

Right now:

Our mutual passions are as deep as the sea;

We can't bear to be parted from each other.

But when that bastard, Wu the Second, comes back we'll have to separate. What can we do?"

"Sir," said the old lady, "what's so hard about that? As I pointed out to you once before: In one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;

In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.

It's always been the case that:

Brothers and sisters-in-law do not
ask after each other.³⁰

Right now, Wu the Elder's 'hundredth day' is about to come up, and the young lady should engage a few Buddhist monks to preside over the burning of his spirit tablet. As soon as that ceremony is completed, and before Wu the Second gets back, you can pop her into a sedan chair, sir, and take her into your household as a concubine. Then, when that bastard, Wu the Second, arrives back, I'll explain the situation to him and he won't have anything to say in the matter. From then on the two of you can: Live happily ever after,
and the whole damn business will come to nothing."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're absolutely right. Truly:

If you aren't tough enough,

You will never be secure."

That day, by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman had finished eating breakfast, they had decided that on the sixth day of the eighth month, which was Wu the Elder's "hundredth day," they would engage monks to perform the Buddhist rites and burn the spirit tablet of the deceased; and that on the evening of the eighth day Hsi-men Ch'ing would send a sedan chair to carry the woman across his threshold. Not long after the three of them had completed their deliberations, Tai-an came back with the horse to take Hsi-men Ch'ing home. But no more of this.

Days and nights speed by like arrows;

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

Before long it was the sixth day of the eighth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing had brought several taels of loose silver and two pecks of polished rice to the woman's house to defray the expenses of the religious observances. He sent Dame Wang to the Pao-en Temple to engage the services of six Buddhist monks, who were to come to the house and perform a "land and water" mass for the benefit of Wu the Elder, and then preside over the burning of his spirit tablet the same evening.

The foreman of the lay workers from the temple arrived early in the morning, at the fifth watch, bearing with him the sutras that would be used in the liturgy. He prepared the consecrated space in which the ceremony would be held and hung up Buddhist effigies. Dame Wang, in the kitchen, supervised the cook who had been engaged to prepare the vegetarian offerings that would be required for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the preceding night at the woman's house.

Before long the monks arrived and started to sound their hand-chimes and strike their drums and cymbals as they embarked upon their declamatory recitations. The liturgy included excerpts from the *Lotus Sutra*³¹ and the *Litanies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty*.³² That morning they dispatched petitions inviting the representatives of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, to confer efficacy upon the ceremony by authenticating the covenant. These sacred beings were then invited to partake of the offerings presented to them. At noon the souls of the departed, on both land and water, were summoned to partake of the sustenance provided for their benefit, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

To resume our story, how could P'an Chin-lien bring herself to observe the appropriate abstentions? She remained in

bed with Hsi-men Ch'ing and, though the sun was already high in the sky, they had not yet arisen. It was only when the monks requested the presence of the ordainer of the rites to burn incense, sign the petitions, authenticate the covenant, and worship Buddha that she got up, washed her face and combed her hair, made a specious show of putting on mourning, and came out to pay her respects before the Buddhist effigies.

When the company of monks caught sight of Wu the Elder's wife:

Each and every one of them became oblivious to
his Buddha nature and his meditative mind;
Each and every one of them lost control of
"the monkey of his mind and the horse of his will."³³
All at sevens and eights,
They melted into a heap.

Behold:

The rector becomes flippant;
In reciting the Buddhas' names
he gets them backward.
The precentor becomes confused;
In chanting the words of the sutras
his intonation goes astray.
The incense-burning acolyte,
Knocks over the flower vase.
The candle-bearing ascetic,
Picks up the incense case instead.
The lector who declaims the covenant,
Reads the "Great Sung Empire"
as the "Great T'ang."
The teacher who enacts the rite of repentance,
Reads "Wu the Elder"
as "Grandfather Wu."
The abbot is so flustered;
He grabs the hand of an acolyte
instead of his drumstick.
The novice is so carried away;
He hammers on the pate of an old monk
instead of the bronze chime.
All the merit of their former austerities
comes to nothing in a moment;

Even a myriad guardian deities
could not reduce them to order.³⁴

As soon as the woman had burned incense before the effigies, signed the petitions, and paid homage to Buddha, she returned to her room to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company as before. A feast of wine and meat was laid on, and they gave themselves over to pleasure.

"If anything should come up," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Dame Wang, "just take care of it yourself. Don't let them come around and pester the lady of the house."

"You can relax, sir," the old lady said with a laugh. "Just leave those shaven-pated bastards to me. The two of you might as well enjoy yourselves."

Gentle reader take note: In this world Buddhist monks of such high virtue and attainments that they can remain: Impervious to the temptations of the flesh,³⁵
are few. A man of old has said:

In one word they are "bonzes,"
In two words they are "Buddhist monks,"
In three words they are "purveyors of demonic music,"
In four words they are "sex-starved hungry ghosts."³⁶

Moreover, as Su Shih³⁷ has said: The untensured are not vicious,

The unvicious are not tonsured,
The vicious are most likely to be tonsured,
The tonsured are most likely to be vicious.³⁸

The subject of this disquisition is how hard it is for monks to keep their vows. Living as they do in their high halls and spacious structures, occupying their sanctuaries and dormitories, supported by the alms of their benefactors so that they can count on three meals a day without having to plant or to plow, and without a worry in the world to occupy their minds, they are able to devote all their attention to lust. Laymen, on the other hand, no matter whether they be scholars, farmers, artisans, or merchants, and even though they be wealthy, distinguished, respected, and well-favored, are often so preoccupied with the pursuit of fame and profit or the demands of social intercourse that even though they have beautiful wives or young concubines at their disposal, the sudden recollection of some besetting problem, or the discovery that the rice-jar is empty and the woodshed short of fuel, is enough to make them lose all interest in such things. This is an arena in which they are no match for the monks.³⁹ There is a poem that testifies to this: Sex-starved hungry ghosts, they are like

long-haired monkeys among the beasts;
Disregarding their vows in the pursuit of lust,
they sully the way of the patriarchs.
These creatures are only fit to be seen
in their natural habitat;
They should never be invited into the decorated
halls of one's home.⁴⁰

That morning when the company of monks beheld the spectacle presented by Wu the Elder's wife, it made an indelible impression on them. When they came back from the temple, to which they had returned for their midday repast and a rest from their labors, the woman was in her room drinking wine and enjoying herself with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

It so happens that the woman's bedroom was right next to the consecrated space that had been set aside for the performance of the Buddhist ceremony. There was only the single thickness of a board wall between them. One of the monks, who had arrived before the rest, went up to the basin outside the woman's bedroom window to wash his hands. Suddenly he overheard the woman: In a trembling voice and melting tones,

Sighing and moaning,
Panting and groaning,

just as though she were engaged in the act of sexual intercourse with someone in her room. At this the monk, pretending to wash his hands, stood there eavesdropping for quite a while.

He overheard the woman appealing in a soft voice to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Daddy, how long are you going to keep on banging away like that? I'm afraid the monks may come back and hear something. Let me off for now and come as quickly as you can."

"There's no need to get so excited," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. I still haven't burnt the moxa on the top of your mons."⁴¹

Who would have thought that everything they said to each other was so clearly overheard by that shaven-pated rascal that he might well have ejaculated: "Is it not delightful?"⁴²

After a while, when the whole company of monks had reassembled and they resumed their performance of the liturgy, the word passed from mouth to mouth until they all knew that the woman was carrying on with a man in her room. Imperceptibly they began to reenact the imagined scene: Miming it with their hands, and

Dancing it with their feet.⁴³

By the time the Buddhist ceremony was nearing its completion that evening and the celebrants had moved outside to send the spirit of the departed on its way and burn the paper money that it would need in the other world, the woman had long since divested herself of her mourning and changed into a more colorful outfit. She and Hsi-men Ch'ing stood, shoulder to shoulder, just inside the hanging blind in the doorway, and watched the monks as they prepared to burn Wu the Elder's spirit tablet. Dame Wang brought out a bucket of water, a torch was lit, and in no time at all the spirit tablet and the Buddhist effigies were consumed by the flames.

The shaven-pated rascals with their cold eyes perceived the silhouettes of the man and the woman standing shoulder to shoulder inside the screen and were reminded of the goings-on they had overheard during the day. With one accord

they fell to beating their drums and banging their cymbals as if their souls depended on it. A gust of wind blew the abbot's Vairocana hat onto the ground, exposing a bluish, finely polished, shiny pate. No one picked it up, but they all continued banging their cymbals, beating their drums, and: Falling into a heap with laughter.



During the Tablet-burning Monks Overhear Sounds of Venery

"Reverend sir," called out Dame Wang, "the paper money has already been burnt. Why do you keep on banging away like that?"

"We still haven't burnt the incense on the top of the furnace,"⁴⁴ replied the monk.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he told Dame Wang to distribute the fee for their services as quickly as possible.

“Won’t the lady who ordained the rites come out so we can thank her?” asked the abbot.
“Dame Wang,” the woman said, “tell them I’d prefer to be excused.”
“We’d better let her off for now,” the monks replied, and went their way convulsed with laughter.

Truly:

If one’s real work had ever found favor in the eyes
of one’s contemporaries;
One would not have had to spend money on rouge
in order to paint peonies.⁴⁵

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Even while burning the spirit tablet
the wanton woman is dissatisfied;
Listening by the wall-side eavesdropping monks
get an earful.

If Buddhism or Taoism were really capable
of absolving her of her sins;
Even the dead, on hearing of such things,
would be dispirited.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 9

HSI-MEN CH'ING CONSPIRES TO MARRY P'AN CHIN-LIEN; CAPTAIN WU MISTAKENLY ASSAULTS LI WAI-CH'UAN

THESE IS a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that goes: With lustful daring as big as the sky they can

no longer control themselves;
Their passions deep, their love fast, the two
are inseparable.
Preoccupied with the present and the pleasures
that they share;
How can they anticipate what future dangers
lurk within their screen-walls?

Greedy for delight,
They set their fancies free;
But the stouthearted hero, for his part,
is bent on revenge.
The Lord of Heaven has his own way
of disposing such affairs;
Victory and defeat, success and failure,
never cease to alternate.¹

The story goes that by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien were finished with the burning of Wu the Elder's spirit tablet they had already exchanged their mourning for more colorful garments. That evening they prepared a feast to which they invited Dame Wang in order to bid her farewell.

Chin-lien turned Ying-erh over to Dame Wang to look after and they then instructed her as follows: "When Wu the Second comes back, just say that the young lady had no way to support herself, and her mother urged her to take steps for the future, so she married a merchant from another town and went off with him."

The woman's trunks had already been dispatched to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house the day before. The broken-down furniture and old clothes that remained were all bequeathed to Dame Wang. Hsi-men Ch'ing also rewarded her for her exertions with a tael of silver.

The next day, in a single sedan chair, accompanied by four lanterns and escorted by Dame Wang and Tai-an, he had the woman carried off to his home. There was no one who lived on that street, whether far or near, who did not know about this affair, but they were all afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was not above resorting to strong-arm tactics and possessed both money and influence, so who would have dared to interfere?

Someone who lived in the locality composed a doggerel quatrain in commemoration of this event that sums it up very well: Hsi-men Ch'ing's lack of shame

is truly laughable;
"First seducing and then marrying,"²
his ill fame is notorious.
Inside the sedan chair there sits
a wanton whore;
While tagging at her heels there follows
an old procuress.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing took the woman into his household he had the three ground-floor rooms of the two-storied belvedere in his garden made ready to serve as her living quarters. She had a little courtyard all to herself, to which the only entrance was a postern gate, and flowers and potted miniature plants had been provided for decoration. It was an extremely secluded place where people seldom came even during the daytime. One of the rooms served as her living room and another as her bedroom.

Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently laid out sixteen taels of silver to buy her a black lacquer bedstead, elaborately adorned with gold tracery, bed curtains of scarlet silk with gold roundels, a dressing case ornamented with floral rosettes, and a complete complement of tables, chairs, and porcelain taborets embossed with patterns of ornamental brocade.

Wu Yüeh-niang, the First Lady of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, employed two maidservants in her quarters, one of whom was named Ch'un-mei, or Spring Plum Blossom, and the other Yü-hsiao, or Jade Flute. Hsi-men Ch'ing reassigned Ch'un-mei to Chin-lien's quarters, directing her to serve her new mistress diligently and address her as Mother. He then laid out five taels of silver to buy another young maidservant, named Hsiao-yü, or Little Jade, to wait on Yüeh-niang, and a further six taels of silver to buy a scullery maid for Chin-lien, whose name was Ch'iu-chü, or Autumn Chrysanthemum.

P'an Chin-lien was designated as the Fifth Lady in the hierarchy of Hsi-men Ch'ing's wife and concubines. There was a former maidservant, named Sun Hsüeh-o, or Snow Moth, who had come into his household as part of the dowry of his deceased wife, née Ch'en. She was about nineteen years old, petite in stature, and good-looking. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already granted her the right to wear the fret on her chignon that was a mark of nonservile status and had designated her as his Fourth Lady. That is why Chin-lien was designated as the Fifth Lady. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Conspires to Marry P'an Chin-lien

No sooner had this woman been brought across the threshold than the members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, both high and low, became unhappy about the situation.

Gentle reader take note: In this world, women with fire in their eyes are extremely numerous. No matter how worthy and intelligent a wife may be, or how much she may protest that she will not be annoyed if her husband should take a concubine, when she is actually confronted with the situation and sees her husband going off to someone else's room to enjoy the pleasure of: Sharing the same bed and a single pillow, though she be ever so fine by nature, to a greater or lesser extent:

Her countenance will sour and her heart be ill-disposed.

Truly:

What a pity that, in its perfect fullness,
the moon of this night;
Should shed its pure radiance on other gardens,
so near and yet so far.³

That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing slept in Chin-lien's chambers.

Like fish sporting in the water;⁴
Their pleasure could not be exceeded.

The next day the woman combed her hair and made herself up, put on her most attractive outfit, directed Ch'un-mei to accompany her with the ceremonial tea, and set out for the quarters of the First Lady, Wu Yüeh-niang, which were located in the rear of the residential compound. The purpose of this visit was to pay her respects to the ladies of the household and to present the First Lady with the customary pair of "presentation shoes," which had been made by her own hand.

From her seated position Yüeh-niang carefully scrutinized her visitor. She saw that the woman was no more than twenty-four or twenty-five years old and was very good-looking. Behold: Her eyebrows are shaped like willow leaves

in early spring;
Forever conveying a sense of longing
for the clouds and rain.
Her face is like peach blossoms
in the third month;

Covertly suggesting thoughts
of breezes and moonlight.
Her slender waist is lissome;
So constricted as to render her
 an idle swallow or languid oriole.
Her sandalwood mouth is dainty;
Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction
and butterflies to madness.
Her jade countenance is alluring,
 a flower that can also speak;
Her fragrant visage is enticing,
 a jade that exudes its own bouquet.⁵

As Wu Yüeh-niang:

Scanned her from head to foot,
Her glamour ran downward apace;
Surveyed her from foot to head,
Her glamour flowed up with her gaze.⁶
If one were to describe her glamour;
It is like a shining pearl
 rolling on a crystal plate.
If one were to speak of her demeanor;
It is like a red apricot on a branch-tip
 caught in the morning sun.⁷

When Yüeh-niang had looked her over for a while:

From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,

“When the servants came home they used to talk a lot about Wu the Elder’s wife, but I had never set eyes on her. Now I can see that she really is as good-looking as they say. No wonder that ruffian of mine is so enamored of her!”

Chin-lien first kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and presented her with the customary pair of shoes. Yüeh-niang allowed her to kowtow to her four times. After this Chin-lien also paid her respects to Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o, with whom she exchanged salutations on an equal footing as sisters. When these formalities were completed she stood to one side until Yüeh-niang ordered a maidservant to bring her a seat and had her sit down. Yüeh-niang directed the maidservants and other serving women in the household to address her as Fifth Lady.

The woman sat to one side and devoted her undivided attention to sizing up her new companions. She observed that Wu Yüeh-niang was about twenty-six years old and learned that she was called Yüeh-niang, or Moon Lady, because she had been born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, the day of the Moon Festival. She had: A face like a silver salver;

Eyes like apricots;
Was gentle in her movements;
Sedate, and of few words.

The Second Lady, Li Chiao-erh, had been a singing girl in the licensed quarter. She was pleasingly plump, rather heavy in build, and had the habit of merely giving a little cough when she was introduced to people. Although she was well versed in all the techniques that might be used to please a patron in bed, as might be expected of a well-known courtesan, she was no match for Chin-lien at the game of breeze and moonlight.

The Third Lady was Meng Yü-lou, who was the most recent addition to the household. She was about twenty-nine years old and had: A pear-blossom complexion;

A willowy waist;
A tall stature;
And a melon-seed face,
With the addition of a few barely perceptible pockmarks.

She was possessed of a natural beauty, to be sure, but the golden lotuses that peeked out from underneath her skirt were neither all that big nor all that small.

The Fourth Lady, Sun Hsüeh-o, had entered the household as a personal maid. She was: Petite in stature;

Dainty in demeanor;
Adept at making bouillabaisse;
And could do a pretty pirouette upon the emerald disk.⁸

Chin-lien was able to size them all up in her mind with one sweep of her eyes.

After the “third-day celebrations” were over she got up early every morning and came to Yüeh-niang’s quarters, where she kept her company in doing needlework or making shoes. She always insisted on: Fetching things, whether they were wanted or not; and

Doing things, whether they were called for or not.⁹

In giving orders to the maids and addressing Yüeh-niang, the words “First Lady” were seldom out of her mouth.

She didn’t have to play up to her with every trick at her disposal very often before Yüeh-niang was so delighted she scarcely knew what to do with herself. Yüeh-niang started to address her as Sister Six because she was the sixth sibling in her generation of the family, presented her with some of her favorite articles of clothing and jewelry, and invited her to

eat her meals and drink tea at the same table with her.

When Li Chiao-erh and the others saw the misguided favor that Yüeh-niang showered upon her they were not happy about it.

“We’ve been here a lot longer than she has,” they grumbled, “but who pays any attention to us? How long has she been here, anyway, that she should be pampered so? Our elder sister doesn’t know what she’s doing.”

Truly:

Though the preceding carriages have overturned by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.¹⁰

To resume our story, once Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken P'an Chin-lien into his household she found herself dwelling in: Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
and was provided with clothing and jewelry to match.

A woman of beauty and a man of talent,
Both of them were in the prime of life.

In everything they were:

Like glue and like lacquer;

She was:

Obedient to his every whim.

And as for their lewd desires, no day went by on which they were not gratified. But let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it.

Let us now return to the story of Wu Sung. He arrived back in Ch'ing-ho district before the first ten days of the eighth month were over, reported immediately to the district yamen, and handed over the reply he had brought back from the capital. On reading it the district magistrate was very pleased to learn that his consignment of gold and other valuables had reached its destination safely. He rewarded Wu Sung with ten taels of silver and treated him to wine and food, but there is no need to describe all this.

Wu Sung then returned to his lodgings, changed his clothes and shoes, put on a new hat, locked the door of his room, and headed straight for Amethyst Street. When the neighbors who lived to either side saw that Wu Sung had come back, they felt so apprehensive they broke into a sweat.

“This is one of those times when:

Catastrophe will arise within the
screen-wall of the house,"
they said to themselves. "Once this wrathful god has returned he'll never be willing to call it quits. Something dire is
bound to happen."

Wu Sung strode up to his elder brother's front door, pulled aside the bamboo blind, and poked his head inside. Catching sight of no one but the young girl, Ying-erh, who was twisting thread in the hallway under the stairs, he said to himself, "My eyes must be deceiving me?" He called out, "Sister-in-law," but there was no reply. He called out, "Elder Brother," but, again, there was no reply. "My ears must be playing tricks on me," he thought. "Why is it that I don't hear any response from my elder brother or my sister-in-law?"

He went up to the young girl, Ying-erh, to ask what was going on, but when she saw that it was her uncle who had come back she was too frightened to say anything.

"Where have your father and mother gone?" Wu Sung demanded, but Ying-erh only started to cry and made no reply.

As he continued to press his inquiry Dame Wang, next door, overheard him and realized that it was Wu the Second who had returned. Fearful lest the cat be let out of the bag, she hurried over to help Ying-erh cover up the situation as best she could.

When Wu the Second saw that it was Dame Wang from next door he made her a bow and asked, "Where has my elder brother gone? And why is my sister-in-law nowhere to be seen?"

"Brother Two," the old lady said, "have a seat and I'll tell you all about it. After you left town, sometime in the fourth month, your elder brother came down with an awkward illness and died."

"When in the fourth month did my brother die?" Wu the Second demanded to know. "What kind of an illness was it? And whose medicine did he take?"

"It was on the twentieth day of the fourth month," said Dame Wang, "that your elder brother suddenly came down with an acute case of heart trouble. He was sick for eight or nine days.

The gods were besought and diviners consulted.¹¹
Every kind of medical prescription was tried, but nothing availed, and so he died."

"My elder brother never suffered from such an ailment before," said Wu the Second. "How could he get heart trouble and die, just like that?"

"Captain," said Dame Wang, "how can you talk that way?

Weather is characterized by unexpected storms;

Man is subject to unpredictable vicissitudes.¹²

When you take off your shoes and socks today;

Who knows whether you will put them on tomorrow?¹³

Who can be sure that nothing will ever happen to him?"¹⁴

"Where is my elder brother buried at the present time?" Wu the Second demanded to know.

"By the time your elder brother breathed his last," said Dame Wang, "there wasn't a candareen left in the house. Your sister-in-law, after all, is like a legless crab. Where could she go to look for a grave site or anything like that? Fortunately a wealthy man in the neighborhood who was barely acquainted with Wu the Elder saw fit to help out by providing a coffin. There was nothing for it. After the body had lain in state for three days, it was carried outside the town and cremated."

"Where has my sister-in-law gone to now?" Wu the Second asked.

"She's still:

A young and delicate lass,"

said Dame Wang, "and had no means of support. She managed, somehow or other, to get through her hundred days of mourning, after which her mother urged her to take steps for the future. So, last month, she married a merchant from another town and went off with him. She left this karmic encumbrance of a step-daughter behind and asked me to look after her until you came back. Now that you're here, I can turn her over to you and thus fulfill my responsibilities in the matter."

When Wu the Second had heard her out, he thought to himself in silence for some time and then, abandoning Dame Wang unceremoniously, strode out the door and headed back to his lodgings in front of the district yamen. Opening the door, he went into his room, changed into a set of plain white garments, and sent his orderly out into the street to buy a hempen sash, a pair of cotton shoes, and a mourning cap to wear on his head. He also picked up some fruits and sweetmeats, incense sticks and candles, paper money and imitation gold and silver ingots, and so forth. Returning to his brother's home, he set up a new spirit tablet to Wu the Elder, prepared the soup and rice he had brought with him, lit lamps and candles on the table in front of the tablet, laid out the sacrificial wine and delicacies, and hung up funeral streamers with appropriate quotations from the sutras inscribed on them. It took him less than four hours, all told, to complete these arrangements.

A little after the first watch Wu the Second lit the incense, prostrated himself, and kowtowed, saying, "Elder Brother, hear me, if your departed soul be not too far away! When you were in this world you were of a meek disposition, and now that you are dead the circumstances remain unclear. Look you, if you have: Suffered injustice and harbor resentment, as the victim of a murder, appear to me in a dream. As your brother I will undertake to: Requite your wrong and assuage your resentment."

Pouring the wine to make a libation, and burning the paper money, Wu the Second commenced to weep aloud, saying, "After all: We came into this world by the same route."

He wept to such effect that among the neighbors to either side there were none who were not moved.

When Wu the Second had finished weeping he shared the soup and rice, wine and delicacies, with his orderly and Ying-erh. As soon as they had eaten he sought out two sleeping mats, instructed his orderly to bed down beside him in the room where they were, sent Ying-erh off to her own room, and then, taking the other mat for himself, lay down in front of the table on which Wu the Elder's spirit tablet was located.

It was around midnight and Wu the Second:

Tossed first this way and then that,
but could not get to sleep. All he could do was to give vent to long sighs. His orderly, meanwhile, lay there, snoring away, stretched out as if he were a dead man. Wu the Second got to his feet to look around and saw that the glass lamp on the table that held the spirit tablet seemed to be: Half alight and half extinguished.

He sat down on the mat again and started to talk to himself, saying, "When my elder brother was alive he was of a meek disposition, and now that he is dead the circumstances remain unclear."

Before he had finished speaking he suddenly became aware of a gust of cold wind swirling up from underneath the table that held the spirit tablet. Behold: Devoid of shape and form,

Neither fog nor mist;
Swirling like an eerie wind,
its chill invades the bones;
Icy as a baleful breath,
its cold penetrates the flesh.
Nebulous and dark,
It causes the lamplight before the tablet
to grow dim;
Somber and spectral,
It makes the paper money on the wall
fly every which way.
All too dimly, it conceals
the poison-eater's ghost;
With a flutter, it ruffles
his soul-inducting banner.¹⁵

This gust of cold wind made Wu the Second's hair stand on end. When he took a close look, he saw someone climbing out from underneath the table that held the spirit tablet, who called out to him, "Younger Brother, I died a grievous death!"

Wu the Second could not see him distinctly, but by the time he started forward to enquire further the cold wind had dissipated and the figure was no longer to be seen.

Wu the Second collapsed onto the mat and sat there thinking to himself, "How uncanny!"

Was it a dream or not a dream?

Just now my elder brother wanted to tell me something, but my vital spirits caused his soul to disperse. It seems clear that this death of his must have been the result of foul play."

As he listened he heard the watchman strike the third quarter of the third watch. He looked over at his orderly, who was still fast asleep, and then, muttering unhappily to himself, "I'll have to wait till dawn before I can do anything about it," he fell into a fitful sleep.

Eventually, at the fifth watch, the cock crowed and it began to grow light in the east. The orderly got up to heat some water. After Wu the Second had washed and rinsed out his mouth, he woke up Ying-erh, so she could look after the house, and went out, taking the orderly with him.

As he went along the street he asked the neighbors who lived in the vicinity, "How did my elder brother come to die? And who has my sister-in-law married herself off to?"

The neighbors who lived on that street knew perfectly well what had happened, but they were all afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, so no one cared to interfere.

All they would say was, "Captain, there's no need to enquire any further. Dame Wang lives right next door. Just ask Dame Wang and you'll find out what you want to know."

A certain busybody also told him, "That Yün-ko who sells pears and Ho the Ninth, the coroner's assistant, are two people who know a good deal about it."

Wu the Second proceeded immediately to the commercial center of town to look for Yün-ko, but couldn't find him at first. Then he spotted the little monkey, carrying a basket woven out of willow osiers in his hand, on his way back from the rice store.

"Yün-ko," called out Wu the Second, "your brother salutes you."

When the young scamp saw that it was Wu the Second who accosted him, he said, "Captain Wu, you've shown up just a step too late. And another thing. My father's in his sixties and there's no one else to look after him. I can't very well let myself get involved in a lawsuit with you just for the fun of it!"

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Second, "come with me." Leading him to the upper floor of a restaurant, he summoned the waiter and ordered him to have two meals prepared for them.

"You may be young, Little Brother," Wu the Second said to Yün-ko, "but you've got the filial desire to maintain your family. I'm afraid I don't have anything much to offer."

After groping around in his pocket, he produced five taels worth of loose silver and gave it to Yün-ko, saying, "You take this for the time being and use it to provide for your father's expenses. There's a matter in which you can be of use to me. Once it's taken care of I'll give you another ten taels or so of silver, which you can employ as capital in your trade. Now tell me in detail, whom did my elder brother quarrel with? Who plotted to do him in? And who carried my sister-in-law off in marriage? Tell me everything you know about it and don't conceal anything."

Yün-ko accepted the silver with alacrity, thinking to himself as he did so, "This five taels of silver is enough to provide for my father for three to five months. So even if I get involved in a lawsuit with him it won't matter."

"Brother Two," he said, "hear me out, and try not to get too upset at what I tell you."

Thereupon he told him the whole story, from beginning to end: how he had gone looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing to peddle some pears, how he had subsequently been beaten by Dame Wang, who wouldn't let him into her room, how he had helped Wu the Elder to catch them in the act of adultery, how Hsi-men Ch'ing had kicked Wu the Elder in the solar plexus, how he had suffered from pain in the region of the heart for several days, and then died under suspicious circumstances.

When Wu the Second had heard him out, he asked, "Is what you tell me really true?" Then he asked again, "And who did my sister-in-law marry herself off to?"

"Your sister-in-law," said Yün-ko, "was carried off to his own house by Hsi-men Ch'ing, so he could knock the bottom out of her at his leisure. And you ask me if it's true or if it's false!"

"You'd better not be lying," said Wu the Second.

"Even if I have to tell it in front of the magistrate," said Yün-ko, "I'll tell it the same way."

"Little Brother," said Wu the Second, "if that's the way things stand, let's have something to eat."

In no time at all they polished off a meal served in:

Large platters and large bowls.

When Wu the Second had paid the reckoning and the two of them had come downstairs, he said to Yün-ko, "You go home now and turn over the living expenses to your father. Early tomorrow morning meet me in front of the district yamen, and be prepared to testify on my behalf." Then he went on to ask, "Where does Ho the Ninth live?"

"It's a little late in the day to be looking for Ho the Ninth," said Yün-ko. "Before you came back, three days ago, he took himself off to who knows where."

Wu the Second let Yün-ko go his own way and then went home.

The next day Wu the Second got up early in the morning and went to Master Ch'en's house for assistance in drafting a formal complaint. Then he went to the front gate of the district yamen, where he found Yün-ko was already waiting. Taking him along with him, he went straight into the courtroom, knelt down, and began loudly to complain of a case of injustice.

When the district magistrate saw him, he recognized that it was Wu Sung and asked, "What is your plea? And what injustice do you have to complain of?"

Wu the Second pled as follows: "My brother, Wu the Elder, has been the victim of collusion between the influential malefactor, Hsi-men Ch'ing, and my sister-in-law, née P'an, with whom he has been carrying on an adulterous affair. The accused, having kicked my brother in the solar plexus, then contrived, at the instigation of Dame Wang, to conspire with his paramour in his murder. Ho the Ninth connived with them by fudging the coroner's inspection and cremating the body, thereby destroying the evidence of the crime. At the present time, Hsi-men Ch'ing has sequestered my sister-in-law by taking her into his house as a concubine. The youngster, Yün-ko, who is now present, is prepared to testify to the truth of these allegations. I trust that Your Honor will see that justice is done."

When he had finished making his plea, Wu the Second presented the written text of his complaint. The district magistrate accepted it, and then asked, "Why is Ho the Ninth not here?"

"Ho the Ninth is aware of his culpability and has decamped," Wu the Second replied. "His whereabouts are unknown."

The district magistrate took Yün-ko's verbal deposition and then withdrew from the courtroom in order to consult with his subordinates.

It so happens that the district magistrate, the vice-magistrate, the assistant magistrate, and the docket officer had all of them, high and low, been engaged in hanky-panky with Hsi-men Ch'ing. For this reason they were unanimous in concluding that this case would be a difficult one to try.

When the district magistrate came back into the tribunal he summoned Wu Sung before him and said, "You are, yourself, a police captain on the staff of this court, and yet you seem to be ignorant of the law. It has always been true that: To prove adultery, you must nab both parties;

To prove theft, you must produce the loot;

To prove homicide, you must find the wound.¹⁶

The corpse of that elder brother of yours is no longer available as evidence, and you have not nabbed the accused in the act of adultery. For you to rely solely on the verbal allegations of this youngster in pressing a charge of murder against them is surely to make a travesty of justice. You ought not to act rashly but think it over to yourself.

If you decide to proceed, then proceed;

If you decide to desist, then desist."

"If Your Honor will permit me to speak," said Wu the Second, "all of these allegations are true. I have not invented a single one of them."

"You may rise, for the present," said the district magistrate. "Let me:

Consider what course would be best.

If it turns out to be feasible to do so, I will have them arrested for you."

Only then did Wu the Second get to his feet and go outside. Yün-ko, however, was detained in the yamen and not permitted to return home.

It was not long before someone reported these events to Hsi-men Ch'ing, informing him that Wu the Second had returned and had taken Yün-ko with him to court to make a formal charge against him. Hsi-men Ch'ing was sufficiently alarmed by this development to send his trusted servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang, with their sleeves full of silver, to take care of the officials involved, all of whom were bought off.

The next morning Wu the Second showed up in the courtroom bright and early and petitioned the district magistrate to proceed with the arrest of the accused. Who would have thought that this official coveted the bribe he had received?

As soon as the case was called, he said, "Wu the Second, you oughtn't to let yourself be misled by anyone else into becoming an antagonist of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The truth in this matter is not clear, and it would be a difficult case to try. As the sage has said: If even what one sees with one's eyes,

May be feared suspect;

How can words spoken behind one's back,

Be completely trustworthy?¹⁷

You ought not to act rashly, on the spur of the moment."

The docket officer, who was standing to one side, also said, "Captain, since you work in the yamen, you must be acquainted with the law. In any case involving an accusation of homicide there are five prerequisites that must be possessed by the prosecutor before he can proceed to trial: the corpse of the victim, the wound, the medical cause of death, the weapon, and evidence that implicates the accused. The corpse of that elder brother of yours is no longer available as evidence. How can such a case be tried?"

"Since Your Honor denies my suit," said Wu the Second, "you must have your reasons."

He then recovered the written text of his complaint, left the courtroom, and returned to his lodgings with Yün-ko, whom he then released from his obligation and allowed to go home.

Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he gazed up to Heaven and gave a long sigh.

Grinding and gnashing his teeth,

he kept muttering, "That damned whore!" to himself, over and over again. How was this man to find a vent for his anger?

Wu Sung headed straight for Hsi-men Ch'ing's wholesale pharmaceutical shop, with the intent of finding the culprit and taking matters into his own hands.

Manager Fu, who was in charge of the shop, was sitting inside the counter when Wu the Second strode up in an obviously belligerent mood, saluted him, and asked, "Is the Honorable Gentleman at home?"

Manager Fu recognized that it was Wu the Second and replied, "He's not at home, Captain. What have you got to say to him?"

"Walk a few steps with me, if you please," said Wu the Second. "I've got something to say to you."

Manager Fu did not dare to refuse and, coming outside, allowed Wu the Second to lead him to the mouth of an out-of-the-way alley for a chat. No sooner did they get there, however, than Wu the Second adopted a menacing manner, took hold of him by the lapel: Opened wide his weird eyes, and demanded, "Do you want to die, or do you want to live?"

"With all due respect, Captain," said Manager Fu, "I've never done anything to offend you. What are you so angry about, Captain?"

"If you want to die," said Wu the Second, "don't bother to reply. But if you want to live, tell me the truth. Where is that bastard, Hsi-men Ch'ing, at this moment? And how long is it since he took my sister-in-law into his household? If you tell me everything I ask, I'll let you go."

Manager Fu was not a courageous man. When he saw that Wu the Second meant business, he became panic-stricken and said, "Calm yourself, Captain! My position in his household is only that of an employee whom he hires for two taels of silver a month to manage his shop. I am not privy to his private affairs. The Honorable Gentleman really isn't at home. Just a little while ago he went out with an acquaintance to have a drink at the Great Tavern on Lion Street. I wouldn't dare tell you a lie."

It was only on hearing these words that Wu the Second released his grip and, with giant strides, flew off in the direction of Lion Street, like a cloud scudding before the wind. Manager Fu was so frightened it was some time before he could stir from the spot. Wu the Second made straight for the tavern just below the bridge on Lion Street.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the company of one of the black-robed lictors on the staff of the district yamen, who was known as Li Wai-ch'uan, or Leaky Li. This man played the role of influence peddler in both the district and the prefecture, intervening in public business on people's behalf, and keeping his ear to the ground as he ran back and forth, for a fee. If two parties were engaged in a lawsuit, he would peddle his services as a conduit of confidential information. Or if anyone wished to offer a bribe to the officials or functionaries, he would take a cut from both sides. For this reason he was known around the district yamen by the nickname Leaky Li.

That day, when he saw the district magistrate reject Wu Sung's suit, he had no sooner acquired the news than he came looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing to tell him that Wu the Second's suit had failed. Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited him to have a drink with him on the second floor of the tavern, where he presented him with five taels of silver.

Just as they were settling down to enjoy their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to look out the window and caught sight of the formidable-looking Wu Sung, racing up toward the tavern from below the bridge. Realizing immediately that he could be up to no good, he excused himself on the pretext of going to the bathroom, leapt out a rear window, fled

along the ridge of an adjacent roof, and jumped down into someone's rear courtyard.

Wu the Second dashed up to the front of the tavern and asked one of the waiters, "Is Hsi-men Ch'ing here?"

"The Honorable Hsi-men," the waiter replied, "is upstairs drinking wine with one of his acquaintances."

Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes,

Wu the Second flew upstairs, where the only thing he saw was a man, occupying the place of honor, with a pair of painted singing girls sitting to either side of him. He recognized that it was Li Wai-ch'uan, the lictor from the district yamen, and knew that he must have come to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing the news.

Enraged, he went up to him and demanded, "Where has Hsi-men Ch'ing gone?"

When Li Wai-ch'uan saw that it was Wu the Second he was too dumbstruck to get a word out for some time. With a single movement of his leg, Wu the Second kicked over the table, smashing the cups and saucers to smithereens. The singing girls were frozen with fright. Wu the Second struck Li Wai-ch'uan right in the face with his fist.

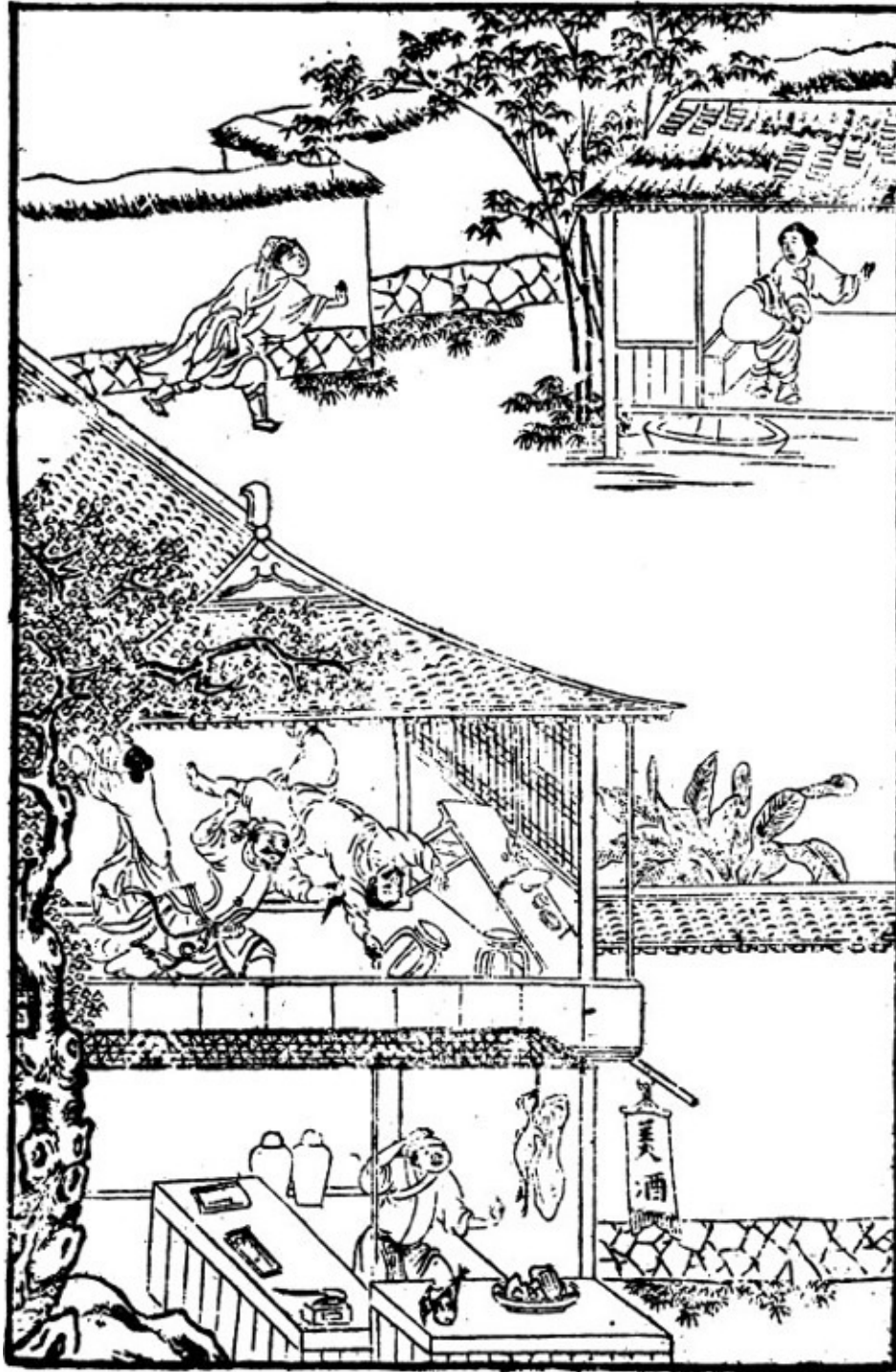
Crying out, "Don't you ... !" Li Wai-ch'uan jumped onto the bench he had been sitting on and tried to make his escape through the rear window, but Wu the Second picked him up with both hands and hurled him clear through the front window, so that he fell, headfirst, into the street below, and was knocked unconscious.

When the waiters on the ground floor saw that Wu the Second was running amok they were scared out of their wits. None of them dared to intervene. The pedestrians on either side of the street all stopped and stared. Wu the Second was still on the rampage. Racing downstairs, he saw that his victim was already half dead from the impact of his fall and lay there, at full length on the ground, unable to move anything but his eyes. Thereupon, square in the crotch, he gave him two additional kicks, with the result that: Alas and alack;

He stopped breathing and died.

"Captain!" everyone exclaimed. "This man is not Hsi-men Ch'ing. You've attacked the wrong person."

"I asked him a question," said Wu the Second. "Why didn't he respond? That's why I assaulted him. Now, it appears that, without even suffering a beating, he has died."



Captain Wu Mistakenly Assaults Li Wai-ch'uan

The local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit saw that a homicide had occurred but did not dare to accost Wu the Second directly in order to place him under arrest. All they could do was to gradually edge closer to him until they had him surrounded and then keep him under strict surveillance. The proprietor of the tavern, Wang Luan, and the two singing girls, whose surnames were Pao and Niu, were also taken into custody, after which they all proceeded to the yamen to appear before the district magistrate.

By this time:

All Lion Street was dumbfounded;
The district of Ch'ing-ho was disturbed.

The spectators who gathered in the streets could not be numbered.

They all said, "Hsi-men Ch'ing must not have been fated to die. When his assailant discovered that he had made good his escape, he took out his wrath on this man instead."

Truly:

Mr. Chang drinks wine, but Mr. Li
gets drunk;

The mulberry tree is cut with a knife,
but the willow bark is scarred.¹⁸

While one person enjoys himself;

Another is haled into court.

Can such things be?

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The hero, endeavoring to assuage his resentment,
suffers the rigors of the law;

What can the Lord of Heaven be up to,
that such murk should be allowed to spread?

In the Nine Springs the poison-eating sojourner
has died in vain;

While, deep in her boudoir,
Chin-lien laughs her head off.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 10

WU THE SECOND IS CONDEMNED TO EXILE IN MENG-CHOU; HSI-MEN AND HIS HAREM REVEL IN THE HIBISCUS PAVILION

In the morning you may read the yogācāra sutras;
In the evening recite disaster-dispelling dhāranis.
If you plant melons you will surely harvest melons;
If you plant beans you will surely harvest beans.
Sutras and dhāranis have no minds of their own;
Once you have made your karma how can it be unmade?
Hell on the one hand and Heaven on the other;
Are only the consequences of our own actions.¹

THE STORY GOES that once Wu Sung and the others had been taken into custody by the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, they all proceeded to the yamen to appear before the district magistrate.

Let us now return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Having leapt out a rear window on the second floor of the tavern and fled along the ridge of an adjacent roof, he had concealed himself in someone's rear courtyard.

It so happens that this was the residence of Old Man Hu, the doctor. While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still attempting to make himself inconspicuous, what should he see but a large, fat maidservant coming out to the privy to relieve herself. Just as she was in the process of jutting out her beefy behind, she suddenly caught sight of a man, on all fours, at the foot of the courtyard wall. Dashing back the way she had come, without even taking the time to put herself to rights, she screamed out, "Thief!" so lustily that Old Man Hu hurried into the courtyard to see what was the matter and recognized that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Congratulations, sir!" he said. "When Wu the Second failed to find you he killed the other person instead. The local constable has already taken him to the district yamen to appear before the magistrate. There is little reason to doubt that he will be convicted of a capital crime. You are free to go home, sir. Nothing will come of it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then bade Old Man Hu a grateful farewell and swaggered off to his home, where he gave P'an Chin-lien a word-for-word account of everything that had happened. The two of them clapped their hands and laughed for joy, thinking that their only cause for worry had been eliminated.

"Spread a little extra money around, high and low," the woman advised Hsi-men Ch'ing. "See to it that they finish him off, so there'll be no danger of his ever getting free again."

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent his trusted servant, Lai-wang, to convey a set of gold and silver wine vessels and fifty taels of "snowflake" silver to the district magistrate. He also distributed a good deal of additional money, high and low, to the other functionaries, including the docket officer. The only purpose behind this largess was to see to it that Wu the Second was not treated leniently. The district magistrate accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribe.

The next morning, at the early session of the court, the district magistrate took his place on the bench and the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit escorted Wu the Second, along with the proprietor of the tavern and the singing girls who were to act as witnesses, into the courtroom and had them kneel down in front of the dais.

The district magistrate had altered his demeanor overnight. "Wu the Second, you rascal," he said. "Only yesterday you tried to bring a specious suit. I don't know how you could have shown such disrespect for the law. And now you have actually killed someone for no reason at all. What have you got to say in your defense?"

Wu the Second kowtowed and pled as follows: "I trust that Your Honor will see that justice is done on my behalf. My quarrel was really with Hsi-men Ch'ing, but when I unexpectedly ran into this man on the second floor of the tavern and asked him where Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone, he refused to give me an answer. In a momentary fit of rage, I wrongly killed him."

"This rascal is talking nonsense," proclaimed the district magistrate. "How could you have failed to recognize that he was a lictor on the staff of the yamen? You must have had an ulterior motive and are refusing to tell the truth."

Then he called out to his minions, "Put him to the question."

Man is a miserable creature;

Unless you beat him he'll never confess."²

From either side three or four lictors and jailers appeared, bearing a full panoply of instruments of torture. They turned Wu Sung over, and the blows of the light bamboo fell on him like rain. In no time at all they had administered twenty strokes, but, despite the beating, Wu the Second continued to protest, again and again, that he was being treated unjustly.

"In the past," he said, "there have been occasions when I exerted myself to the utmost on Your Honor's behalf. How can you show no pity for me now? Your Honor ought not to subject me to such cruel torture."

When the district magistrate heard these words he became even more incensed. "You scoundrel!" he replied. "You've killed someone with your own hands and you're still trying to tough it out. You can't stick anyone else with your own guilt." Then he called out, "Put the squeezers on him and give him a good squeezing."

Thereupon the finger-squeezers were applied to Wu Sung and, after being tightened in place, were struck fifty times with a heavy bamboo. He was then put into a long cangue and incarcerated in the district prison, while the witnesses in the case were temporarily detained in the gatehouse of the yamen.

Now among the vice-magistrate and other subsidiary officials there were some who had been on friendly terms with Wu the Second, who knew him to be a man of righteous and heroic cast, and who would have liked to help him out. But because they had all accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes, their mouths were sealed, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Wu Sung continued to protest that he was being treated unjustly, which delayed matters for a few days, but eventually he was driven into making a hugger-mugger confession. The docket officer on duty, the coroner's assistant, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, the witnesses, and so forth, were all escorted to Lion Street where a formal inquest was performed on Li Wai-ch'uan's corpse, and the inquest report form filled out. The said document read as follows: Wu Sung demanded reparation from the deceased for the unequal division of a sum of money, and, failing to receive satisfaction, in a drunken rage, assaulted him with both fists and feet and threw him to the ground with fatal results. The left rib cage, the face, the solar plexus, and the scrotum of the deceased all exhibit livid marks produced by injuries of varying degrees of severity.

After the inquest was completed they returned to the district yamen. One day, after a formal report of the particulars had been prepared, the prisoner was escorted under guard to Tung-p'ing prefecture to await the final disposition of his case.

Now the prefect of Tung-p'ing was named Ch'en Wen-chao.³ He was a native of Honan and was an official of absolute integrity. As soon as he learned that the prisoner had arrived he took his position on the bench. What was this official like? Behold: All his life he has been correct and upright;

By natural endowment he is worthy and perspicacious.

In his youth he studied his books

by light reflected from the snow;⁴

Once grown up he responded to imperial inquiries
in the Palace of Golden Bells.⁵

He constantly harbors
 a loyal and filial heart;
 He is always motivated by
 humane and kind considerations.
 The population of his jurisdiction grows;
 The taxes are honestly levied;
 Common people who sing his praises
 fill the streets.
 The number of lawsuits is diminished;
 Banditry and robbery are curtailed;
 The clamor of elders extolling his virtues
 is heard in the marketplace.
 The people curb his carriage and tug at his stirrups;⁶
 Enshrining his name in the history books
 for a thousand years.
 His merits are carved on stone and engraved on stelae;
 So that his fame as a prefect will be acclaimed
 for all time.
 Correct and upright, of absolute integrity,
 he is the father and mother of the people;
 Worthy and good, square and proper,
 he deserves the epithet "Azure Heaven."⁷

Now the prefect, Ch'en Wen-chao, already knew something about this case and gave immediate orders that both the accused and the witnesses should be brought before him. The first thing he did, right there in the courtroom, was to examine the report of the case that had been forwarded from Ch'ing-ho district as well as the various depositions and the recommended sentence. Truly, what did this report say? The text read as follows: Ch'ing-ho district reports a case of homicide to Tung-p'ing prefecture, as below: The accused, Wu Sung, twenty-seven years of age, is a native of Yang-ku district. Because of his unusual strength, the magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district appointed him to the post of police captain. On his return from an official mission, while preparing to make a ritual sacrifice in commemoration of his deceased elder brother, he learned that his sister-in-law, née P'an, had remarried before the expiration of her mourning period. The said Wu Sung, on making further inquiries in the streets, made his way, as he should not have done, to the second floor of Wang Luan's tavern in Lion Street, where he encountered the initially unknown but now identified Li Wai-ch'uan. Upon drunkenly demanding repayment of a prior loan of three hundred cash and meeting with a refusal from Li Wai-ch'uan, he engaged him, as he should not have done, in an affray, neither one being willing to submit to the other. In the course of being seized, beaten, kicked, and thrown to the ground, the victim suffered such severe injuries that he died on the spot. Two singing girls, surnamed Niu and Pao, were present at the time as witnesses of the affray. The accused was taken into custody by the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit. An official was deputized to proceed to the site of the crime, summon the coroner's assistant, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, the witnesses, and so forth, and conduct an inquest. Depositions were taken, bond was posted for the witnesses, and the inquest report form was duly filled out and submitted. If no conflicting evidence is adduced during retrial, the recommended sentence is as follows: According to the article of the penal code that reads "In cases of involuntary manslaughter resulting from an affray, no matter whether the fatal injury be inflicted by hand, foot, other object, or metal blade, the penalty shall be strangulation,"⁸ Wu Sung should be sentenced to death by strangulation. The testimony of the proprietor of the tavern, Wang Luan, and the singing girls surnamed Niu and Pao indicates them to be innocent of any crime. The case is hereby duly forwarded to your tribunal for final disposition.

Date: The nth day of the eighth month of the third year of the Cheng-ho reign period.⁹

Signed: Li Ta-t'ien, District Magistrate
 Yüeh Ho-an, Vice-Magistrate
 Hua Ho-lu, Assistant Magistrate
 Hsia Kung-chi, Docket Officer
 Ch'ien Lao, Clerk, Office of Punishment

When the prefect had finished reading this document he called up Wu Sung, who knelt down in front of the dais, and asked him, "Why did you kill Li Wai-ch'uan?"

Wu Sung kowtowed and appealed to the prefect, saying, "Lord 'Azure Heaven,' to appear before you is to see the light of day. If you permit me to speak, I will presume to speak."

"Pray speak up, then," the prefect responded.

"I was actually bent on avenging the death of my elder brother," said Wu Sung. "In the course of seeking out Hsi-men Ch'ing, I wrongly assaulted and killed this person."

He then gave an account of the foregoing events, concluding as follows, "The truth is that I have: Suffered injustice and harbor resentment.

The power of Hsi-men Ch'ing's money is too great for me to withstand. The only thing that rankles is that my brother, Wu the Elder, still bears a grudge in the nether world and has lost his life for nothing."

"You need not say another word," the prefect responded. "I already know all about it."

He then called up the clerk from the office of punishment, Ch'ien Lao, and ordered him to be given twenty strokes with the light bamboo, saying, "That district magistrate of yours doesn't deserve to continue in office. How can he have

put justice up for sale so flagrantly?"

Thereupon, after taking the depositions of all the witnesses once again, he picked up his brush and rewrote Wu Sung's confession.

Turning to his subsidiary officials, he said, "This man was seeking to avenge the death of his elder brother when he wrongly killed this Li Wai-ch'uan. He is a man of honor, motivated by righteous indignation. This is not an instance of 'deliberate homicide of an innocent person.' "

On the one hand, he ordered that Wu Sung's long cangue be taken off and replaced with the lighter one prescribed for lesser offenses, and had him incarcerated in the prefectural prison, while he sent the witnesses back where they came from to await the final disposition of the case. On the other hand, he sent a dispatch to Ch'ing-ho district ordering the magistrate to apprehend the influential malefactor, Hsi-men Ch'ing; the sister-in-law of the accused, née P'an; Dame Wang; the youngster, Yün-ko; and the coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth; to subject them to honest interrogation; and to report the results before taking any further action.

While Wu Sung was in prison in Tung-p'ing prefecture, since everyone knew that he was the victim of a miscarriage of justice, the jail warden and the guards actually provided him with food and wine without demanding a candareen for themselves.

It was not long before someone reported these events back to Ch'ing-ho district, and when Hsi-men Ch'ing got wind of them he was more alarmed than before. Ch'en Wen-chao was an official of absolute integrity, and he was afraid to try to bribe him. He had to go ask for help from the Ch'en family, to whom he was related by his daughter's marriage. That very night he dispatched one of their trusted servants, along with his own servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang,¹⁰ to travel to the Eastern Capital and deliver a letter to Yang Chien, the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard.

The commander, in his turn, sought the aid of the grand councilor and grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching. The grand preceptor, fearing lest the reputation of District Magistrate Li be tarnished, immediately sent an urgent secret message to Ch'en Wen-chao in Tung-p'ing prefecture, directing him not to insist on haling Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien into court.

Now this Ch'en Wen-chao had been the director of one of the two divisions of the Court of Judicial Review in the capital when he was promoted to the position of prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, and Grand Preceptor Ts'ai had been his examiner when he qualified for office by passing the civil service examinations. He was also aware that Yang Chien, as the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, was an official who had the ear of the emperor himself. Thus: His obligations cancelled each other out.¹¹

All he could do under the circumstances was to save Wu Sung from the death penalty. His judgment was therefore rendered as follows: Recommended sentence: that the accused shall be beaten forty strokes on the back with the heavy bamboo; that the name of his offense shall be tattooed on his face; and that he shall be condemned to military exile for life at a distance of 2,000 li.

In addition: whereas Wu the Elder is already dead; and whereas his corpse is no longer available as evidence; and whereas nothing more than suspicions have been adduced as to the circumstances of his death; the matter shall not be pursued further. All other persons involved with this case may be released and permitted to return to their homes.

The records of the case were forwarded to the Ministry of Justice in the capital, and thence to the Censorate for ratification, and, one day, a directive came down ordering that the sentence be carried out without delay. Ch'en Wen-chao had Wu Sung brought out of prison, and the imperial decree was read out loud to him in the courtroom. His cangue was then removed, and there was no way to avoid the infliction of forty strokes on the back with the heavy bamboo. He was then fastened into a seven-and-a-half catty, ironclad, round-ended cangue, and two columns of gold-colored characters were tattooed on his face, preparatory to his removal to the prison camp at Meng-chou.

After the other persons involved in the case had been sent on their way, the prefect, right there in the courtroom, stamped the necessary documents with his seal and deputed two guards to escort Wu Sung to Meng-chou and turn him over to the authorities there.

That very day Wu Sung and the two guards left Tung-p'ing prefecture and returned to his brother's house in Ch'ing-ho district. He auctioned off whatever furnishings remained in order to provide the two guards with expense money along the way.

Then he approached a neighbor, Yao the Second, and asked him to look after Ying-erh for him, saying, "If, by imperial grace, an amnesty should ever be proclaimed that would allow me to return home: Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

The neighbors in the vicinity and the prominent householders who had been on good terms with Wu the Second, knowing that he was a man of honor who had had the misfortune to suffer this punishment, all helped him out with gifts of silver, or by providing food and wine, cash, or rice.

Wu the Second then went to his own lodgings and asked his former orderlies to bring out the bundle of his personal effects. That very day they set out on their journey, leaving Ch'ing-ho district, and wending their way along the highway toward Meng-chou. The weather was that of the middle month of autumn. With regard to this trip, truly:



Wu the Second Is Condemned to Exile in Meng-chou

If one is only able, somehow,
to preserve his foolish life;
He will be happy to go hungry
for the rest of his days.¹²
There is a poem that testifies to this:

The prefect, in investigating this case,
maintained the utmost impartiality;
He was successful in rescuing Wu Sung
from the brink of death.
Though he was condemned to military exile

in a distant prison camp;
The sickly verdure recovered its health
upon exposure to the genial breeze.¹³

Wu the Second set off on his way to military exile in Meng-chou. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that his enemy had taken to the road, he felt as though: The stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground;

The blockage in his heart had been miraculously removed.

He was as happy as could be.

Thereupon he ordered his servants, Lai-wang, Lai-pao, and Lai-hsing, to tidy up and sweep clean the Hibiscus Pavilion in the rear flower garden, set up standing screens, suspend gold-colored partitions, and make all the necessary preparations for a feast. Having engaged musicians to provide: Wind and string instruments, song, and dance, for their entertainment, he invited the First Lady, Wu Yüeh-niang, the Second Lady, Li Chiao-erh, the Third Lady, Meng Yü-lou, the Fourth Lady, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the Fifth Lady, P'an Chin-lien, to join him in a party for the: Jollification of the entire family.

The wives of his household retainers, along with maidservants and waiting women, stood in attendance on either side. What were the revels like that day? Behold: Incense smolders in precious tripods;

Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.

The table service is an array of
exotic antiques from Hsiang-chou;¹⁴

The hanging blinds are adorned with
shining pearls from Ho-p'u.¹⁵ Crystal platters, Are piled high with the magic jujubes and pears
that confer immortality;

Chrysoprase goblets,
Are filled to the brim with the jade and carnelian hued
nectars of the gods.

There are deep-fried dragon livers,
And roast phoenix entrails;
Truly, one has but to use one's chopsticks
to exhaust ten thousand cash.

There are black bears' paws,
And purple dromedaries' pads;
When these are presented after the wine
their fragrance suffuses the table.

And there are also:

Tenderly steamed fragrant rice garnished with
red lotus blossoms;
And neatly sliced gray mullet large enough to
swallow an official seal;¹⁶

Bream and carp from the I and Lo rivers,
Truly, more costly than beef or lamb;¹⁷
As well as longans and litchis,
Verily, the finest fruits of the Southeast.
As the phoenix tablets are crushed,¹⁸

Foaming whitecaps of brick tea
break in white jade cups;
As the carnelian liquid is poured,
The pure bouquet of vintage wine
bursts from the golden flagon.
In fine, the sumptuousness of this repast
could put Lord Meng-ch'ang to shame;¹⁹
This feast, alone, required such wealth
as might have beggared Shih Ch'ung.²⁰

On this occasion, as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang had occupied the positions of honor, the rest of the ladies, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsiieh-o, and P'an Chin-lien, arrayed themselves on either side and the drinking began: With the raising of glasses and passing of cups;²¹

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.

Who should appear at this juncture but the page boy, Tai-an, who led into their presence a young boy and a young girl, with their hair cut straight across their foreheads, prepossessing in appearance, and carrying a pair of gift boxes.

"They're from Eunuch Director Hua's house, next door," he said. "They've brought over some flowers for the ladies to put in their hair."

The two messengers went up and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang, and the others, and then stood to one side, saying, "Our mistress has sent us over to deliver this box of pastries and some flowers for Madam Hsi-men to wear in her hair."



Hsi-men and His Harem Revel in the Hibiscus Pavilion

Yüeh-niang pulled aside the hanging blind to take a look at the gifts. One box contained stuffed, spiced, gold-colored pastries, of a kind reserved for use in the imperial palace. The other box contained newly picked fresh plantain lilies.

"I've been the occasion of putting your mistress to too much trouble once again, I fear," said Yüeh-niang, utterly delighted.

She saw to it that the two of them were offered something to eat and then gave the young girl a handkerchief and the young boy a hundred cash.

"Tell your mistress many thanks," she said, and then asked the young girl, "What's your name?"

"I'm called Hsiu-ch'un," she replied, "and the boy's called T'ien-fu." After they were gone, Yüeh-niang turned to Hsi-

men Ch'ing and said, "This lady from the Hua household next door is really nice. She's always sending her page boy and maidservant over here with gifts for me, and I'm afraid I haven't yet done anything to reciprocate."

"It hasn't even been two years," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "since Brother Hua the Second took this woman to wife. He tells me himself that she has a most accommodating disposition, otherwise she'd never consent to keep two such attractive young girls as personal maids."

"Not long ago," said Yüeh-niang, "in the sixth month, when the old gentleman of their household passed away, I met her by the graveside while attending the funeral. She is petite in stature and has a round face, delicately curved eyebrows, and a fair complexion. She seems very considerate by nature and must still be quite young, not more than twenty-three or twenty-four."

"You don't know the story," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was originally the concubine of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh when he was regent of the Northern Capital at Ta-ming prefecture, so her union with Hua Tzu-hsü is a case of remarriage, though she brought him a considerable fortune."

"The fact that she has sent over these gift boxes indicates a desire to get better acquainted," said Yüeh-niang. "We are next-door neighbors, after all. We mustn't be remiss in our social obligations. One of these days we'd better send something over there in return."

Gentle reader take note: It so happens that the maiden name of Hua Tzu-hsü's wife was Li. Because she was born on the fifteenth day of the first month, and someone had made her family a gift of a pair of fish-shaped vases on that day, her informal name was P'ing-erh, or Vase. She had formerly been a concubine in the household of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh in Ta-ming prefecture. Privy Councilor Liang was the son-in-law of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital.²² His wife was extremely jealous by nature and had beaten numbers of maidservants and concubines to death and buried them in the rear flower garden. Li P'ing-erh, consequently, resided outside the women's quarters in her husband's studio, where she had a waiting woman to look after her.

It happened that on the fifteenth day of the first month of the first year of the Cheng-ho reign period,²³ during the Lantern Festival, Privy Councilor Liang and his wife were enjoying themselves on the upper floor of the Blue Cloud Tavern, when Li K'uei slaughtered their entire household, old and young alike, during a bandit raid on Ta-ming prefecture.²⁴ Privy Councilor Liang and his wife were forced to flee for their lives. On this occasion Li P'ing-erh managed to escape the carnage, along with her waiting woman, but not before she had appropriated a necklace of one hundred large, Western Ocean²⁵ pearls and a pair of onyx gemstones weighing a good two ounces, with which she made her way to the Eastern Capital to seek refuge with relatives.

At that time Eunuch Director Hua had just been promoted from his post in the imperial palace to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan. Because his nephew, Hua Tzu-hsü, was still without a mate, he sent a matchmaker to propose a marriage, and Li P'ing-erh thus entered the household as a legitimate wife. When the old eunuch departed to take up his post in Kuang-nan, he took them with him, but after they had lived there for something over half a year, he unfortunately fell ill and petitioned the throne for permission to retire to his native place. Because he was originally from Ch'ing-ho district, it was there that he had come to live in retirement.

Now that Eunuch Director Hua had died, his entire estate fell into the hands of Hua Tzu-hsü, who made it a daily practice to frequent the licensed quarter with his friends, one of whom was Hsi-men Ch'ing. They had formed a club, of which Hsi-men Ch'ing was the senior member.

The second member was named Ying Po-chüeh, or Sponger Ying. He had started life as the son of Master Ying, the merchant, who owned a fine-silk-goods store, but once the business had come into his hands, he had lost his capital and fallen on hard times. He now made his living by squiring young rakes about the licensed quarters and picking up whatever he could along the way. He was an expert performer at kickball and knew all there was to know about such games as backgammon and elephant chess.

The third member was named Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh, whose courtesy name was Tzu-ch'un. He, too, was a profligate hanger-on as well as being an expert performer on the *p'i-p'a*. He had nothing to do every day but to haunt the licensed quarter and live off the tea and rice afforded by romance.

There were also other members with names such as Chu Jih-nien, or Sticky Chu; Sun Kua-tsui, or Blabbermouth Sun; Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu; Yün Li-shou, or Welsher Yün; Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang; Pu Chih-tao, or No-account Pu; and Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai. There were ten of them in all.²⁶ Pu Chih-tao had died recently, and Hua Tzu-hsü, or Nobody Hua, had been allowed to take his place.

Every month the ten of them met together somewhere and engaged the services of two singing girls so they could enjoy themselves: Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.

The other members of the club, observing that Hua Tzu-hsü was the profligate scion of a eunuch household and that he had: Money to spend and silver to squander,²⁷

were anything but backward in encouraging him to patronize singing girls in the licensed quarter, with the result that he often stayed out for three or five nights in a row without going home. Truly: On the purple roads spring is at its height;

In the red bowers the music is intoxicating.

How long a span of life are we allotted?

Not to enjoy it is to live in vain.²⁸

Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing and his wife and concubines enjoyed a feast in the Hibiscus Pavilion for the: Jollification of the entire family.

The party did not break up until evening. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing retired to P'an Chin-lien's quarters he was already

half drunk and, exhilarated by the wine, wanted to play at clouds and rain with her. The woman hastily lit some incense and laid out the bedding, after which they: Took off their clothes and went to bed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, however, did not proceed directly to the clouds and rain. Knowing that the woman was partial to "toying with the flute,"²⁹ he sat down inside the green gauze mosquito netting and ordered her to get down on all fours beside him. After: Lightly adjusting her golden bracelets,

she took hold of his organ with both hands and popped it into her mouth. Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Bent his head in order the better to savor,
The marvelous sight as it went in and out.
She sucked it audibly for some time, until
Their lewd excitement was redoubled.

At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing called out to Ch'un-mei to come in and bring them some tea. The woman was afraid the maidservant would see what they were up to and hastily let down the bed curtains.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Brother Hua the Second next door," he went on, "actually has two attractive young girls as maidservants in his rooms. The one who delivered the flowers today was the youngest. There is another one, as old as Ch'un-mei, whom Brother Hua the Second has already had his way with. I caught sight of her once, when she had followed her mistress to the front door, and could see that she has a good figure. Who would have thought that Brother Hua the Second, young as he is, would carry on that way in his own house?"



Hsi-men Ch'ing and His Cronies Form the Brotherhood of Ten

When the woman heard this, she gave him a look, saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! If you want to have your way with this maidservant, go ahead and take her. What need is there to: Beat around the bush; or

Point out a mountain and promise a millstone.³⁰ Why drag anyone else into it? In the first place, I'm not that sort of person; and, in the second place, she's not really my maidservant to begin with. If that's the way things stand, tomorrow I'll pay a visit to the rear compound and leave the way open for you. Just call her into the room and have your way with her. That's all there is to it."

When she had finished speaking, she went back to "toying with the flute" until Hsi-men Ch'ing ejaculated. Only then

did they go to sleep: Arm around head and thigh over thigh.
Truly:

Past mistress of the intimate arts,
she caters to her lover's whim;
How quick she is, and diligent,
to "play the purple flute."³¹

There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:

The scent of orchid and musk pervades
the gauze netting;
The delicate beauty is an old hand at
"playing the flute."
Her snow-white jade body is visible
through the bed curtains;
It's enough to make one's "ethereal and
material souls take flight."

On jade wrists she gently adjusts
golden bracelets;
Both of them are passionate,
"half drunk, half crazed."

The talented gentleman is moved
to enjoin his partner,
"Take it easy, so you can go on sucking
a little longer."³²

The next day, sure enough, the woman went to pay a visit to Meng Yü-lou's quarters in the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing called Ch'un-mei into the room and had his way with the young girl.

When spring touches the apricot and peach trees,
their new buds burst into red flower;
When the breeze plays among the willow fronds,
they are made to bend their green waists.³³

From this day on, her mistress treated her with special favor, no longer sending her to the kitchen to: Do the cooking or clean the stove,
but only asking her to serve inside her own rooms, to:

Make the beds and fold the quilts,
or to fetch tea. She presented her with some of her favorite articles of clothing and jewelry, and encouraged her to bind her feet in order to keep them delectably tiny.

It so happens that Ch'un-mei was quite unlike Ch'iu-chü. She was naturally intelligent, enjoyed repartee, was quick on the uptake, and rather good-looking. Hsi-men Ch'ing was very partial to her. Ch'iu-chü, on the other hand, was stupid and dull, and could not be relied upon to perform her tasks. She was the one who got beaten by her mistress. Truly: The swallows and sparrows round the pond

make quite a clamor with their chatter;
All appeal to humanity and righteousness
and judge each other stupid or worthy.
Though they may belong to different species,
they are alike in being birds of the air;
And yet, noble and base, high and low,
even they are not all the same.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 11

P'AN CHIN-LIEN INSTIGATES THE BEATING OF SUN HSÜEH-O; HSI-MEN CH'ING DECIDES TO DEFLOWER LI KUEI-CHIEH

When the woman, for her part,
is "as jealous as can be";
The wastrel, on his part,
"does just as he pleases."
Susceptible to "clever words
and deceptive phrases";
He cares nothing for "new loves
and old affections."
Once out the door, he
"feels the tug of red sleeves";

And finds another place to
"peddle his romantic feelings."
Each day becomes "a Cold Food
or a Lantern Festival";¹
Who will not "cater to his whims
or connive in his ruin"?²

THE STORY GOES that once P'an Chin-lien was established in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household she: Relied on his favor to become arrogant;

Transmuting the "cold" into the "hot," to such effect that, day or night, there was no longer any peace and quiet to be had. She was extremely suspicious by nature and was forever: Listening at the fence or eavesdropping by the wall, on the lookout for an excuse to make trouble. Nor was her maidservant, Ch'un-mei, any model of forbearance.

One day, as ill luck would have it, Chin-lien was upset over some insignificant matter and spoke a few intemperate words to Ch'un-mei. Ch'un-mei, having no place else to vent her spleen, went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and started: Pounding the table and banging the pans, in no mood to be trifled with.

Sun Hsüeh-o, who found this behavior annoying, twitted her sarcastically with the words, "You crazy good-for-nothing! If you're hard up for a man, go be hard up someplace else. I can do without your high-handedness around here."

When Ch'un-mei, who was still at the height of her ill-humor, heard these words, she flared up immediately.

"Just who is insinuating that I'm on the lookout for a man?" she demanded to know.

Hsüeh-o saw that she was really out of sorts and managed to keep her mouth shut. Ch'un-mei, however, took off in a huff for the front compound, where she gave Chin-lien a provocative word-for-word account of this exchange: Thus and thus, and

So and so, with a few additional details thrown in for good measure, such as, "She claimed that you connive with me to share our favors with him as a means of keeping him all to ourselves."

Chin-lien had had a bellyful. She was already feeling rather tired from having to get up earlier than usual in order to see off Wu Yüeh-niang on her way to a funeral. She took a nap and then went out to sit in the pavilion in the garden.

While she was there, who should come strolling along but Meng Yü-lou, who addressed her with an ingratiating smile, saying, "Sister, how come you're so silent and glum?"

"I don't even want to talk about it," said Chin-lien. "I'm feeling all tired out this morning. Where've you come from, Sister Three?"

"I've just paid a visit to the kitchen in the rear compound," said Meng Yü-lou.

"And what did that woman have to say to you?" asked Chin-lien.

"Sister didn't have anything to say," replied Yü-lou.

Although Chin-lien said no more about it at the time, she stored up the resentment in her heart and, henceforth, regarded Sun Hsüeh-o as her enemy. But no more of this.

The two of them did some needlework together for a while when Ch'un-mei appeared with a pot of hot water and Ch'iu-chü with two cups of tea. After finishing their tea, the two of them set out the pieces of a board game and started to play with each other.

Just as they were at a critical point in their game, the page boy, Ch'in-t'ung, whose job it was to watch the garden gate, suddenly appeared and announced, "Father has come home."

The two women made haste to put the game away, but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had already crossed the threshold of the garden, caught sight of them. They were wearing their everyday chignons enclosed in frets of silver filigree, from which two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple, pendant onyx earrings, blouses of white silk, pink vests, drawnwork skirts, and two pairs of tiny shoes, the up-turned points of which were adorned with red mandarin ducks. Each of them appeared to him to be: Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.

Without his even being aware of it, Hsi-men Ch'ing's face became wreathed in smiles, and he blurted out, "They look just like a pair of painted faces, and they'd cost a pretty penny too."

"We're no painted faces," declared Chin-lien. "But if that's what you're looking for, you can find the genuine article in the rear compound."

At this sally, Meng Yü-lou excused herself and started back toward her own quarters, but Hsi-men Ch'ing caught her with one hand and said, "Where are you off to? Do you have to leave as soon as I show up? Tell me the truth, now; when I'm not at home, what do the two of you do around here?"

"We're bored to distraction," said Chin-lien, "and were only playing a couple of rounds of a board game here. We really haven't stolen anything. How were we to know that you would turn up?"

As she spoke, she helped him off with his outer clothes and then said, "You've come back from the funeral early today."

"Most of the guests at the reception," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "were either eunuchs or official colleagues of the deceased. Moreover, the weather was hot. I couldn't stick it out, so I came home before it was over."

"Why isn't our elder sister home yet?" asked Meng Yü-lou.

"Her sedan chair has probably reached the city walls by now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already sent two servant

boys back to meet her."

When he had finished taking off his outer clothes, he sat down and asked, "What do the two of you wager when you play games together?"

"We were only playing for the fun of it," said Chin-lien. "Why should we have to wager anything?"

"Let me play a game with you," proposed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever loses will have to forfeit a tael of silver and treat the rest of us."

"But we don't have any money," said Chin-lien.

"If you don't have any money," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can pull out one of your fancy hairpins and pawn it with me. It all comes to the same thing."

Thereupon, they set up the board and the three of them played a game together. P'an Chin-lien lost. While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still counting the pieces, the woman upset the board and then ran over beside a clump of sweet-smelling daphne, leaned against an ornamental rock, and pretended to busy herself picking flowers.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing located her, he said, "All right, little oily mouth! It was you who lost the game, and now you're trying to hide over here, are you?"

When the woman saw Hsi-men Ch'ing coming, she broke into giggles, saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! It was Meng the Third who lost, but you didn't dare enforce the rules on her, but have come to bother me instead."

As she spoke, she tore the petals off the flowers in her hand and scattered them all over Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Stepping forward, Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her with both arms, pushed her up against the ornamental rock: Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue;

Mingled his sweet spittle with hers,
and began to toy with her in earnest.

At this juncture, Yü-lou appeared on the scene and called out, "Sister Six, the First Lady has arrived home. I'm going back to the rear compound."

Only then did the woman abandon Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Brother, I'll have something more to say to you later," Chin-lien said to him as she went off to accompany Yü-lou on her way back to the rear compound.

When they had paid their respects to Yüeh-niang, she asked them, "What are the two of you laughing about?"

"Today Sister Six played a board game with Father," replied Yü-lou, "and lost a tael of silver. Tomorrow she'll have to play host and invite you to join the fun."

Yüeh-niang smiled. Chin-lien, on this occasion, did no more than put in a pro forma appearance before Yüeh-niang and then head back to the front compound in order to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company. She ordered Ch'un-mei to light some incense in her room and to prepare the bathing tub and heat some bath water so that that evening she and Hsi-men Ch'ing could: Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water.³

Gentle reader take note: Although Wu Yüeh-niang was the First Lady of the house and occupied the master suite, she was sick so much of the time that she hadn't been able to take effective charge of household affairs. All she really did was to go out and pay the social calls that propriety demanded. The household expenditures and receipts were all in the hands of the excourtesan, Li Chiao-erh. Sun Hsüeh-o was in charge of the wives of the household retainers who worked in the kitchen, and it was her responsibility to supply the needed food and drink to the separate quarters of the various residents. For example, if Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in one of his concubine's quarters and needed anything to eat or drink, or a particular kind of soup, it was Hsüeh-o's responsibility to see that it was duly prepared, and the maidservants from the rooms in question would come to fetch it. But no more of this.

That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in Chin-lien's quarters where they drank wine for a while, and then, when they had finished bathing, went to bed.

The next day was one of those occasions on which: Something was destined to happen. Hsi-men Ch'ing had promised Chin-lien that he would visit the fair at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak and buy some pearls for her to make into a headband. For this reason he rose early and expressed a desire for some lotus-blossom cakes and pickled fish and vermicelli soup for breakfast. As soon as he got up he asked Ch'un-mei to go to the kitchen and order these things for him, but she refused to budge.

"Don't send her back there," said Chin-lien. "There's someone there who goes around saying that I encourage her to connive with me in sharing your favors as a means of keeping you all to ourselves. She's forever: Pointing at the pig but cursing the dog,⁴

and abusing the two of us every way she knows how. What would you want to send her back there for?"

"Who is it that says that sort of thing or abuses her?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know. "Tell me who it is."

"What's the point of talking about it?" said Chin-lien.

"Even basins and jugs have ears."⁵

Just don't send her back there, but send Ch'iu-chü instead, that's all."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, therefore, called in Ch'iu-chü and told her to go back to the kitchen and give Hsüeh-o his instructions. Enough time went by in which to eat two meals; the woman had already set the table, but still no food was forthcoming. By this time Hsi-men Ch'ing was getting very hot and bothered.

When the woman saw that Ch'iu-chü had not returned she turned to Ch'un-mei and said, "You go back there and see what's going on. That slave still hasn't come back. She must have: Taken root and sent up sprouts, by now."

Ch'un-mei was rather out of sorts to begin with and marched off to the kitchen in a huff.

When she saw that Ch'iu-chü was still waiting for the food, she started to curse at her, saying, "You lousy, sleepy-eyed slave! Mother's going to beat the legs right off you! 'Why haven't you come back?' she'd like to know. Father's being kept waiting. As soon as he's eaten he wants to go to the temple fair. There he is up front, anxious to be on his way, and getting increasingly hot and bothered. I've been sent to see if I can drag you back with me."

If Sun Hsüeh-o had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, she became enraged and started to curse, saying, "You crazy little whore! You may think I'm like: The Mohammedan bowing to Mecca;⁶

So whoever shows up gets a bow.

But:

The saucepan is beaten out of iron;

Things take a little time to make.

The congee I had already prepared, he doesn't want to eat. Instead, all of a sudden, he comes up with a brand new idea, and expects me to start grilling cakes and making soup. How was I supposed to know what he wanted? After all, I'm not a: Tapeworm in his belly."⁷

Ch'un-mei was incensed at her cursing and responded, "Stop talking through your cunt! If the master hadn't ordered us to come for it, who would have dared to demand anything of you? Whether you come up with it or not, we're going back up front and report. Why make such a fuss about it?"

Taking hold of Ch'iu-chü by the ear, she set off toward the front compound.

"Like mistress, like slave," muttered Hsüeh-o. "Do you think you can carry on so high-handedly, and remain in favor, forever?"

"If you've got the favor,

You might as well flaunt it,"

said Ch'un-mei. "I wouldn't sell the two of us short if I were you."

Thereupon, she marched off in a fit of high dudgeon.

When Chin-lien saw her come in the door, her face waxen with rage, dragging Ch'iu-chü behind her, she asked, "What's the matter?"

"Why don't you ask her?" said Ch'un-mei. "When I went, she was still mooning around in the kitchen, waiting, while the other one: Just as slow and easy as you please, had only started to knead the dough. Although I probably shouldn't have, I said, 'Father's up front waiting, and Mother wants to know why you haven't come back yet. She's sent me here to get you.' Whereupon that insignificant harlot started to curse me, calling me 'slave' a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. She said, 'Father seems to think I'm like: The Mohammedan bowing to Mecca;

So whoever shows up gets a bow.

Someone must have been putting ideas in his head. The congee I had already prepared, he doesn't want to eat. Instead, out of the blue, he comes up with a brand new idea, and calls for cakes and soup.' She was so busy with her cursing in the kitchen that she couldn't get around to the cooking."

"Just as I said," interjected the woman, "you shouldn't have sent her back there. As long as someone's so ill-disposed toward her, and claims that she and I are keeping you all to ourselves here in our quarters, she's bound to get nothing but abuse for her pains."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he became enraged. Marching back to the kitchen:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he kicked Hsüeh-o several times and cursed her, saying, "You lousy, splay-legged whore! When I sent her here to ask after the cakes, what did you curse her for? You called her a slave, did you? Why don't you: Piddle a bladderful of piss, and

Take a good look at yourself?"⁸

Hsüeh-o had to suffer Hsi-men Ch'ing's kicking and abuse, but:

Though she dared to be angry,

She dared not speak.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly gone out the kitchen door when Hsüeh-o turned to the wife of the head servant, Lai-chao, whose nickname was "The Beanpole," and said, "This must be my unlucky day! It's a good thing you were here to see it. I didn't say anything to her. She came marching in here like an avenging spirit: Making all kinds of threatening noises, and dragging the other maidservant away. Then she went:

Talebearing and embroidering on the facts,⁹

in front of the master, so that he came storming in here and abused me this way for no reason at all. I'm going to keep my eyes peeled from now on. The two of them are like mistress, like slave. Do they think they can carry on so high-handedly forever? They'll come a cropper if they don't watch out."

Unbeknownst to her, Hsi-men Ch'ing had overheard everything she said.

He came back in and struck her several additional blows with his fist, cursing as he did so, "You lousy slave of a whore! And you still claim you weren't abusive to her, when I've heard you cursing her with my own ears?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing beat her until:

The pain was difficult to bear,

and then went back to the front compound. Hsüeh-o was left in the kitchen with the tears running down her face. Convulsed with sobs, she began to cry out loud.

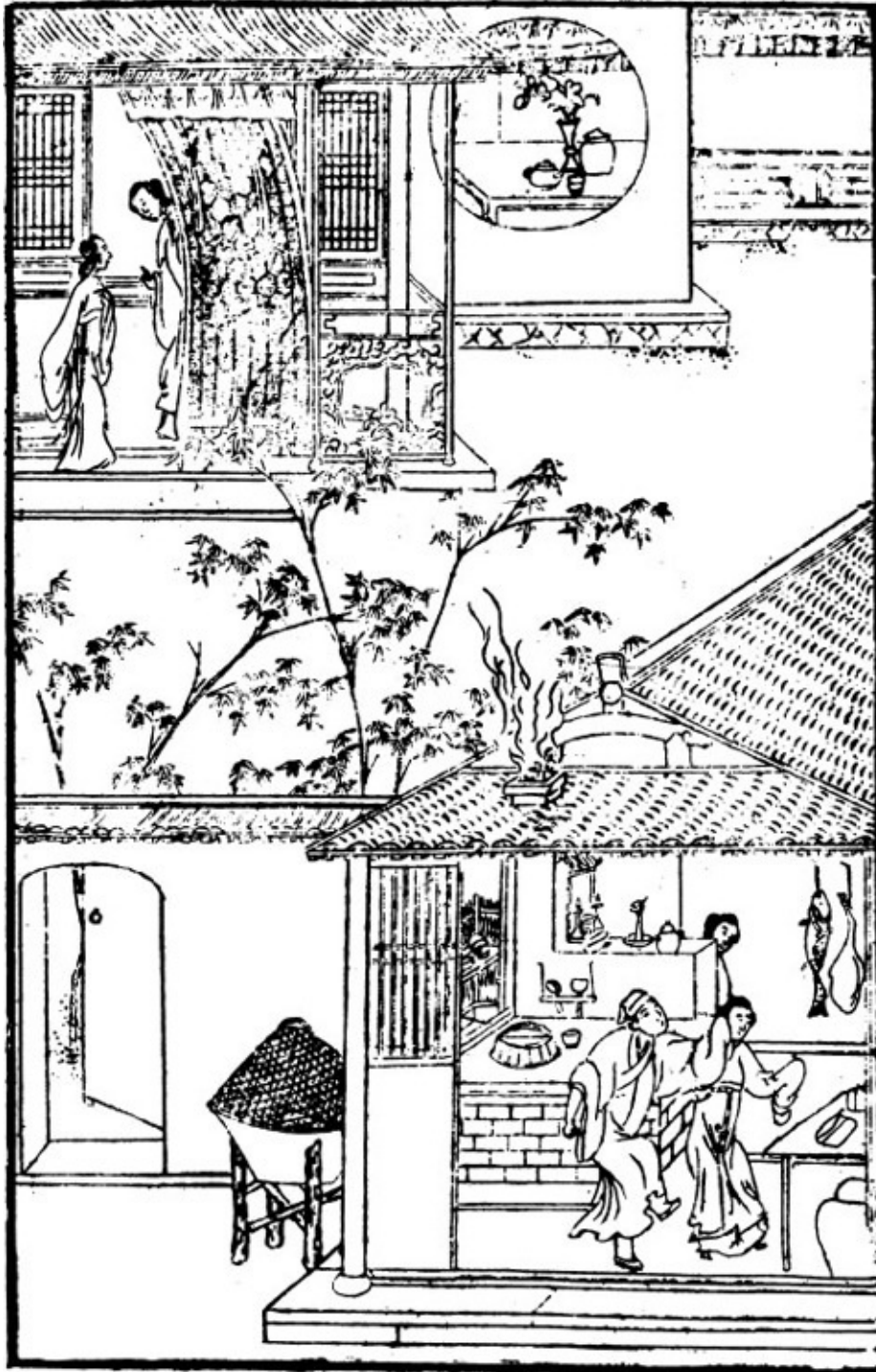
Wu Yüeh-niang had just gotten up and was in the master bedroom combing her hair.

"What's the ruckus in the kitchen all about?" she asked Hsiao-yü.

Hsiao-yü came back and reported, "Father wanted some cakes to eat before going to the temple fair. They say the lady in the kitchen was cursing at Ch'un-mei, from the Fifth Lady's quarters, when Father overheard her and gave her a few kicks. That's why she's started to cry."

"I don't remember his ever asking for cakes before," said Yüeh-niang. "But all she needed to do was to make them up as fast as she could and send him on his way. What need was there for her to curse the maidservant from the other quarters?"

Thereupon, she sent Hsiao-yü to the kitchen to urge Hsiieh-o and the servants' wives to hurry up with the preparation of the soup. Hsi-men Ch'ing finally ate his breakfast, mounted his horse, and set off for the temple, accompanied by one of his page boys. But no more of this.



Sun Hsüeh-o couldn't get over her resentment at what had happened, so she went into Yüeh-niang's room and started telling her about it. But she didn't realize that Chin-lien had stolen up outside and was standing by the window, eavesdropping.

Chin-lien saw that Hsüeh-o was inside the room and overheard her saying to Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh, "She's got him completely monopolized. Behind your back: There's nothing she won't do."¹⁰ Mother, you don't know that whore. When you get right down to it, she's more insatiable than any mere adulteress. She can't stand to go even a single night without a man. She's always up to something behind your back.

Things no one else would do;
She can bring herself to do."¹¹

Originally, when she was living in her own home, she poisoned her husband to death. And now that she's here, she's trying her best to bury the rest of us alive. She's turned our husband into an angry fighting cock who glares at us as though he doesn't even see us."

"I don't remember your ever acting this way before," said Yüeh-niang. "If he sent a maidservant from the front compound to ask for cakes, all you needed to do was to make them up as best you could and send him on his way. What need was there for you to start cursing her for no good reason?"

"I'll call her bald or blind if I like!" retorted Hsüeh-o. "Just a little while ago, when that maidservant worked for you, if she refused to do as she was told when I was on duty in the kitchen, I would give her a smack with the back of a knife. And you didn't say anything about it. But now that she's fallen into the hands of that other one, she's started to carry on as though she owns the place."

While they were still talking, Hsiao-yü came in and said, "The Fifth Lady is outside."

A minute later, Chin-lien came into the room and said to Hsüeh-o, "If I really did do in my former husband, you had no business allowing your husband to bring me into the household in the first place. That way I could never have monopolized him or taken your place away from you. As for Ch'un-mei, she wasn't even my own maid to begin with. If you're so angry about it, all you have to do is make her go back to serving the First Lady. That way if you want to quarrel with her, I won't get dragged into it. No one feels good about losing a husband and having to marry another, but, right now, there's really nothing difficult about it. Just wait till he gets home and have him give me a writ of divorce. I'll go, and that will be the end of it."

"I don't know what's at the bottom of all this," said Yüeh-niang, "but it would help if the two of you would be a little more sparing of words."

"Just look at her, Mother," protested Hsüeh-o:

"Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate."¹²

Nobody can get the better of her. And she's always wagging her tongue in front of our husband, turning him against us, so he scarcely recognizes us any more."

"If you had your way," she continued, turning to Chin-lien, "except for Mother, the rest of us would all be driven away, so you'd be the only one left."

Wu Yüeh-niang just sat there and let the two of them continue to trade insults, without saying a word. It didn't take long for it to heat up even further.

"You may call me a slave," said Hsüeh-o, "but it's you who are the real slave."

They were on the verge of coming to blows when Yüeh-niang decided she had had enough of it and told Hsiao-yü to drag Hsüeh-o back to the kitchen.

P'an Chin-lien, for her part, went straight back to her quarters, where she:

Took off her fancy attire,
Washed away her makeup,
Let loose her raven locks, and
Left her flowery countenance in disarray.

She wept until:

Her two eyes were the color of peaches,
and threw herself down on her bed.

When the sun began to set in the west, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from the temple fair, carrying four ounces of pearls in his sleeve. No sooner did he enter her room and see the state she was in than he asked, "What's the matter?"

The woman started to cry out loud, demanding a writ of divorce from Hsi-men Ch'ing and pouring out, thus and so, the entire story.

"I certainly never loved you just for your money, and now that I've joined my fate to yours, how can you let anyone abuse me so? She said I had done in my husband, a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. What's it to me if I: Pick up something that I already have, or

Lose something that never belonged to me?

If I have to do without a maidservant, so be it. What do I want with a maid from someone else's quarters to wait on me, if I have to take all this abuse for it? I've got one shadow too many as it is."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them: The spirits of his Three Corpses¹³ became agitated; The breaths of his Five Viscera¹⁴ ascended to Heaven.¹⁵

Like a whirlwind he descended upon the kitchen, seized Hsüeh-o by the hair, and proceeded to beat her with a short stick as hard as he could.

Luckily for her, Wu Yüeh-niang intervened, grabbing him by the hand and saying, "Why doesn't everyone take things a little easier? You're just upsetting the master of the house."

"You lousy, splay-legged whore!" exploded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I heard you cursing in the kitchen with my own ears, and you're still trying to drag other people into it. If I don't beat your bottom right off for you, I might as well forget it."

Gentle reader take note: As a direct result of the beating of Sun Hsüeh-o this day, P'an Chin-lien would find that: Though her deeds were done in the past,

The chickens would come home to roost.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Chin-lien, by relying on her husband's favor,
could count on his support;
But, in so doing, she aroused the deepest enmity
in Sun Hsüeh-o.
It has always been true that gratitude for kindness
and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand or ten thousand years
will never be allowed to gather dust.¹⁶

On this occasion, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had beaten Hsüeh-o, he returned to the front compound and endeavored to mollify Chin-lien. He brought out from his sleeve the four ounces of pearls that he had bought at the temple fair that day and gave them to her to make into a headband. When the woman saw that her husband had taken action on her behalf and thereby enabled her to vent her spleen, there was no reason for her to be anything but delighted. From this time on: Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold,¹⁷ and the favor shown her was even greater than it had been before.

One day thereafter, she fulfilled her obligation by giving a little party in the garden to which she invited only Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, so the four of them could have a drink together.

To make a long story short, Hsi-men Ch'ing had formed a club, the membership of which consisted of ten friends, who met together once a month for a drinking party.¹⁸

The first of them was named Ying Po-chüeh, or Sponger Ying. He was the decadent scion of what had once been a substantial family, but had managed to completely squander his patrimony, and now made his living by squiring wealthy young rakes about the licensed quarters and picking up whatever he could along the way. His nickname was Beggar Ying.

The second was named Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh. He had inherited the right to a position as a battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard, but, having lost his parents while still a child, had become: A dedicated idler, devoted to his leisure.¹⁹

He was an expert performer at kickball and also liked to gamble. Having abandoned his prospects of a career, he was now a confirmed hanger-on.

The third was named Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu. He had been a yin-yang master on the staff of the district yamen, but had been removed from his post for cause. He now made his living by hanging around in front of the yamen and acting as a guarantor for loans to the local officials and functionaries. This was how he had become acquainted with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The fourth was named Sun T'ien-hua, whose nickname was Sun Kua-tsui, or Blabbermouth Sun. He was more than fifty years old and specialized in talking his way into the brothels in the licensed quarter without purchasing their wares.²⁰ He made himself useful to the singing girls by: Delivering letters and passing notes, or helping them to attract customers, thus depending for his living on the emoluments of romance.

The fifth, who was the younger brother of Assistant Regional Commander Yün, was named Yün Li-shou, or Welsher Yün.

The sixth, who was the nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, was named Hua Tzu-hsü, or Nobody Hua.

The seventh was named Chu Jih-nien, or Sticky Chu.

The eighth was named Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang.

The ninth was named Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai.

Together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, they made ten in all. The other members of the club, out of consideration for Hsi-men Ch'ing's supply of ready cash, insisted on his taking the position of senior member. Every month they met together somewhere for a drinking party, at which they took turns playing host.

One day it was the turn of Hua Tzu-hsü to convene the club at his home, which was right next door to that of Hsi-men Ch'ing. As befitted the household of a eunuch, everything was done on a lavish scale, with: Large platters and large bowls.

The others had already arrived, but Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy that day, and by midafternoon had still failed to show up, though they were careful to keep a place for him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing finally arrived, he was immaculately dressed and accompanied by four page boys. The whole company got up from their seats to welcome him. When they had finished with the social amenities, the host sat down in the appropriate place and Hsi-men Ch'ing took the seat of honor. A performer with a painted face and two other singing girls were there to entertain them, playing a *p'i-p'a*, a psaltery, and a mandola, and singing in front of the gathering. Truly, words are inadequate to describe: The graceful beauty of the denizens of the Pear Garden;²¹

Whose beauty and talent both approached perfection.

Behold:

Their silk garments are like drifts of snow;

Their jeweled chignons are like storeyed clouds.

They have cherry mouths, apricotlike faces,
 and peach-colored cheeks;
 They possess willow waists, orchidaceous hearts,
 and epidendronlike natures.
 The sound of their singing is melodious;
 Their voices are like the warbling of orioles
 as they sport upon the branch.
 The style of their dancing is fastidious;
 Their postures resemble the pacing of phoenixes
 as they move among the flowers.
 Their tunes adhere to classic standards;
 Their music has the air of spontaneity.
 Their dancing waylays the bright moon
 into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in;
 Their singing diverts the moving clouds
 into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u.
 High or low, allegro or andante,
 they adhere to the appropriate modes;
 Spitting out jade and expectorating pearls.
 Light or heavy, scherzando or legato,
 they follow the prescribed melodies;
 Like plangent metal or tinkling jade.
 The bridges on the psaltery are ranged like wild geese;
 making each note distinct.
 The wood of the clappers is inlaid with red ivory;
 so every beat sounds new.²²

After a little while, when:

Three rounds of wine had been consumed; and
 Two suites of songs had been performed,
 the three singing girls laid aside their instruments, came forward, and:
 Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
 Sent the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,

as they kowtowed to the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for his page boy, Tai-an, and instructed him to take three sealed gift packets out of his letter case. There were two mace for each of them. After they had kowtowed once again to express their gratitude, they withdrew.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked his host, Hua Tzu-hsü, "What's the name of this girl? She can really sing!"

Before his host could reply, Ying Po-chüeh interjected, "You're certainly becoming rather forgetful not to recognize her, sir. The one who was playing the psaltery is Brother Hua the Second's sweetheart, Wu Yin-erh, or Silver, from the back alley in the licensed quarter. The one who was playing the mandola is Greenhorn Chu's daughter, Chu Ai-ai, or Love. And this one who was playing the *p'ï-p'a* is the daughter of Auntie Li the Third, from Second Street. She's the younger sister of Li Kuei-ch'ing and her informal name is Kuei-chieh, or Cassia. Since her paternal aunt is a member of your household, how can you pretend not to know her?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "It's been six years since I saw her last, and she's grown up to be a woman already."

A little later, when they had run out of wine, the girls came out to replenish their drinks, and Kuei-chieh performed her task most ingratiatingly, engaging them in flirtatious conversation as she did so.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her, "What are Auntie Three and your sister, Kuei-ch'ing, doing at home these days? Why haven't they paid me a visit recently, or come to see your aunt?"

"My mother's been in bad shape since last year," said Kuei-chieh. One of her legs is partially paralyzed to this day, so she can't even walk without someone to lean on. My elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, has been engaged by a merchant from the Huai region for the last six months. He's always taking her off to stay with him in his inn, and he won't let her come home for two or three days at a time. There's hardly anyone to be relied on at home these days. My mother is completely dependent on me to come out and sing every day, helping to entertain the few gentlemen that we're acquainted with. It's a hard life. We simply haven't had the time to pay a visit at your house, or look in on my aunt. How is it, Father, that you haven't been inside the quarter for such a long time? And why haven't you let my aunt come home to visit with my mother?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that her manner was congenial and her conversation clever and sprightly, he felt himself rather attracted to her.

"If I arranged with two of my friends to escort you back to your place today," he asked, "how would that be with you?"

"Don't joke with me, Father," said Kuei-chieh. "How could:

Such distinguished feet tread on such humble ground?"²³

"I'm not joking," said Hsi-men Ch'ing; and he actually reached into his sleeve, pulled out his handkerchief, along with a toothpick and a box of breath-sweetening lozenges, and gave them to Kuei-chieh as a pledge.

“When do you plan to leave?” asked Kuei-chieh. “I ought to send the servant back home right away, to let them know, so they’ll be able to make some preparations.”

“As soon as the party breaks up,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “we can set out together.”

Not long thereafter, when they had finished passing around the wine, it was lamplighting time and the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch’ing invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him, and, without even bothering to go home, they set out, on horse and mule back, to accompany Kuei-chieh into the licensed quarter, to the Li family establishment. Truly: Into the brocaded nest,

It is not nearly as good to venture
as it is to stay away;

Into the red floss noose,

It is easy enough to stick your head
but hard to extricate it.²⁴

There is a song to the tune “The Water Nymphs” that testifies to this:

A human pitfall, secretly constructed,
like an underground dugout;
A circean cave, as artfully designed
as a penitentiary;
A charnel house, openly laid out
like a butcher shop;
Its sole purpose is to love you to death
while devouring you alive.
On its signboard you will find written
in large characters:
“For the cost of his entertainment
the patron will receive no discount;

For the expenses incurred
the madam alone will accept payment;
For the price of their favors
the girls will not extend credit."²⁵

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and the others had escorted Li Kuei-chieh's sedan chair to the door of her establishment, Li Kuei-ch'ing came out to meet them and ushered them into the main room. After they had finished with the appropriate amenities, they invited her old mother to come out so they could pay their respects. Before long, the old procuress made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, for she suffered from partial paralysis on one side of her body.

When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing she saluted him with the words, "My Heavens! It's my distinguished kinsman. What wind has blown you this way?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "I've been so busy recently I haven't been able to stop by. I hope you won't take it amiss."

"And who may these two gentlemen be?" asked the procuress.

"They're two good friends of mine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta. We had a meeting of our club at the Hua residence today and ran into Kuei-chieh there, so we decided to see her home together. Bring on the wine. We'd be happy to have three cups with you."

The procuress asked her three guests to be seated at the upper end of the room while she busied herself with seeing that tea was served, a dining table wiped off, and wine and delicacies prepared. In a little while a servant came in with the table, the lamps and candles were lit, and an array of wine and foodstuffs appeared.

Kuei-chieh returned to her room and changed her clothes before coming back out to help entertain them. It was truly:
A nest of breezes and moonlight;

A lair of orioles and flowers.

There was nothing for it for the two sisters but to:

Fill their golden goblets to the brim; and

Tune their jade mandolas to one melody,

as they sang and served the wine. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Inside glass goblets,
The amber fluid is rich.
From the small press the wine drips
in pearls of red.

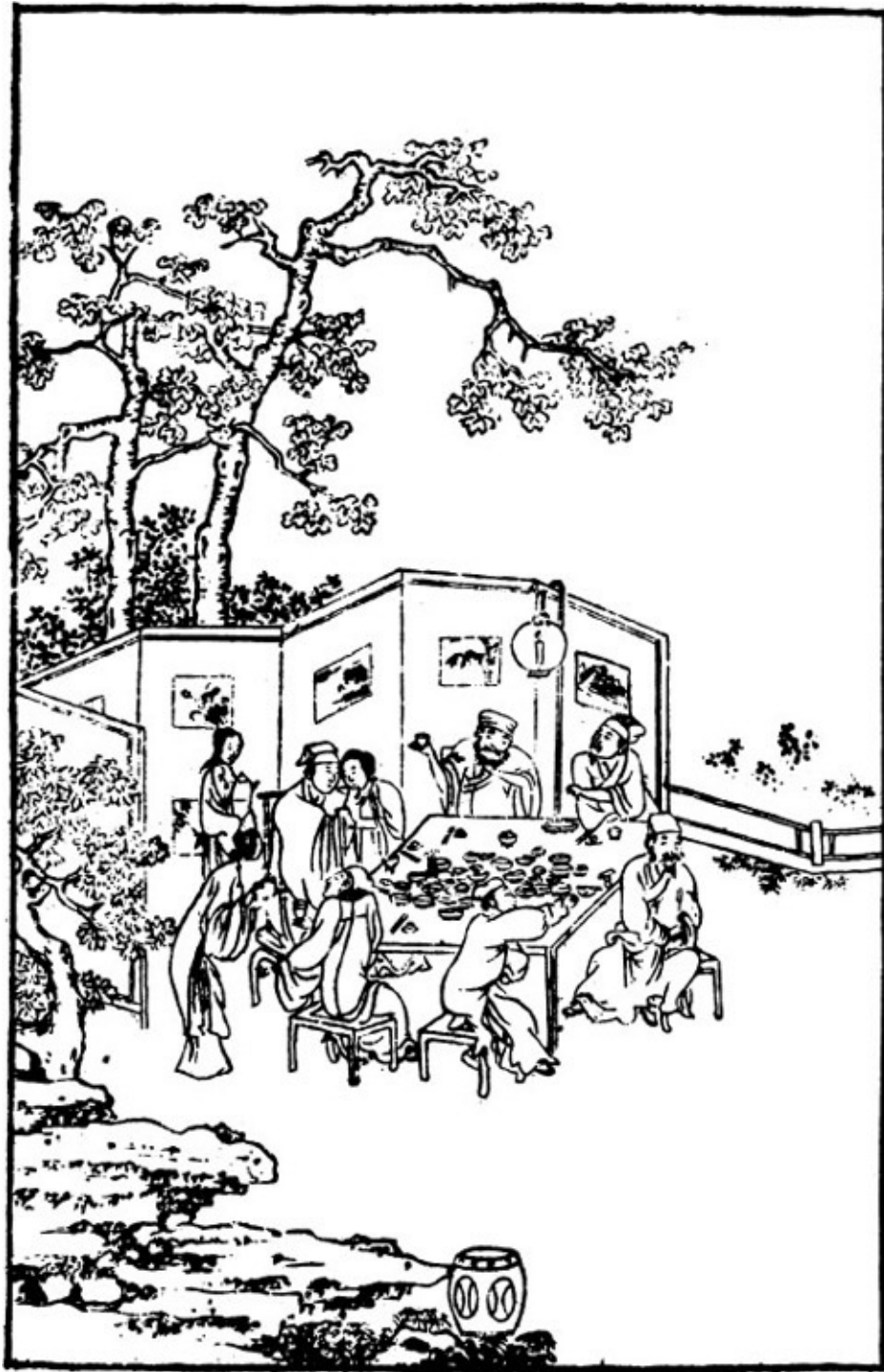
Frying dragons and roasting phoenixes
weep jade fat.

Silk screens and embroidered curtains
contain the perfumed air.
Blow dragon flutes!
Beat alligator drums!
Let white teeth sing!
Slender waists dance!
All the more, since verdant spring
must not be spent in vain,
And silver lamps reflect the voices
of alluring damsels.
No wine now wets the earth
of Liu Ling's ²⁶ tomb. ²⁷

On this occasion, Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh sang a suite of songs together, while at the table the guests were having such a good time that: Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter. ²⁸

Turning to Kuei-ch'ing, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Since the two of you are both here today, and I've heard for a long time what an accomplished performer of southern melodies Kuei-chieh has become, why not ask her to sing us a song, as a means of encouraging our two guests to have another cup of wine? What do you think?"

"We really oughtn't to put her to the trouble," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but are prepared to wash our ears in hopes of hearing a superb performance."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Decides to Deflower Li Kuei-chieh

Kuei-chieh simply sat there with a smile on her face for some time, without making a move.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gotten the idea into his head that he might like to deflower Kuei-chieh, and that was why he had first expressed a desire to hear her sing a solo. This fact did not escape the practiced eyes of the denizens of the quarter, who: Knew a ghost when they saw one, and had already guessed 80 or 90 percent of what was afoot.

Li Kuei-ch'ing, who was sitting by her side, was the first to speak, saying, "I'm afraid our Kuei-chieh has been spoiled ever since she was a child. She's always been rather shy, by nature, and doesn't like to sing for people on a merely casual basis."

At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for his page boy, Tai-an, drew a five-tael ingot of silver out of his letter case, and placed it on the table, saying, "This doesn't amount to anything, but may help to defray the cost of Kuei-chieh's makeup for the time being. On another day I'll send over a few sets of brocade clothing for her."

Kuei-chieh hastily rose to her feet and expressed her thanks, after which a maidservant was directed to put the money away, on the one hand, while on the other, a small table was placed out for her, and Kuei-chieh was invited to leave her place at the main table and sing for them.

Thereupon, Kuei-chieh:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily;
Lightly raising her silken sleeves,
Setting her beige skirt in motion,
and with a pink, tasseled handkerchief, decorated with a motif of:
Fallen blossoms on flowing water,
dangling from the mouth of her sleeve, sang a song to the tune "Stopping the Clouds in Flight:"

Though her demeanor is nonchalant,
She has outdone every rival in the quarter
to take top billing.
Her every move is escorted by a fragrant breeze,
And never fails to elicit respect.
Ch'a!
She is a piece of jade sullied in the muck;
Hardly run of the mill.
With a single, unaccompanied song,
She takes her audience by storm.

Just like the epiphany
in King Hsiang's dream.²⁹
Just like the epiphany,
in King Hsiang's dream.³⁰

By the time she had finished her song, Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted he scarcely knew what to do with himself. He ordered Tai-an to take the horse home with him, and that evening he spent the night in Li Kuei-ch'ing's room. Merely because Hsi-men Ch'ing felt an inclination to deflower this girl, and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were on the spot to aid and abet him in this enterprise, he took the bait.

The next day he sent a page boy to his house to fetch fifty taels of silver and also to a silk goods store to buy four sets of clothing, explaining that he planned to deflower Li Kuei-chieh. When Li Chiao-erh heard that it was her own niece, from her old establishment, that he was planning to deflower, how could she have been anything but delighted? She promptly produced a silver ingot of fifty taels weight and gave it to Tai-an to deliver to the licensed quarter.

A set of jewelry was made up, clothing was tailored, tables of food were ordered, and with: Wind and string instruments, song and dance;

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
there were three days of nuptial festivities. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta also persuaded Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, and Cadger Ch'ang to come up with five candareens each, in the way of a gift, when they came to offer their congratulations. Every last thing, including the bedding, was paid for by Hsi-men Ch'ing. Day after day they regaled themselves in the licensed quarter with: Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.
But no more of this.

Amid dancers' skirts and singers' clappers
he is forever seeking novelty;
But when all the yellow gold is spent
nothing but his body remains.
A word of advice to wealthy young men:
"Don't spend it all too fast;
The practice of economy is like good medicine,
for it can cure poverty."³¹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 12

P'AN CHIN-LIEN SUFFERS IGNOMINY FOR ADULTERY WITH A SERVANT; STARGAZER LIU PURVEYS BLACK MAGIC IN PURSUIT OF GAIN

How laughable is the parvenu Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Whoever possesses money is welcomed as a patron.
His whole household is in a state of disorder;
Who cares about standards of decency or propriety?
His days are spent consorting with boon companions;
His nights devoted to sleeping with a painted woman.
Though this may not be a long-lived relationship;
It still counts as "a fling in the spring breeze."¹

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing was so infatuated by Li Kuei-chieh's beauty that he lingered in the licensed quarter for nearly half a month, without going home. Wu Yüeh-niang sent a servant with his horse to bring him home on numerous occasions, but the proprietors of the Li family establishment even hid his clothes and hat, so reluctant were they to let him leave the premises. As a result, the women in his household were all left at loose ends.

This might have been tolerated by the rest of them, but as for P'an Chin-lien:

She was still in the springtime of her youth,
not thirty years old;
The flames of her desire could not be banked,²
but flared up ten feet high.

Every day, without fail, she and Meng Yü-lou would make their way to the front gate, looking as though they were: Modeled in plaster, carved of jade;

Displaying white teeth and red lips,
and lean against the doorjamb as they gazed out into the street, often remaining there until dusk.

In the evening when Chin-lien returned to her room she found that:

On her glossy pillow, amid deserted bed curtains,
There was no companion on the Phoenix Terrace.³

Unable to sleep, she would wander into the garden where she:

Gently paced the flower-strewn moss, and
Watched the moon bobbing beneath the water;

fearful lest Hsi-men Ch'ing's:

Heart should prove as difficult to capture.
She objected to the lovemaking of the tortoiseshell cats,
For the tumult it engendered in her fragrant heart.

At the time when Meng Yü-lou had entered the household she had brought with her a page boy named Ch'in-t'ung, who was about fifteen years old and had just begun to wear his hair in adult style. He was: Bright-eyed and clean-cut, as well as being:

Artful and accomplished.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had entrusted the keys of the garden to him and made him responsible for keeping it properly swept. At night he slept in a small side chamber just outside the garden gate.

During the day, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou often met in the pavilion in the garden and did needlework together, or played board games with each other. This page boy was adept at performing little favors and, when he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived home, was in the habit of coming to let the women know before telling anybody else. For this reason Chin-lien was fond of him and often invited him into her room and treated him to a drink of wine. As a result, the two of them: Morning after morning and evening after evening;

Exchanged looks with eyes and eyebrows,⁴
until they both began to get ideas.

It happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month was approaching. When Wu Yüeh-niang realized that he was still in the licensed quarter, so enamored of the mist and flowers that he had no thought of return, she sent the page boy, Tai-an, to take his horse to the Li establishment and try to bring him back home.

P'an Chin-lien secretly addressed a note to him and gave it to Tai-an, with the injunction, "Slip this to your father inconspicuously, and tell him, 'The Fifth Lady hopes you'll come home as soon as possible.' "

Tai-an did not dare to be remiss, but mounted the horse and proceeded straight to the Li family establishment in the licensed quarter. What should he see when he got there but Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, Blabbermouth Sun, and Cadger Ch'ang, the whole bunch of them in fact, keeping Hsi-men Ch'ing company as he embraced his painted lady: Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade;

Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Tai-an had arrived, he asked, "What have you come for? Is everything all right at

home?"

"Everything's all right at home," replied Tai-an.

"Tell Uncle Fu the Second to try to collect those unpaid bills that are still outstanding in the shop up front," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll look over the accounts when I get home."

"The last few days Uncle Fu the Second has collected quite a few of them," said Tai-an. "He'll present the accounts when you get home."

"Did you bring that outfit for your Aunt Kuei-chieh?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I've got it right here," replied Tai-an.

He then reached into his felt bag, drew out a red blouse with a blue skirt to match, and handed them to Kuei-chieh. Kuei-chieh and Kuei-ch'ing both bowed to express their thanks, and the present was put away. After which, they made haste to give orders that Tai-an should be properly entertained with food and wine in the servants' quarters.

As soon as the page boy had finished his food and wine he came back into the main room to await his instructions, and he took advantage of the occasion to approach Hsi-men Ch'ing and: Whisper into his ear in a low voice,⁵
"The Fifth Lady at home asked me to deliver this note. She hopes you'll come home as soon as possible."

Just as Hsi-men Ch'ing was reaching out his hand to take it, Li Kuei-chieh caught sight of the transaction and, assuming it to be a love letter from some prostitute in the front sector of the quarter, snatched it out of his hands and tore it open to see for herself. It turned out to be a sheet of fancy note paper with a diapered border, on which there were a few lines of handwriting. Kuei-chieh handed it to Sticky Chu and asked him to read it out loud to her.

Sticky Chu saw that the missive was in the form of a pair of songs to the tune "The Wind Scatters the Plum Blossoms" and proceeded to declaim them to the company, as follows: Yearning for him at twilight,

Longing for him by day;
I've tired myself out waiting,
but my lover doesn't come.
Solely on his account, only for his sake,
I've worn myself to a frazzle.
Alas, beneath my brocade coverlet,
I sleep alone.⁶

The lamp is guttering out,
Everyone else is asleep;
All that remains, peeping through my window,
is the bright moon.
Sleeping alone, even if my heart
were hard as iron;
How could it endure the desolation
of this night?⁷

The note was signed:

Respectfully,

Your favorite, P'an the Sixth

When Kuei-chieh heard the contents of this missive, she left the table, went back to her room, threw herself down on the bed, and lay there with her face to the wall.

To resume our story, as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that Kuei-chieh was upset, he took the note and tore it to shreds and then, in front of everybody, kicked Tai-an twice with his booted foot. He also sent someone twice to ask Kuei-chieh to return, but she did not come back. Hsi-men Ch'ing was so flummoxed by this that he made his way back to her room himself and carried her out to rejoin the party.

Upon his return he said to Tai-an, "I order you to take the horse and go home. If any whore at my place sends you here again, no matter who it is, when I get back I'll beat her to a stinking pulp!"

Tai-an returned home in tears, but we will say no more of that.

"Kuei-chieh," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there's no need to be so upset. This note is not from anyone else, it's only from the fifth concubine back at my place, asking me to go home because there's something she needs to take up with me. That's all there is to it."

Sticky Chu continued the joke, saying, "Kuei-chieh, don't you believe him. He's only trying to fool you. This P'an the Sixth is really a prostitute from another part of the quarter that he's recently taken up with. She's a real looker. You shouldn't let him off the hook."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and pretended to hit him, saying, "You goddamned louse! All you ever do is plague people to death. She's giving me enough trouble as it is without you and your nonsense on top of everything else."

"It's you who are in the wrong, brother-in-law," said Li Kuei-ch'ing. "As long as you have people at home to keep you in line, what need is there for you to deflower a painted woman in the first place? You might as well stick to the ones you've already got, period. How long have the two of you been together, after all, that you should already be prepared to abandon her?"

"You've got a point there," interjected Sponger Ying. "Sir," he continued, turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you'll only take my advice, you won't have to go home, on the one hand, and Kuei-chieh won't have to be upset, on the other. From this day on, let's agree that if anyone gets into such a spat again, each of the culprits will have to forfeit two taels of silver and buy meat and wine to treat the rest of us."

And sure enough, the four or five boon companions at the table:

The talkers talking,
The jokers joking;
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits,

Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine, finally succeeded in mollifying Kuei-chieh. Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her and sat her on his lap with an ingratiating smile, while the two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them as they drank.

Before long, seven cups of tea were brought in on a vermilion tray of bright red lacquer. The teacups were the color of snowy linen, the teaspoons were in the shape of apricot leaves, and the tea itself, which was flavored with marinated bamboo shoots, sesame seeds, and osmanthus, was of a bewitching fragrance.

When a cup had been placed in front of each of them, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I know a song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the virtues of tea: The tender leaves,

Of this high-grade tea,
Are nourished by the spring breeze.
Though, if neglected, they will wither away;
The slightest infusion brings out their true colors.
Incomparable, extraordinary;
Hard to depict or to describe;
Often savored in the mouth;
When drunk, you long for them;
When sober, you adore them;
But a single armful will cost you a bundle.⁸

Tagalong Hsieh laughed, saying, "If the Honorable Gentleman is:

Spending his money and wasting his goods,
without hoping to get such an armful, what else could he be hoping for? Now, everyone ought to pitch in, by singing a song if he knows one, or, if he can't sing, by telling a joke, to help Kuei-chieh down her wine."

Tagalong Hsieh, himself, was the first to tell a joke. "Once upon a time there was a mason who was engaged to repave a courtyard in the licensed quarter. Because the madam had been less than generous with him, he surreptitiously stuck a brick in her covered drain.⁹ As a result, when it rained, her whole courtyard filled up with water. The madam, in a state of consternation, sought him out, gave him all he could eat or drink, weighed out a mace of silver, and begged him to get rid of the water for her. The mason consumed the food and wine and then stealthily removed the brick from her drain, whereupon all the water immediately drained away. 'Foreman,' asked the madam, 'what was the problem?' To which the mason replied, 'The problem with your drain was the same as it is with you: It's only dough that makes things flow;

Without the dough, there'd be no flow.' "

It so happens that this joke reflected badly on Kuei-chieh's profession, which induced her to speak up, as follows, "I've got a joke of my own with which to regale you gentlemen. Once upon a time, the Taoist adept Sun Ssu-miao¹⁰ had prepared a feast and wished to summon his guests, so he sent the tiger who was customarily in attendance beneath his dais to invite them. The tiger proceeded to eat each and every one of the guests while they were en route to the feast. The Taoist waited until evening, but not a single guest had arrived. Everyone told him, 'That tiger of yours must have eaten the guests on their way here.' Before long the tiger arrived and the Taoist asked him, 'What has become of the guests I sent you to invite?' To which the tiger, who could speak the language of men, replied, 'You should know, master, that I've never been known to invite people to partake of anything. The only thing I'm any good at is devouring people.' "¹¹

This joke reflected badly on the whole bunch of them.

"It would seem," said Sponger Ying, "that all we know how to do is free-load off your patron, without being able to stand him a treat in return."

Thereupon, he extracted a silver-plated earpick from his hair that weighed one mace. Tagalong Hsieh contributed the pair of gilded rings he used to hold his hairnet in place, which were found to weigh nine and a half candareens. Sticky Chu pulled an old handkerchief out of his sleeve, which was assessed at a value of two hundred discounted cash. Blabbermouth Sun divested himself of the white cotton breechcloth he wore around his loins, which was pawned for enough to buy two and a half jars of wine. Cadger Ch'ang had nothing he could contribute, so he asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for the loan of a full mace of good-quality silver.

The entire proceeds of the collection were handed over to Li Kuei-ch'ing, to defray the expenses of standing Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuei-chieh a treat. Kuei-ch'ing turned the money over to the servant, who managed to buy a mace worth of crabs, a mace worth of pork, and a chicken. The Li establishment threw in a few side dishes of its own, and everything was duly prepared in the kitchen and served up in: Large platters and large bowls.

Once the company was seated they scarcely needed an invitation before setting to.

The telling is slow;
What happened was quick.

Behold:

Everyone's mouth goes into motion,
Each of them lowers his head to the task.
Obscuring the sky and bedimming the sun,¹²
They are like a swarm of locusts
all descending at once;
Squinting their eyes and hunching their shoulders,

They are like starving prisoners
just let out of jail.
This one sets to with flailing arms,
As though it has been years
since he saw food or wine;
That one holds his chopsticks together,
As if it has been ages
since he attended a feast.
One of them has sweat pouring from his face,
As he engages in a grudge match
with a chicken bone;
Another wipes the oil from his lips,
As he wolfs down bristle and rind
with his hog's flesh.
When they have eaten but a while,
The cups and plates are in a state of disarray;¹³
By the time they are through,
The chopsticks lie about helter-skelter.
The cups and plates are in a state of disarray;
As spic-and-span as though washed.
The chopsticks lie about helter-skelter;
As neat and clean as though scoured.

This one rates the designation
Commander in Chief of the Gourmands;
That one has earned the sobriquet
General of the Trenchermen.¹⁴
The wine pots are drained dry,
but they continue to upend them;
The platters are quite empty,
yet they scan them in vain.

Truly:

Delicacies of every variety
have perished in but a moment;

Sacrificed upon the altar
in the Temple of the Five Viscera.¹⁵

On this occasion, the bunch of them cleaned the place out as thoroughly as any Buddha King of Purifying Light¹⁶ could have done. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuei-chieh barely had two cups of wine apiece, and a few meager gleanings from the dishes on the table, before everything was gobbled up by the ravenous horde.

That day two of the chairs at their table were broken. The page boy who waited out front with the horse was not invited in for a snack, so he knocked the image of the tutelary god off its pedestal in the shrine by the door and deposited a bulging pile of hot shit in its place. On his way out the door, Blabbermouth Sun stuffed the gilded brass Buddha from the Li family's parlor into his waistband. Sponger Ying, pretending to kiss Kuei-chieh, snatched a gold-filled pin from her hairdo. Tagalong Hsieh pocketed Hsi-men Ch'ing's Szechwan fan. Sticky Chu went into Kuei-ch'ing's room to have a look at himself and made off with her mercury-backed mirror. Even the discount on the mace of silver that Cadger Ch'ang had borrowed from Hsi-men Ch'ing was put onto the reckoning.

It so happened that this bunch of men had nothing better to do than keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company in his revels. What a time they had together! There is a poem that testifies to this: The prostitutes of the licensed quarter

are as coquettish as monkeys;
They are only fit to be visited
on the impulse of the moment.
If one allows himself to become infatuated,
with no sense of satiety;
To whom can he safely entrust
the keys to his coffers?

His boon companions continued to cluster around Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine.

But let us put this aside for a moment and return to the story of Tai-an.

When the page boy returned home with the horse, Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in her room with Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien.

As soon as she saw Tai-an, she asked, "Have you brought your father back with you or not?"

Tai-an had been crying so hard that both his eyes were as red as could be. He gave an account, thus and so, that concluded, "I only got kicked and cursed by Father for my pains. And he also said, 'Whoever sends after me again will hear from me when I get home.' "

"Just look at him," said Yüeh-niang. "How unreasonable can you get? If he won't come home, so much for that; what business does he have abusing the page boy? How can he allow himself to be so bewitched by that vixen?"

"It's bad enough to kick a page boy," said Meng Yü-lou, "but how can he threaten to abuse us into the bargain?"

"Nine out of ten of those whores in the licensed quarter," said P'an Chin-lien, "don't have any real feelings for their customers. As the saying goes: Not even shiploads of gold and silver,

Can fill up the camps of mist and flowers."

Chin-lien simply blurted out what she had to say, without remembering that:

Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass.¹⁷

Ever since Tai-an had returned from the licensed quarter, Li Chiao-erh had stolen up outside and had been standing by the window, eavesdropping. When she overheard P'an Chin-lien abusing the members of her own household to Yüeh-niang and referring to them as whores a thousand times, if not ten thousand times, she secretly stored up the resentment in her heart and, henceforth, regarded Chin-lien as her enemy. But no more of this. Truly: Honeyed words and plausible speeches

can make the twelfth month warm;
Cruel words that are hurtful to others
can turn the sixth month cold.¹⁸
Chin-lien's only consideration was
the need to make herself heard;
How could she anticipate that a bystander
could be the cause of calamity?

We will say no more for the moment about the enmity that Chin-lien incurred in Li Chiao-erh, but return to the story of that woman herself.

When Chin-lien returned to her room:

Each half hour was like three months of autumn;

Each two-hour period seemed like half a summer.

Knowing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not coming home that night, she sent her two maidservants off to sleep, made a pretense of going out for a stroll in the garden, invited Ch'in-t'ung into her room, drank wine with him until he was drunk, closed the door: Took off her clothes and unfastened her girdle, and proceeded to couple with him. Truly:

With lustful daring as big as the sky,

what is there to fear?

Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:

a lifetime of passion.¹⁹

Behold:

One of them shows total disregard

for ethical norms or distinctions of status;

The other does not discriminate between
above and below or high and low.
One of them, inspired by perverse lustful daring,
Cares nothing for the severity of her husband;
The other, carried away by lecherous desires,
Ignores a clear-cut violation of the law.
One of them, breathing heavily with staring eyes,
Sounds like an ox snoring in the willow's shade;
The other, with coy words and inarticulate cries,
Reminds one of an oriole warbling among the flowers.
One of them, murmurs in her partner's ear
of passions evoked by clouds and rain;
The other, swears by the pillow side
to be as faithful as the hills and seas.
The garden with its hundred flowers,
Has been transformed into a pleasure ground;
The bedroom of his lawful mistress,
Has turned into a Kingdom of Cockaigne.
Almost before they know it, a glob
of donkey's spunk,
Has been deposited in Chin-lien's
jadelike body.²⁰

From this time on, every night the woman invited the page boy into her room for a repeat performance and sent him on his way again before dawn. She secretly let him have two or three of her gold-headed pins to wear in his hair, and she also gave him the brocade scent bag she wore suspended at her waist, together with the gourd toggle that held it in place, so he could wear them under his clothes.

How could she have known that this page boy:

Was not the sort to abide by his lot,²¹

but constantly went out into the street to drink and gamble with his fellow servants, where he was so indiscreet as to allow these gifts to be seen? As the saying goes: The best way to avoid being found out,

Is not to do it in the first place.²²

One day wind of this came to the ears of Sun Hsüeh-o and Li Chiao-erh, who said to each other, "That lousy whore is forever hypocritically protesting her own virtue. How is it, then, that today she's been caught red-handed committing adultery with a page boy?"

The two of them went off together to tell Yüeh-niang about it, but Yüeh-niang expressed herself repeatedly to be incredulous.

"It's all because the two of you are on the outs with her," she said. "But how can you help offending Sister Meng the Third by such an accusation? She'll say you're just trying to get rid of her page boy."

This response reduced the two to silence.

Sometime after this, the woman was carrying on with the page boy in her room one night when she forgot to close the back door. Her maidservant, Ch'iu-chü, happened to come out to relieve herself and saw what was going on. The next day she reported what she had seen to Hsiao-yü in the rear compound, and Hsiao-yü mentioned it to Hsüeh-o. Hsüeh-o and Li Chiao-erh again sought out Yüeh-niang and told her about it.

It happened to be the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month, the eve of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, and he had just come back from the licensed quarter to celebrate it. The two of them recounted everything, thus and so.

"The maidservant from her own quarters has reported it with her own mouth. It's not just a case of our trying to do her in. If you won't say anything about it, we'll go tell Father ourselves. You'd do as well to forgive a whore like that as you would to forgive a scorpion!"

"He's only just come home," said Yüeh-niang, "and it's a special day for him to boot. If you two disregard me and insist on telling him about it, in a little while, when the trouble starts, you'll have to look out for yourselves."

The two of them did not take Yüeh-niang's advice, but waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing came into his room and then told him all about how Chin-lien had been committing adultery with the page boy.

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:

Anger flared up in his heart, and

Malice accrued in his gall.²³

Marching out to the front compound, he sat down and called out in a loud voice for Ch'in-t'ung.

It was not long before someone reported these events to P'an Chin-lien.

In a state of panic she sent Ch'un-mei to call the page boy into her room, where she enjoined him, "Whatever happens, don't admit to anything!"

She demanded back the pins he was wearing in his hair, but she was so flustered she forgot to recover the scent bag with the gourd toggle.

Summoned into the front reception room, the page boy was made to kneel in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who ordered three or four servants to stand by with heavy bamboo canes.

"You lousy slave!" Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed him, "Do you acknowledge your crime?"

Ch'in-t'ung was too frightened to answer for some time.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his minions, "Take off his hat and pull out the pins in his hair. I want to take a look at them. He's been seen sporting two gold-headed silver pins." Then, addressing him directly, he demanded, "What's become of the gold-headed silver pins you've been wearing?"

"I've never had any silver pins," said Ch'in-t'ung.

"The slave is still up to his tricks," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Strip off all his clothes and beat him with the bamboo."

The two or three servants in attendance set about their task. One of them, while engaged in stripping off his clothes, took down his trousers, disclosing the fact that underneath them he was wearing a jade-colored damask tunic, from the waist-string of which there hung a brocade scent bag with a gourd toggle.

Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed it immediately and called out, "Bring it here so I can have a look at it."

Recognizing it as the very object that P'an Chin-lien customarily wore suspended at her waist, he became enraged.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded. "Tell me the truth. Who gave it to you?"

The page boy was so frightened that it was some time before he could open his mouth to reply.

"It's something I picked up one day while I was sweeping in the garden," he said. "Nobody gave it to me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing gnashed his teeth in rage and shouted out the order, "Tie him up and give him a real thrashing."

Then and there Ch'in-t'ung was bound, hand and foot, and the blows of the cane fell on him like rain. In no time at all they had administered thirty strokes of the heavy bamboo, so severely that: The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and

Fresh blood flowed down his legs.²⁴

Hsi-men Ch'ing also gave orders to his chief household retainer, Lai-pao: "Pluck out the hair on the slave's temples and throw him out of here. See that he never sets foot on the threshold again."

When Ch'in-t'ung had kowtowed to his master, still weeping and wailing, he was given the gate. This page boy, only because: Last night he flirted with the nymph who keeps the books

in the Palace of the Jade Emperor;

Today, guilty of a clear-cut violation of Heaven's law,²⁵

is banished to the realms below.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Tigers deploy the revenants of their prey,
birds are snared with decoys;
Chin-lien was not the sort to remain chaste
within her empty boudoir.
Today she's in an untenable position
for adultery with a servant;
From now on, if she encounters criticism
she has no one to blame but herself.

On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had Ch'in-t'ung beaten and then ejected him from the household.

When P'an Chin-lien, in her room, heard what had happened, it was: Just as though she had been dunked in a tub of ice water.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her quarters. The woman trembled with fright as if the pulse had stopped beating in her body. When she went up to him, obsequiously, to take his outer garments, Hsi-men Ch'ing slapped her in the face so hard he knocked her down. He ordered Ch'un-mei to lock the front and back gates and not let anyone in. Then he got himself a small chair, sat down in the courtyard underneath the flower arbor, pulled out a riding crop, and, brandishing it in his hand, commanded, "Whore! Take off your clothes and get down on your knees."

The woman, troubled as she was by a bad conscience, did not dare to disobey. She actually took off all her clothes, above and below, and knelt down before him: Hanging her powdered face in shame, not daring to utter a sound.

"You lousy whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's no use pretending you're:

Still asleep in dreamland.

I've just gotten the truth out of that slave. He's confessed to everything. Tell me the truth. While I've been away from home, how many times have you made out with him?"

"My Heavens!" the woman wept. "You really do me a mortal injustice, that's all there is to it. During the whole time you've been away from home the last half month or so, I've spent my days in the company of Sister Meng the Third, doing needlework together, and in the evenings I've locked the gate early and gone to bed. Without some reason I haven't presumed to step outside the postern gate. If you don't believe me, just ask Ch'un-mei, that's all. If I'd been indulging in any: Illicit salt or illicit vinegar,²⁶ she could hardly fail to know about it." Then, calling to Ch'un-mei, she said, "Sister, come over here and tell your father all about it."

"You lousy whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing cursed. "They say you gave two or three of your gold-headed hairpins to that page boy on the sly. How can you deny it?"

"They do me a mortal injustice, that's all there is to it," the woman said. "It's all the doing of some backbiting whore, who will come to a bad end, eating her heart out when she sees how often you come to my room to spend the night, and angry enough to try to nail me with such a preposterous²⁷ story. As for the hairpins you've given me, there are only so many of them, and every last one is accounted for. Take a look for yourself. What could I be thinking of to give them to that slave for no reason at all? Someone like that, who hardly even makes the grade as a slave! He's such a babe in the woods it would be no exaggeration to say he hasn't even learned to piss yet. It's all a story someone has made up out of

whole cloth to get back at me.”

“Forget about the hairpins,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, reaching into his sleeve and pulling out Ch’in-t’ung’s scent bag. “This is something that belongs to you. How did it come to be discovered hanging underneath the clothes of that page boy? Brazen that out if you can.”

As he spoke, the gorge rose within him and he brought down the riding crop, with a whistling slash, across her pale and fragrant flesh. He struck the woman so hard that: The pain was difficult to bear, and

Tears streaked her powdered face.

“Please, Father!” she blubbered. “If you let me speak, I’ll speak. If you don’t let me speak, you can beat me to death if you like, and make a stinking mess of the place. As for this scent bag and its gourd toggle; while you were away from home one day, I was going past the banksia rose trellis, on my way into the garden to do some needlework with Sister Meng the Third, when my girdle came undone. It must have fallen off at that time. I’ve looked for it everywhere. Who could have known that this slave would pick it up? I certainly never gave it to him.”

This explanation happened to accord perfectly with what Ch’in-t’ung had just stated in the front reception room when he said he had picked it up in the garden. Moreover, when Hsi-men Ch’ing saw the woman’s flowerlike body, which had been stripped stark naked, kneeling before him as she uttered her: Winsome sobs and melting words,²⁸

His anger flew to Java,
and he became 80 or 90 percent disposed to clemency.

Calling over Ch’un-mei, he sat her in his lap, and asked her, “Has the whore really been engaged in hanky-panky with the page boy or not? If you tell me to forgive the whore, I’ll forgive her.”

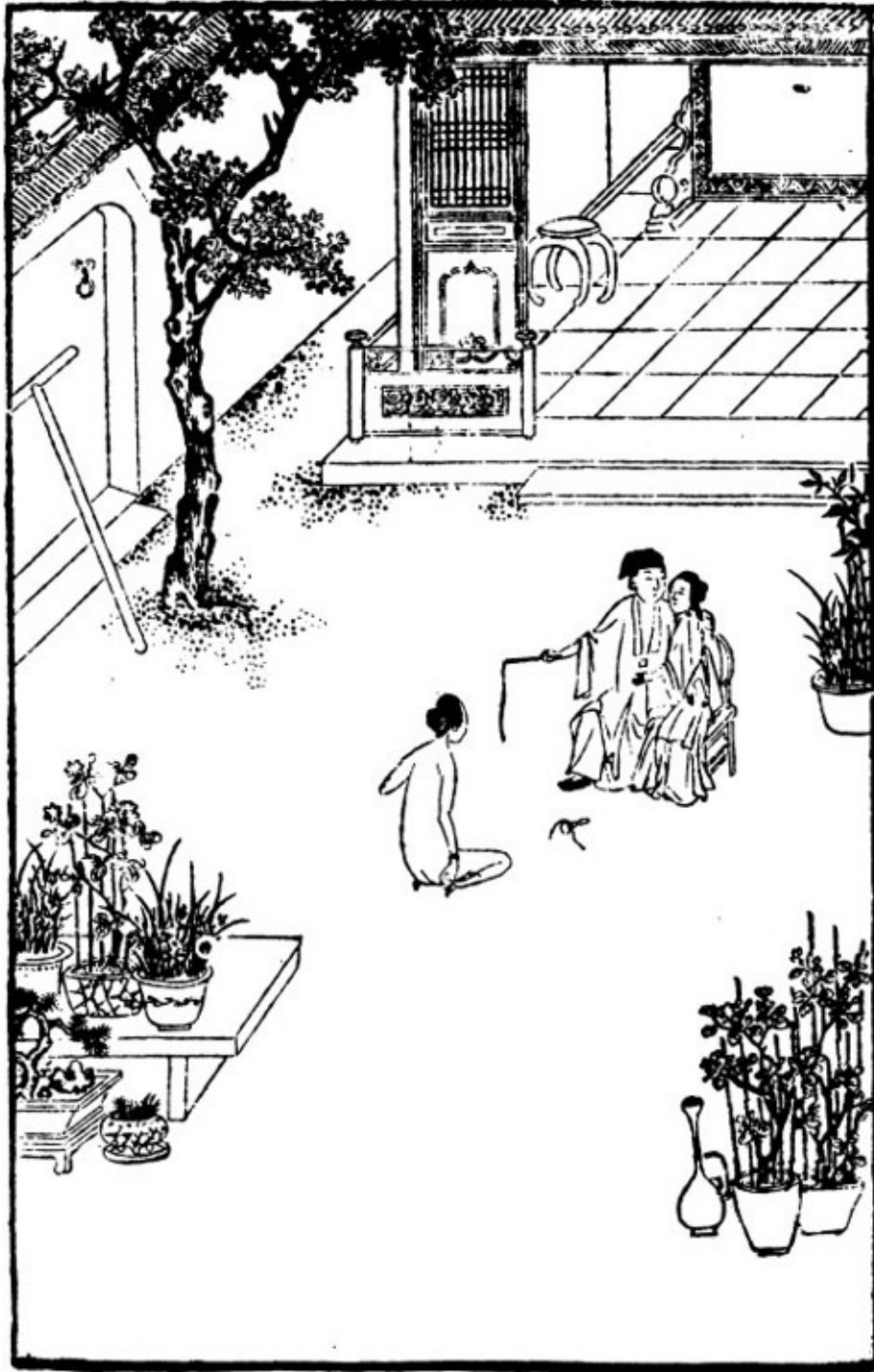
Affecting the:

Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,²⁹

Ch’un-mei sat down in his lap and said, “As for that, Father, needless to say, all day long Mother and I have been: As inseparable as the lip and the cheek.”³⁰

How could she have had anything to do with that slave? This is all something fabricated by someone who is jealous of Mother and me. Father, you ought to think what you’re doing, or you’ll only make an ugly reputation for yourself, which won’t sound any too good when it gets abroad.”

With these few words she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch’ing to silence. Throwing aside the riding crop, he told Chin-lien to get up and put on her clothes, on the one hand, while he also gave orders to Ch’iu-chü to fetch something to eat and set the table so they could have a drink.



P'an Chin-lien Suffers Ignominy for Adultery with a Servant

The woman thereupon filled a cup of wine to the brim and, holding it in front of her with both hands, knelt down on the ground: Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
as she offered it up to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing admonished her as follows: "I'll forgive you this once. But whenever I'm away from home, I want you to: Cleanse your heart and reform your ways.³¹

Lock the doors early and don't allow yourself to:

Give way to foolish fancies.³²

If I find out anything, I certainly won't forgive you again."

"I hear and I obey," the woman said, and then:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times. Only then did she take her place at the table and keep him company as they drank wine together. Truly: If you're going to be a human being,

don't be a woman;

Or your every joy and sorrow will be
dependent on another.³³

This woman, P'an Chin-lien, had been so favored by Hsi-men Ch'ing in the past as to lose all sense of decorum, but today she had brought this shameful ignominy on herself. There is a poem that testifies to this: No matter how congenial and compliant

Chin-lien might appear;
She flaunted her favor to compete for affection
and thereby aroused enmity.
Had it not been for Ch'un-mei's intervention
on the day in question;
How could her parents' legacy of skin and flesh
have borne up under the lash?

While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still drinking wine in Chin-lien's room, they were interrupted by the sound of a page boy knocking at the gate, who announced that Hsi-men Ch'ing's brothers-in-law, Wu Yüeh-niang's eldest brother Wu K'ai³⁴ and second brother Wu the Second, along with his shop manager, Fu Ming, his daughter and son-in-law, and other relatives, had arrived in the front reception room to offer presents and wish him a happy birthday. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing relinquish Chin-lien, readjust his clothing, and go out front to entertain his guests.

On this occasion, there were gifts from Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and the other members of the club, and Li Kuei-chieh's establishment in the licensed quarter also sent a servant with a gift. Hsi-men Ch'ing was kept busy in the front compound, acknowledging the presents people had sent and issuing invitations. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Meng Yü-lou heard that Chin-lien had been thus humiliated, she waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing was out of the house, took pains to evade the notice of Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o, and came to pay Chin-lien a visit.

Finding her lying on her bed, she asked, "Sister Six, what's the real story behind this? Tell me all about it."

Her eyes brimming over with tears, Chin-lien sobbed out, "Sister Three, just look at what that insignificant whore has done. Today, behind my back, she's provoked our husband into giving me such a beating. From now on, the enmity between those two whores and me will be as deep as the sea."

"Even if you had a bone to pick with them," said Yü-lou, "you didn't have to do it in such a way that my page boy got thrown out of the household, did you? Sister Six, don't let yourself get too depressed about it. After all, it's not as though our husband will no longer listen to anything we have to say. If he doesn't come into my quarters someday soon, there won't be anything I can do about it, but if he does come into my quarters, I'll see if I can't put in a good word for you."

"Many thanks for your help, Sister," said Chin-lien. She then called in Ch'un-mei to bring them some tea, and they sat down and chatted together for a while, until Yü-lou said goodbye and returned to her own quarters.

That evening, because Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was visiting in the master suite, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Yü-lou's quarters to spend the night.

Yü-lou took the opportunity to say to him, "You really oughtn't to flout Sister Six's feelings for you. She never did anything like that. It's all because, in the past, she's had words with Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o, and now, for no reason at all, these charges have been trumped up against my page boy. Without so much as enquiring into the: Blue or red, black or white."³⁵

of the situation, you've done him an injustice. You mustn't blame Sister Six. You've really been too hard on her. I'm prepared to swear an oath on her behalf. If anything like that had really happened, do you think Elder Sister wouldn't have told you?"

"I asked Ch'un-mei about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and she said the same thing."

"She's in her room right now," said Yü-lou, "feeling miserable. Why don't you go look in on her?"

"I know," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go to her quarters tomorrow."

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day was Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, and a lot of distinguished guests had been invited to attend a party, including the commandant, Chou Hsiu,³⁶ the judicial commissioner, Hsia Yen-ling, the militia commander, Chang Kuan, and Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law, Wu K'ai. A sedan chair was dispatched to bring Li Kuei-chieh, and the services of two other singing girls were also engaged, to sing at the daylong celebration.

When Li Chiao-erh saw that her niece had come, she led her in to meet Yüeh-niang and the others, and she was invited to sit down in the master suite and have a cup of tea. She asked to meet P'an Chin-lien, and maidservants were sent after her twice, but Chin-lien refused to put in an appearance, claiming that she felt out of sorts.

In the evening, when Kuei-chieh was about to go home, she came to say goodbye to Yüeh-niang, who gave her a vest of cloud-patterned damask, a handkerchief, and some other trinkets, and, together with Li Chiao-erh, accompanied her to the main gate.

On their way, Kuei-chieh herself went up to Chin-lien's postern gate in the garden, saying, "Come what may, I'd really like to meet the Fifth Lady."

When Chin-lien heard she had come, she sent Ch'un-mei to shut the postern gate and:

Lock it tight as an iron bucket, so that
Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through,³⁷
while repeating, quite audibly, the words, "I won't let her in."
As a result of this rebuff, the prostitute returned home:
Her face crimson with mortification.

Truly:

Distribute your favors widely;
In this life you never know where
you will meet again.
If you make a lot of enemies;
You'll encounter them in a tight spot
where there's no escape.³⁸

We will say no more for the moment about how Li Kuei-chieh went home, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing. That evening he appeared in Chin-lien's quarters and she met him at the door with her: Cloudy locks in disarray, and her Flowery countenance dispirited, as she helped him off with his clothes. She waited on him with tea and hot water to wash his feet, playing up to him with every trick at her disposal in the endeavor to please him. That night as they shared pillow and mat: Like fish sporting in the water;

She humbled herself to the most shameful acts.
There was no length to which she would not go.³⁹

"Darling," she said, "who is there in the whole household who really loves you? Out of all these cases of: Cohabitation amid the dewdrops,⁴⁰ among all these 'remarried goods,' you and I are the only ones who really understand each other. When the others see how much you care for me, and how much time you spend with me, it makes them angry, and they fabricate things behind my back and try to make trouble between us. My foolish lover, what have you been thinking of, to allow yourself to be made the instrument of someone else's revenge? How could you have treated the person you love with such heartless cruelty? As the saying goes: If you beat domestic fowl, they'll hop around in circles; If you beat wildfowl, they'll fly high into the sky.⁴¹

Even if you were to beat me to death, I'd still be right here in this room. Where else would I dare go? Just the other day, for example, when you were in the licensed quarter and kicked and cursed your page boy—fortunately Elder Sister from the master suite and Sister Meng the Third were there to corroborate this—didn't I say something—and it was well-intentioned—about my fears that the painted woman in that establishment would exhaust your vitality—that the singing girls in the licensed quarter are only in it for the money and don't have any real feelings for their customers—what do they really care for you? How was I to know that this would be overheard by an interested party and that the two of them would connive against me behind my back? It's always been the case that: When other people are out to get you it's seldom fatal;

It's only when Heaven is out to get you that it's fatal.

Later on:

With the passage of time the truth will become clear.⁴²
The only thing is you've got to stand up for me, that's all."

On this occasion, with no more than these few words she succeeded in mollifying Hsi-men Ch'ing. That night the two of them: Indulged their lusts without restraint.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing had his horse prepared and set off for the licensed quarter with the two page boys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, in attendance.

To resume our story, Li Kuei-chieh was all dressed up and engaged in entertaining a customer. When she heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, she hastily returned to her room, where she: Washed away her makeup,

Took off her pins and earrings,
Threw herself down on the bed, and
Pulled the coverlet over her head.

Upon his arrival, Hsi-men Ch'ing had to wait a long time before anyone came out to keep him company. At long last, the old lady appeared, bowed to him in greeting, and offered him a seat.

"How now, Kinsman?" the madam said. "It's been days since you've paid us a visit."

"It's only on account of all the busywork in connection with my birthday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."

"My daughter imposed on your hospitality the other day," said the madam.

"Why didn't her elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, come with her that day?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Kuei-ch'ing is not at home," the madam replied. "Her patron has taken her to stay with him in his inn and hasn't let her come home the last few days."

They talked for a long time. After a while, someone brought tea and she kept him company while he drank it.

"What's become of Kuei-chieh?" Hsi-men Ch'ing finally asked.

"You mean you don't know about it, Kinsman?" the madam asked. "It's childish of her, and I don't know what it was

that happened, but she was upset about something when she came home that day. She's been out of sorts ever since and has taken to her bed. In fact, she hasn't set foot outside her room from that time to this. It's really too cruel of you, Kinsman, not to have come to see her."

"Is that so?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I didn't know anything about it." And he went on to ask, "Which room is she in? I'll go pay her a visit."

"She's sleeping in her bedroom at the back of the house," the madam replied, and immediately ordered a maidservant to show him the way.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to her room, where he found the painted woman with:

Raven locks in disarray, and

Pale countenance unadorned,

sitting on the bed, with the coverlet wrapped around her, and her face to the wall. When she saw it was Hsi-men Ch'ing, she made no response of any kind.

"What went wrong when you were at my place the other day?" he asked.

Receiving no reply, he asked again, "Who was it who upset you? Tell me all about it."

He kept on asking for a long time before Kuei-chieh replied, saying, "Well, anyway, it was the Fifth Lady of your household. Since you've already got someone who's so good at: Playing up to people and trading on her looks, what need is there for you to bother yourself with whores like me? We may have been born to the trade, but when we put our legs in the air we do a better job of it than any of those amateurs on the outside, no matter what their social standing. I wasn't there in my professional capacity the other day, to provide entertainment, but came to bring you a gift, like the other guests. The First Lady treated me very cordially, as did the other two ladies, and presented me with clothes and trinkets. Under the circumstances, if I hadn't asked to be introduced to her, she would have said that we denizens of the licensed quarter were ignorant of the rules of proper behavior. Having heard people say there was a Fifth Lady in your household, I assumed I might ask to be introduced to her. But she refused to make an appearance. When I was about to come home, together with my aunt, I went to say goodbye to her, but she sent her maidservant to shut the gate in my face. Really: She wouldn't know a favor if she saw one."

"Don't hold it against her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was really feeling out of sorts that day. If she had been feeling all right, she could hardly have refused to come out and meet you. What a whore she is! Why, several times, on account of her backbiting and troublemaking, I've been on the verge of giving her a beating."

Kuei-chieh brushed Hsi-men Ch'ing across the face facetiously with the back of her hand and said, "What a shameless fellow! You'd actually beat her, would you?"

"You don't know what I'm capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Except for my regular wife, it's nothing for me to give any one of the other concubines or maidservants a beating. When you get right down to it, if twenty or thirty strokes with a riding crop are not enough to subdue them, I'll even go so far as to cut off their hair, whether they like it or not."

"Decapitation's too good for you," said Kuei-chieh. "This calls for 'delinguification,' if there's any such thing. You probably: Bow down to them thrice, and

Say yes to them twice,⁴³

for all I know. If you're really up to it, when you get home, just cut off a single hank of hair, and bring it here to show me. Only then will I acknowledge your claim to fame as a real devotee of the licensed quarters."

"Are you willing to shake on it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I'd shake on it a hundred times," said Kuei-chieh.

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in the licensed quarter. The next day, around dusk, he said goodbye to Kuei-chieh and mounted his horse to return home.

Kuei-chieh said:

"My eyes are on the lookout for the flag of victory,

My ears are always on the alert for good tidings.

Darling, if the quest for this object proves unsuccessful, you needn't expect to see me again."

Hsi-men Ch'ing's dander was up as a result of her needling, and he was already inebriated by the time he returned home. He didn't go anywhere else, but headed straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound. When the woman saw that he was in his cups, she waited on him with more than usual care. In reply to her questions, he said he didn't want any food or wine, but ordered Ch'un-mei to wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat and then close the door and leave them alone.

Sitting down on the bed, he ordered the woman to take off his boots. The woman did not dare to refuse. In no time at all she had taken off his boots and helped him into bed. But Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to sleep. Sitting up on a pillow, he ordered the woman to take off her clothes and kneel down on the surface of the bed before him.

The woman was so apprehensive she broke into a sweat. Without any idea what it was all about, she knelt down on the bed and began to weep out loud in a quavery voice, saying, "Father, if you'd only give me a clear-cut idea of what's going on: I'd be prepared to die if I must."⁴⁴

Even when you:

Keep me on tenterhooks,⁴⁵

all evening and I do my level best to watch my step, I don't seem to be able to suit your fancy. How can I bear it when all you do is saw away at me with a blunt knife?"

"You lousy whore!" cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you don't take off your clothes I'm going to lose my patience."

"The riding crop's hanging on the other side of the door," he called out to Ch'un-mei. "Bring it here for me, will you?"

Ch'un-mei deliberately refused to come into the room. Only after he had called for some time did she push open the door and come in: Just as slow and easy as you please. She saw the woman kneeling on the surface of the bed in the lamplight, with her hair tumbled before her like oil pouring from an overturned table. Hsi-men Ch'ing repeated his order, but she didn't budge.

"Ch'un-mei, my sister," the woman pled with her. "Help me! He's going to beat me."

"Little oily mouth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't pay any attention to her. Just fetch me the riding crop so I can give this whore a beating."

"Father, how can you carry on so shamelessly?" demanded Ch'un-mei. "What business of yours has Mother ever ruined, that you should take the word of some whore, whose only interest is to: Stir up a storm in untroubled waters,⁴⁶ and persist in making such capricious demands on her? How can you expect anyone to be:

Of one heart and one mind,
with you under the circumstances? You'll be lucky if they give you a second glance."

Ch'un-mei refused to obey him, latched the door behind her, and went off to the front of the compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:

At a loss for what to do next,
laughed loudly and said to Chin-lien, "I won't beat you then. You can get up. If I ask you for something, will you give it to me, or won't you?"

"Darling," the woman said, "my whole body, bones and flesh alike, is completely at your disposal. Whatever it is you may want, I could not refuse to comply. But I don't know what it is you've set your heart on."

"What I want," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is a lock of the best hair from the crown of your head."

"Dear heart," the woman said, "any part of my body is yours for the asking. You can burn it with moxa wherever you like and I'll go along with you. But to cut off my hair is out of the question. The very thought of it scares me to death. From the time I left my mother's womb twenty-five years ago, I've never done anything like that. On top of which, recently the hair has already begun to thin out on the crown of my head. You really ought to take pity on me, that's all."

"You were upset at my annoyance with you just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but when I ask you for something, you refuse to comply."

"If I didn't comply with your desires," said the woman, "with whose should I comply?" She then went on to ask, "Tell me the truth. What do you want this hair of mine for, anyway?"

"I want to make a hairnet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If you want to make a hairnet," said the woman, "I'll make it for you. Just don't give it to that whore so she can use it to cast a spell on me."

"I won't give it to anybody, that's all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I only want your hair to make the main cord of a hairnet to bind my topknot with."

"If all you want it for is to make a cord for your topknot," said the woman, "I'll cut it off for you."

Thereupon, the woman undid her hair and let Hsi-men Ch'ing himself take a pair of scissors and neatly cut off a large lock from the crown of her head. He wrapped it in paper and put it in his wallet.

The woman then fell into Hsi-men Ch'ing's arms and, weeping coquettishly, said, "I'll do anything you want. I only hope you don't forget your feelings for me. No matter how stuck you become on anyone in the quarter, just don't abandon me."

That night they:

Enjoyed each other even more than usual.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and, as soon as the woman had fed him his breakfast, went outside, mounted his horse, and headed straight for the licensed quarter.

"Where's the hair you've cut off her head," Kuei-chieh demanded.

"I've got it right here," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. He then reached into his wallet, pulled it out, and handed it to Kuei-chieh. She opened it and took a look, and when she saw that it was really a lock of beautiful hair, as glossy and black as oil, she promptly tucked it into her sleeve.

"Now that you've seen it, give it back to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Last night she made all kinds of difficulties about cutting this hair. It was only when I changed countenance and got angry that she let me cut off this single lock of it. I fooled her by saying I only wanted it to make the main cord of a hairnet to bind my topknot with, and then brought it straight here to show you. You can see, I'm as good as my word."

"What sort of a rarity is this," said Kuei-chieh, "to have put you into such a state? When you're ready to go home I'll give it back to you. If you're as afraid of her as all that, you shouldn't have cut it off in the first place."

"Who's afraid of her?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's just that I don't want to go back on my word."

Kuei-chieh induced Kuei-ch'ing to keep him company for a drink of wine, and then, as soon as she was out of sight, inserted the woman's hair into the linings of her shoes, so she could trample her underfoot every day. But no more of this.

Now that she had Hsi-men Ch'ing in her clutches, she kept him there for several consecutive days, without letting him go home.

From the time that Chin-lien allowed the cutting off of this lock of her hair, she became dispirited. Every day she: Confined herself to her room,

Too languid to consume tea or food.

Wu Yüeh-niang, consequently, sent a page boy after a certain Dame Liu, whose services were frequently called upon in

the household, to come and take a look at her.

"Madam has contracted a black humor," the old lady said, "which continues to rankle in the heart and can't be eliminated. Your head aches, you feel nauseous, and you have no appetite."

On the one hand, she opened her medicine bag and left behind two doses of medicine, in the form of black pills, which were to be taken in the evening along with a decoction of ginger, while, on the other hand, she said, "I'll get my old man to come by tomorrow and ascertain whether or not you're fated to suffer any calamities during the current year of your horoscope."

"So your old man can also tell fortunes, can he?" said Chin-lien.

"Even though he's blind," said Dame Liu, "there are two or three things he can do. First of all, he's an expert at the Yin-yang School of fortune-telling and can either avert peoples' calamities or offer them protection against them. Secondly, he's well versed in acupuncture, moxabustion, and the treatment of pyogenic infections of the skin. His third skill is one that I really shouldn't talk about, but he's always helping people to perform 'turnabouts.'"

"What does the word 'turnabout' mean?" asked the woman.

"Well, for example," said Dame Liu, "if a father and son are at odds, or two brothers are not getting along harmoniously, or a legitimate wife and a concubine are quarreling with each other; if one of the parties calls on the services of my old man, he can employ a counteractive agent on his or her behalf in order to keep the other party in check, or provide him or her with a philter containing a counteractive spell that, if given to the other party to drink, will cause, within three days, the father and son to become intimate, the brothers to become harmonious, or the wife and concubine to cease to quarrel. Or if someone's business is not doing well, or his real estate is not prospering, he can 'open the door to wealth' for him, or enable him to 'turn a profit.' And as for such things as the treatment of disease, the performance of ritual purification, the exorcism of the spirits of baleful stars,⁴⁷ or the invocation of the Great Dipper, he's good at all of them. For this reason people all call him Stargazer Liu.

"There was one case, I remember, of a newly married daughter-in-law, of humble social origin, who was somewhat light-fingered and was constantly stealing things from her mother-in-law's household and taking them back to her own family. Whenever her husband found out about it she was regularly beaten. My old man was able to perform a 'turnabout' for her, by writing two spells, which were burnt, and the ashes buried under the water jar. The whole family drank water from the jar, after which the daughter-in-law could steal things right in front of their eyes without their noticing it. He also provided her with a counteractive agent, which was placed under her pillow, with the result that whenever her husband slept on that pillow it was just as though his hands had been restrained and he no longer beat her."

When P'an Chin-lien heard this, she took it to heart and ordered her maidservant to provide Dame Liu with tea and something to eat. When the latter was about to leave, Chin-lien wrapped up three mace of silver for her medical services. She also weighed out an additional five mace to enable her to buy paper money and other ritual objects, and asked her to bring her blind husband back with her at breakfast time the next day to burn the spirit money for her. Dame Liu then took her leave and went home.

The next day, sure enough, bright and early in the morning, Dame Liu showed up with the blind rascal in tow and proceeded to come straight in through the front gate. That day Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the licensed quarter, from which he had not yet returned home.

The page boy in charge of the gate asked the blind man where he thought he was going, to which Dame Liu replied, "Today we've come to burn paper for the Fifth Lady."

"Dame Liu," said the page boy, "if you've come to burn paper for the Fifth Lady, you can lead him right in, but look out for the dog."

The old lady took her husband by the hand and led him straight to P'an Chin-lien's parlor, where they had to wait a long time before the woman finally appeared. The blind man saluted her and then sat down.

The woman told him the eight characters that determined her horoscope,⁴⁸ and after the blind rascal had performed some calculations on the fingers of his hand, he said, "Madam was born in a *keng-ch'en* year, in a *keng-yin* month, on an *i-hai* day, during the hour *chi-ch'ou*. Since the solar term 'Spring Begins' fell on the eighth day of the first month that year, one day before the day of your birth, your horoscope begins in the first month of the year. According to the orthodox interpretation of the Tzu-p'ing School,⁴⁹ although this horoscope of yours is certainly splendid and remarkable, you will not, in this life, receive any support from your 'husband star,' which corresponds to the stem *keng*. There will also be some difficulty as far as your 'children star' is concerned. The element wood, associated with the stem *i* in the combination *i-hai* that designates the day of your birth, is the governing element in your horoscope, but your horoscopic 'body' cannot be said to 'flourish' when this element occurs in the first month. If the effect of this unpropitious factor is not counteracted, the element is likely to burn itself up. Moreover, the reduplication of the element metal, associated with the stem *keng* in the combinations *keng-ch'en* and *keng-yin* that designate the year and month of your birth, indicates that the influence of the baleful star Yang-jen, or Ram's Blade, is too great. This will create difficulties for your 'husband star.' Only after you have gained the ascendancy over two husbands will you be all right."

"I already have," the woman said.

The blind rascal then continued, "As for this horoscope of yours, madam, excuse me for saying so, but the Tzu-p'ing School attaches great importance to the horoscopic categories called the 'killer' and the 'seal,' which would correspond, in your case, to the elements metal and water. These two elements would normally be quite compatible, but the presence of the element water, associated with the stem *kuei*, in the 'one-sided seal' pertaining to the combination *i-hai* that designates the day of your birth, and the recurrence of the same element in the horoscopic category called 'injurer of the

official' pertaining to the combination *keng-ch'en* that designates the year of your birth, indicates an excess of water that produces a 'collision' with your governing element of wood. This is inadequately compensated for by the presence of the element earth, associated with the stem *chi* in the combination *chi-ch'ou* that designates the hour of your birth. Since the stem *keng*, which is your 'official,' and the stem *hsin*, which is your 'killer,' are both associated with the element metal, they conflict with each other. As the authorities say: If the 'killer' is in the ascendant for a man,

he will exercise authority and power;

If the 'killer' is in the ascendant for a woman,

she is sure to 'punish' her husband.

"All of this indicates that you must be intelligent, adept at adapting yourself to changing circumstances, and sure to attract the favorable or unfavorable attention of others. But there is one problem. This year of your horoscope is a *chia-wu*⁵⁰ year, and the indications are that during this 'annual fatal period' calamities are likely to occur. You are fated to suffer difficulties resulting from encounters with the influence of the two baleful stars Hsiao-hao, or Little Waster, and Kou-chiao, or Strangler. Although you may escape unharmed, the indications are that there will be disharmony resulting from the 'matched shoulders' between your governing element and that associated with the stem *chia* in the designation of this year in your horoscope, both of which are wood. The wagging tongues of petty persons may often cost you some groaning and discomfort."



Stargazer Liu Purveys Black Magic in Pursuit of Gain

When the woman had heard him out, she said, "I'd be much obliged to you, sir, if you could do whatever you can to effect a 'turnabout' on my behalf. I've got a tael of silver here for you, sir, as a token of my gratitude. I hope it will suffice to buy you a cup of tea. I don't ask for anything else; all I want is to keep petty persons at a distance, and to be assured of the love and respect of my husband."

Retiring into her bedroom, she pulled out two of her hair ornaments and handed them to the blind rascal, who accepted them and tucked them into his sleeve.

"If you want me to effect a 'turnabout,' " he said, "I'll take a piece of willow wood and carve a pair of male and female effigies out of it. They must be inscribed, respectively, with the sets of eight characters that determine your and your

husband's horoscopes, and then bound together with seven times seven, or forty-nine, strands of red thread. A strip of red gauze must be fastened over the eyes of the male effigy, love grass must be stuffed into its heart cavity, its hands must be secured with needles, and, below, its feet must be stuck together with glue. The effigy must then be concealed inside the pillow on which he sleeps. In addition to this, I will write a spell for you, using vermilion ink, which you must burn to ashes, and surreptitiously stir into a cup of strong tea. If your husband drinks the tea and sleeps, the same night, on the pillow, in no more than three days, the magic will naturally take effect."

"Please, sir," the woman asked, "tell me, what's the significance of these four things?"

"I'll explain them to you, madam," the blind rascal said. "The fastening of the gauze around the eyes is to make you appear in your husband's sight as captivating and voluptuous as Hsi-shih. The stuffing of the heart cavity with love grass is to make him love you in his heart. The securing of the hands with needles is to prevent him from daring to strike you, no matter what you do, so that, in fact, he'll even get down on his knees to you. The sticking together of the feet with glue is to make it impossible for him to go out and sow any more wild oats."

When the woman heard tell that:

Such things could be,
she was utterly delighted. Thereupon, the incense, candles, and paper money were all prepared and the ceremony of burning spirit money on the woman's behalf was duly carried out.

The next day Stargazer Liu sent his wife to deliver the spell for the making of the philter and the other counteractive agents that he had promised. The woman took care of everything just as she had been told. Having burnt the spell to ashes, she stirred it into some good tea and, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, had Ch'un-mei serve it to him. That night the two of them: Shared a single pillow on the same bed.

As time passed:

One day became two,

Two days became three,

and they became:

As inseparable as fish from water, and

Enjoyed each other as usual.

Gentle reader take note: No matter whether your household be great or small, it is best to avoid the services of priests and nuns, Buddhists and Taoists, wet nurses and go-betweens. There is no telling what they will do behind your back. A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition, in the form of a quatrain, that express this very well: To the formal reception room of your house

never admit female professionals;
Always keep your back door securely locked
in order to deny them admission.
If you have a well in your courtyard,
repair even the slightest fissure;
Then your catastrophes will be few
and your stars of good fortune many.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 13

LI P'ING-ERH MAKES A SECRET TRYST OVER THE GARDEN WALL; THE MAID YING-CH'UN PEEKS THROUGH A CRACK AND GETS AN EYEFUL

Since there's no such thing in this life
as complete satisfaction;
In one's way of coping with the world
do not be too demanding.¹
It's a good thing always to pay heed
only to the words of superior men;

When disputes arise never listen
to the words of petty persons.²
Only regard the customs of the age
as a source of amusement;
While respecting the intentions of others
by keeping them at a distance.
If one were to address perceptive women with
a word to the wise;
It would be, "Don't ever confide your troubles
to your sweetheart."³

THE STORY GOES that one day earlier that summer,⁴ on the fourteenth day of the sixth month, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came in from the front compound and went into Yüeh-niang's room, she said to him, "While you were out today, the Hua household sent a page boy over with a note inviting you for a drink. 'Ask him to come over whenever he gets home,' he said."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the invitation, which read, "Can you join me for a chat at Wu Yin-erh's place in the licensed quarter at noon today? Come over to my place so we can go together. I do hope you can make it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon dressed himself to befit the occasion, ordered two of his attendants to prepare his best horse, and proceeded directly to the Hua household next door. How could he have known that Hua Tzu-hsü would not be at home? His wife, Li P'ing-erh, was standing on the raised stone platform just inside the second gate, the unfinished vamp of a sand-green Lu-chou pongee shoe in her hand. She was wearing a summer outfit that consisted of: A chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree,

Pendant amethyst earrings in gold settings,
A blouse of pale lavender silk, opening down the middle,
And a white silk skirt with drawnwork borders,
Beneath which there peeked out a pair of tiny shoes,
The points of which bore the beaks of red phoenixes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, quite unaware of what was in store for him, proceeded through the gate, and the two of them ran smack into each other.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had already had her on his mind for some time. Although he had caught a glimpse of her by the graveside at the old Eunuch Director's funeral the previous summer, he had not yet had a chance to savor the details. Now that he was able to meet her face to face and saw that she had a naturally fair complexion, was petite in stature, and had a face shaped like a melon seed and delicately curved eyebrows, before he knew it: His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and

His material souls dispersed among the nine heavens.⁵

Stepping forward with alacrity, he gave her a deep bow, and the woman returned his salute, after which she turned around and disappeared into the interior of the house. But she sent out the maidservant with her hair cut straight across her forehead, named Hsiu-ch'un, to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to take a seat in the parlor, while she herself stood just inside the postern gate: Half revealing her captivating countenance, and addressed him, saying, "Please sit down for a little while, sir. He's gone out on an errand just now, but he'll be back any minute."

Before long she sent out a maidservant with a cup of tea, and while Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking it, she conversed with him from the other side of the gate, saying, "At this drinking party over there that he's invited you to today, sir, whatever happens, for my sake, couldn't you urge him to come home a little earlier than usual? Our two menservants will both accompany him, leaving only these two maidservants and myself, so there won't be anyone to be relied on at home."

"Sister-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're certainly in the right. My brother really ought to: Pay more attention to his family affairs.

Since you have so instructed me, Sister-in-law, I'll be sure to stick by his side.

Together we'll go and together return.

How could I do anything detrimental to my brother's interests?"

While they were still speaking, who should appear but Hua Tzu-hsü himself, and the woman returned to her own quarters.

Hua Tzu-hsü saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing and then said, "How good of you to accept my invitation. Something came up just now that I simply had to run out and take care of. Forgive me for not being here to greet you myself."

Thereupon, they took their places as guest and host, and a page boy was ordered to bring tea.

It was not long until they had done with the tea, and Hua Tzu-hsü instructed the page boy, "Tell Mother to prepare the refreshments. I'm going to share three cups of wine with Mr. Hsi-men here before we set off."

Then, turning to his guest, he continued, "Today is the birthday of Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter, and so I've invited you to join me in paying her a visit in order to celebrate the occasion."

"My Good Brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't you say so before?"

Turning to Tai-an, he ordered, "Go home at once, get five mace of silver put into a sealed packet, and bring it back to me here."

"What need is there for you to put yourself to such trouble, Brother?" protested Hua Tzu-hsü. "I'm afraid I'm to blame."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the servants were setting up a table, he said, "Brother, there's no need to entertain me here. Let's go into the quarter and do our drinking there."

"I wouldn't presume to detain you," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "Just stay a little longer."

Whereupon, in:

Large platters and large bowls,
such delicacies as chicken feet and fresh pork were set before them. A high-stemmed silver goblet in the shape of a sunflower was provided for each of them. There were also four "spring rolls" left over when they had finished eating, which they saved as a treat for the boys who tended their horses.

Before long, after Tai-an had returned with the requested gratuity, the two of them mounted their horses and set off together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was accompanied by Tai-an and P'ing-an, and Hua Tzu-hsü by T'ien-fu and T'ien-hsi, so they had four page boys in their retinue as they made their way directly to Madam Wu the Fourth's establishment in the back alley of the licensed quarter in order to celebrate Wu Yin-erh's birthday.

After they got there:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Song and dance and wind and string instruments,
they continued drinking until the first watch before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that Hua Tzu-hsü got stinking drunk, while at the same time, in response to Li P'ing-erh's request, he actually accompanied him on his way home. When the calls of the page boys had succeeded in getting someone to open the front gate, they helped their master into the parlor and set him down. Li P'ing-erh and her maidservants, carrying lamps and candles, came out and supported Hua Tzu-hsü on his way into the interior of the house.

His mission accomplished, Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to take his leave when the woman came back out to thank him.

"My poor husband is a sorry lot and something of a sot," she said. "It's very kind of you to have put up with him for my sake and to have brought him home with you. Please don't laugh at my solicitude, sir."

"How would I dare?" replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, hastening to make a low bow in response to her salutation. "Since you gave me my marching orders this morning, Sister-in-law, I have shown myself capable of: Leading the army forth, and

Leading it back again.

How could your wish that I should accompany your husband home be anything but:

Imprinted in my heart and engraved on my bones?⁶

Had I failed to do so, it would not only have added to your worries, but would have shown me to be: Undependable in the performance of my task.

The people at that establishment would have had Brother in their clutches if I hadn't insisted on urging him to leave. But as we passed by the gate of the Star of Joy establishment—the one that features the painted face, Cheng Ai-hsiang, whose nickname is Cheng Kuan-yin, or Goddess of Mercy Cheng, and who's quite a looker—Brother would have ventured in there, if I hadn't done everything in my power to stop him. 'Brother,' I said to him, 'let's go home. There's time enough to come another day. Sister-in-law's at home worried to death about you.' It was only then that he consented to come straight home with me. Otherwise, if he'd gone into the Cheng place, he wouldn't have been home all night.

"With all due respect, Sister-in-law—I really shouldn't say this sort of thing—but Brother's a fool. With such a young wife and such a large house to look after, how can he simply abandon you and stay away from home for whole nights at a time? It doesn't make any sense."

"It's just as you say," the woman responded. "Simply because of this philandering of his, and his refusal to take anyone's advice, I get so upset here at home that my body aches all over. From now on, sir, whenever you run into him in the licensed quarter, whatever happens, for my sake, urge him to come home as soon as possible.

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

Now this Hsi-men Ch'ing was the sort of man of whom it is said: If you hit him on the top of his head,

The soles of his feet will ring.

He had been a habitué of the world of breeze and moonlight for so many years that there wasn't much he didn't know about anything. Therefore, on this particular day, the fact that the woman was opening up a wide avenue of approach to herself was not lost on him.

His face wreathed in smiles, he laughed, saying, "How can you talk that way, Sister-in-law? Really! What are friends for, anyway? I'll certainly do my best to admonish my brother. You can rest assured, Sister-in-law."

The woman bowed to him again to express her thanks and also directed a young maidservant to bring out a cup of tea, flavored with fruit kernels, in a carved lacquer cup with a silver spoon.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished the tea, he said, "I'd better be on my way. Be careful not to let anyone into the house."

Whereupon, he took his leave and went home.

From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing made up his mind that he would contrive to make a conquest of this woman. Time and again he saw to it that Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and the rest of that crowd detained Hua Tzu-hsü in the licensed quarter, carousing all night long, while he slipped out and made his way back to his own home. Once there, he would stand around in front of the gate until the woman and her two maidservants appeared at the front gate next door. She noticed that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing, who gave a discreet cough as he passed in front of her door. First he would head east, then turn around and go west, or come to a halt in front of the gateway across the street and stare fixedly in the direction of her door. The woman would show herself in the doorway and then, when she saw him coming, duck inside,

only to stick her head out again as soon as he had passed by. As for: The messages in their eyes and the expectations in their hearts;

There was no longer any need to express them in words.

One day, as Hsi-men Ch'ing was standing in front of his gate, the woman sent her young maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, to invite him over.

"What are you inviting me for, Sister?" Hsi-men Ch'ing pointedly asked. "Is your father at home or not?"

"Father's not at home," Hsiu-ch'un replied. "It's Mother that's inviting you, sir. There's something she wants to ask you."

This was just the signal Hsi-men Ch'ing had been waiting for. He complied with alacrity, was shown into the parlor, and took a seat.

After some time, the woman came out and saluted him, saying as she did so, "I'm extremely grateful for your consideration the other day."

It is imprinted in my heart,

My gratitude knows no bounds.

Since my poor husband went out last, it's been two days in a row now that he hasn't come home. I wonder if you happen to have come across him or not, sir?"

"Yesterday, along with three or four others, he was drinking in the Cheng family establishment," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Something happened to come up that brought me home, and today I haven't had a chance to go into the quarter, so I don't know whether he's still there or not. If I'd been there I could hardly have failed to urge him to come home as early as possible. I'm well aware how upsetting it is for you, Sister-in-law."

"It's just as you say," the woman responded. "I suffer constantly from his refusal to take anyone's advice, his frequent resort to the quarter: Sleeping among the flowers and lolling

beneath the willows,

and his refusal to pay any attention to family affairs."

"If one had to assess Brother's character," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he's certainly humane and righteous enough, but he does have this one flaw."

As they were talking, the young maidservant brought tea, and they drank it together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid Hua Tzu-hsü might come home and thought it imprudent to linger, so he prepared to take his leave.

The woman, for her part, begged Hsi-men Ch'ing, in no uncertain terms, "If you happen to go there tomorrow, whatever happens, urge him to come home as soon as possible. Your kindness will be rewarded. You can be sure I'll make it worth your while, sir."

"Say no more, Sister-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, Brother and I are just like that together."

After saying which, Hsi-men Ch'ing went home.

The next day, when Hua Tzu-hsü came back from the licensed quarter, the woman complained to him, saying, "While you've been out: Indulging your taste for wine and sex, we've become more than a little obligated to our next-door neighbor, the Honorable Hsi-men, who has, more than once, helped to see you safely home. You really ought to buy him a present of some kind to express your gratitude if you don't want to fall behind in your social obligations."

Hua Tzu-hsü immediately bought four boxes of presents and a jar of wine and sent the page boy, T'ien-hsi, to deliver them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted them and gave the messenger a generous tip, but we will say no more of this.

Wu Yüeh-niang, who was present on this occasion, asked, "What is the Hua household sending you this batch of presents for?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "This must be because, the other day, when Brother Hua the Second invited me to join him in the licensed quarter to help celebrate Wu Yin-erh's birthday, he got drunk, and I had to help him to get home. And also because his wife is aware that I constantly urge him not to spend the night in the quarter but to go home as early as possible, and she can't get over her feelings of gratitude at my consideration. I imagine she must have suggested to Brother Hua the Second that he buy these presents in order to thank me."

Wu Yüeh-niang folded her hands in front of her chest and made him a bow in the manner of a Buddhist priest, saying, "Brother, you really ought to take a good look at yourself. You're just like: The earthenware idol preaching to the idol of clay.

You, too, stay away from home for days at a time:

Seducing people's daughters and carrying on

with their wives,

and you have the face to preach to someone else's husband."

"I don't suppose," she continued, "that you're planning to simply accept these presents from them without doing anything in return. Whose name was written on the card that came with the gifts, anyway? If it was his wife's name, then we can write an invitation in my name today and invite her over for a visit. She's been anxious to make our acquaintance for some time. If it was her husband's name, invite him or not, as you please. It's no business of mine."

"It was in Brother Hua the Second's name," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll invite him over tomorrow, that's all."

The next day, sure enough, Hsi-men Ch'ing made the necessary preparations and invited Hua Tzu-hsü over for a visit. They spent the better part of the day drinking together.

When he got home, Li P'ing-erh said to him, "We mustn't be remiss in our social obligations. We sent him a set of

presents and he has reciprocated by inviting you over for a drink. Some day soon you ought to make the necessary preparations and invite him back over here for a drink. Turnabout is fair play.”

Light and darkness alternate swiftly.

Before long the Double Yang festival,⁷ on the ninth day of the ninth month, rolled around. Hua Tzu-hsü took advantage of the occasion to engage the services of two singing girls, and sent an invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing to come over and enjoy the chrysanthemums with him. He also invited Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun to keep them company. Playing the game: “Passing the Flower to the Beat of the Drum,”⁸ they:

Enjoyed themselves as they drank up the wine.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The raven and the hare⁹ move in their orbits as swiftly as arrows;
Among the festivals in the human world
it is again the Double Yang.
The red leaves on a thousand branches
supply autumn color;
The yellow blossoms on the garden paths
emit unusual fragrance.
But the black-hatted young official is not seen
ascending the heights;
He is still dreaming of a silk-clad young lady
offering him wine.
Amid embroidered hangings, behind latticed doors,
they gaze at each other;
From this time on, their mutual love
will never be forgotten.

That day the bunch of them continued to drink until after the lamps had been lighted. At this juncture Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to get up from his place and go outside to relieve himself. He did not anticipate that Li P'ing-erh would be standing there, eavesdropping, just on the other side of the latticework partition, and the two of them ran smack into each other. Before Hsi-men Ch'ing could get out of the way, the woman, who had hastily withdrawn behind the postern gate on the west side of the courtyard, surreptitiously sent her maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, to waylay him in the shadows.

“Mother has sent me to ask you, sir,” she whispered, “if you won't take it easy on the wine and go home as early as you can. Right now she's contriving a way to hustle Father off to the quarter to spend the night. This evening, thus and so, Mother would like to have a word with you.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:

His delight knew no bounds.

He returned to the party, after relieving himself, and from that point on surreptitiously disposed of his drinks, concealing what he was doing behind his sleeve. As the singing girls continued to play their instruments, sing, and ply the guests with wine, he pretended to be too drunk to have any more.

Before long it was already the first watch, and Li P'ing-erh kept coming back impatiently to eavesdrop outside the screen. She saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting in the place of honor, pretending to have fallen asleep, while Sponger Ying and Tagalong Hsieh were sitting there, as if their bodies were nailed to their chairs. They were so drunk they bobbed about like the float valve in an oil jar, but they wouldn't get up to go. It got so bad that Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun finally left, but the two of them still wouldn't budge. Li P'ing-erh was beside herself.

Hsi-men Ch'ing eventually got up to go, but Hua Tzu-hsü wouldn't let him get away.

“I must not have done my duty as a host today,” he said. “Brother, how can you refuse to stay a little longer?”

“I'm really drunk,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “I can't swallow another drop.” Whereupon, making a deliberate display of: Swaying to the east and tumbling to the west, he prevailed upon his two page boys to help him back home.

“I don't know what's the matter with him today,” said Sponger Ying, “that he kept refusing to have anything more. He got drunk when he'd hardly had anything to drink. But since our host has gone to so much trouble on our behalf, let's ask our two sisters here to bring out some larger cups, and we'll have another forty or fifty rounds before breaking up.”

When Li P'ing-erh heard this, from her vantage point on the other side of the screen, she cursed them unremittingly for a pair of slobber-pussed jailbirds, and inconspicuously sent the page boy, T'ien-hsi, to call Hua Tzu-hsü out for a word with her.

“If you want to go on drinking with that bunch,” she told him, in no uncertain terms, “you can take yourselves into the licensed quarter, this minute, and do your drinking there. Don't stick around the house and bother me anymore. Before I know it, it'll be: The third watch in the middle of the night, and you'll still be:

Burning oil and wasting fuel.

I've had enough of it.”

“If I go into the licensed quarter with them at this hour,” said Hua Tzu-hsü, “I'll never make it back home tonight. You'd better not give me a hard time about it.”

“You go ahead,” the woman said. “I'll not give you a hard time about it, that's all.”

This was just the signal Hua Tzu-hsü had been waiting for. He came back and told the others about it, thus and so, saying, “Let's go into the licensed quarter.”

“Really?” said Sponger Ying. “Sister-in-law said that? It's no use trying to fool us. You'd better go back and ask Sister-in-law again before we get going.”

"My wife just spoke to me about it a minute ago," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "She told me not to come home till tomorrow."

"I've got it," said Tagalong Hsieh. "She just couldn't take any more of Beggar Ying's palaver. Now that our brother's succeeded in getting her permission, we can go without anything to worry about."

Thereupon, along with the two singing girls, the whole party set off for the licensed quarter. T'ien-fu and T'ien-hsi accompanied their master, Hua Tzu-hsü, and his two guests. When they arrived at Wu Yin-erh's place in the back alley of the quarter it was already the second watch. They called until someone opened the gate. Wu Yin-erh had already gone to bed, but she got up, lit some candles in the reception room, and invited them to come in and have a seat.

"The patron of your establishment," explained Sponger Ying, "invited us to his place to enjoy the chrysanthemums and have a drink today. Having already drunk to the point where we can't stop, he's also invited us to look in on you here in the quarter. Whatever you've got in the house to drink, serve it up, so we can continue drinking."

We will say no more, for the moment, about Hua Tzu-hsü's drinking bout in the licensed quarter, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he arrived home, still feigning drunkenness, he went into P'an Chin-lien's quarters. No sooner had he taken off his outer clothes, however, than he went out into the front garden and sat down to await a signal from Li P'ing-erh's side of the wall. After some time had passed, he heard them chasing the dog and locking the gate on the other side. Not long after this, what should appear in the dark shadows over the wall but the maidservant, Ying-ch'un. She pretended to be calling a cat, but when she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in the pavilion, she gave him a message. Hsi-men Ch'ing then moved over a table and a bench and, by mounting on top of them, was able to get over the wall. A ladder had already been put in place on the other side.

Now that Hua Tzu-hsü was out of the way, Li P'ing-erh had already:

Removed her headdress,

Carelessly coiled her raven locks, and

Adorned herself with demure elegance,

before coming out to stand in the veranda. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come over the wall: Her delight knew no bounds.

She welcomed him into her room, which was brightly illuminated by lamps and candles, and where she had already laid out a magnificent spread of wine and delicacies, condiments and appetizers.

There was a small pot:

Filled to the brim with fragrant wine.

The woman:

Lifting high a jade goblet,

with both hands, allowed Ying-ch'un to fill it from the wine pot, and then offered it to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a deep bow, saying, "We've been obligated to you in the past, sir, and you have even gone to the trouble of entertaining us. It's enough to make me: Uneasy in my heart."



Li P'ing-erh Makes a Secret Tryst over the Garden Wall

Today I took it upon myself to prepare this cup of watery wine and invite you over, sir, as a means of expressing some small part of my inadequate feelings. And then I've had to contend with the refusal of those two goddamned slobber-pusses to leave. I was really beside myself. But now I've succeeded in packing them all off to the licensed quarter."

"My only fear is that Brother Two might come home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I've already told him to spend the night there and not come back," said the woman. "The two menservants have both gone with him. There's no one else left at home but these two maidservants and Old Mother Feng, who looks after the gate. She's been a servant in my family since I was a child and is completely trustworthy. The front and back gates are already locked."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was completely delighted. The two of them then sat down together: Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,

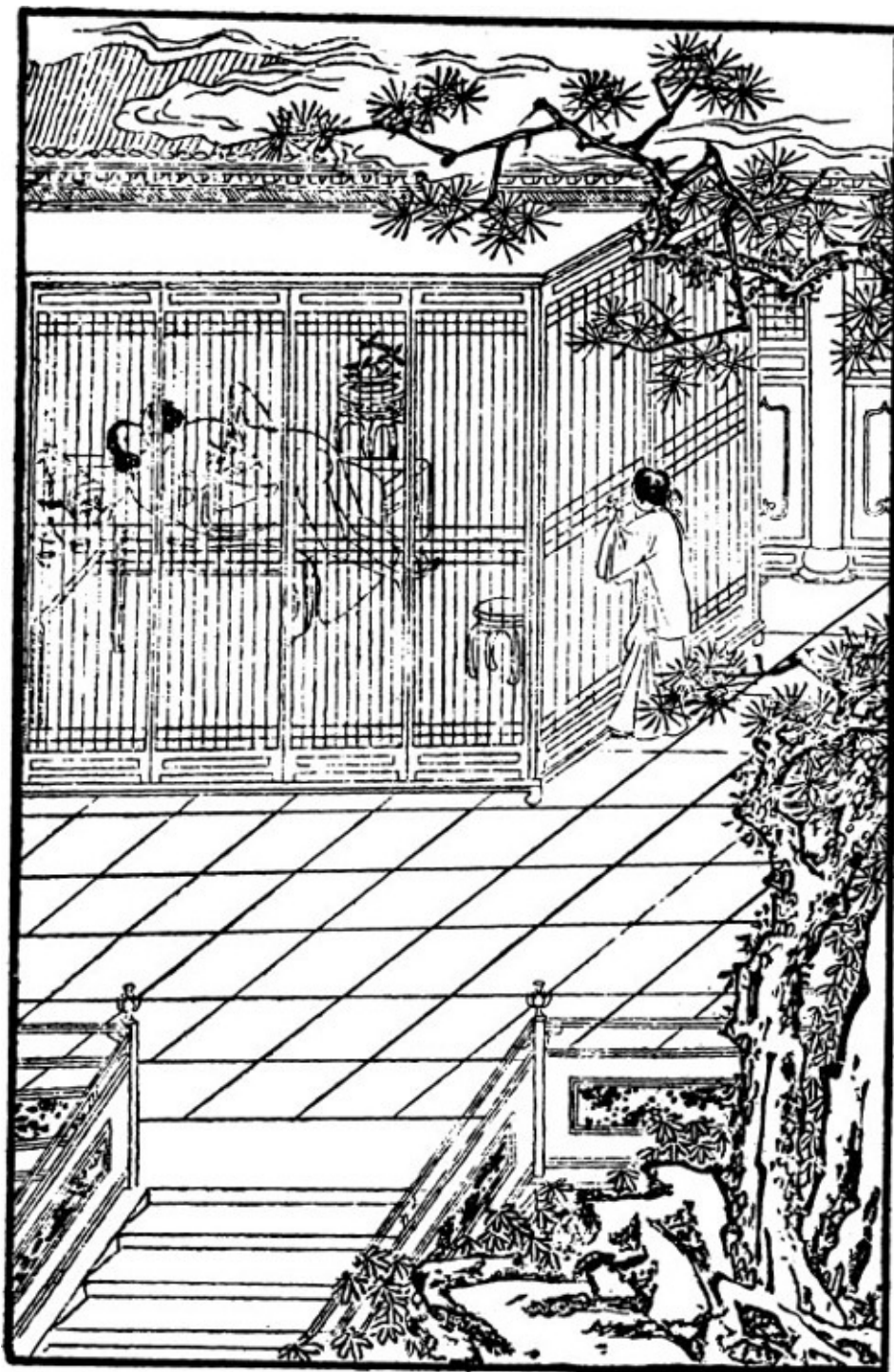
Exchanging cups as they drank,
while Ying-ch'un stood at their side to pour the wine and Hsiu-ch'un went back and forth to serve the food. When they began to feel the effects of the wine; within the brocade bed curtains, the maids: Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, and

Put in its place the coral pillow.
The servants then removed the table at which they had been drinking and put the latch on the door, after which the two of them: Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport.

It so happens that well-to-do households are equipped with double windows, the outer layers of which are called shutters, and the inner layers, casements. When the woman sent her maidservants out of the room, she closed the two casements on the inside, so that even though the room was illuminated by lamps and candles, no one could see in from the outside.

Now the maidservant, Ying-ch'un, was already sixteen years old and knew something of the world. When she saw that the two of them were going to engage in an illicit liaison that night, she stealthily pulled a hairpin out of her headdress, poked a hole in the paper of the lower part of the casement, and peeped inside. Truly, what were the two of them doing with each other? Behold: By the gleam of lamplight,

Amid mermaid silk curtains;
One comes, the other goes,
One butts, the other lunges.
One of them stirs his jade arms into motion,
The other raises her golden lotuses on high.
This one gives vent to the warbling of an oriole,



The Maid Ying-ch'un Peeks through a Crack and Gets an Eyeful

That one gives voice to the twittering of a swallow.
 It is just like Chang Chün-jui's rendezvous
 with Ts'ui Ying-ying,¹⁰
 It much resembles Sung Yü's secret tryst
 with the Goddess of Witches' Mountain.¹¹
 Promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
 Still resonate within their ears;
 The butterfly is enamored, the bee distraught,

They are not yet willing to call a halt.
The engagement is protracted,
The coverlet disturbed by crimson waves,¹²
Until the transfusing touch of the "magic rhinoceros
horn"¹³ penetrates her creamy breast; The battle is prolonged,
The bed curtains clipped by silver hooks,
Until the twin arcs of her painted eyebrows
wilt on her jade face.

Truly:

The third time that lip meets lip
passion is stronger than ever;
A single melting sensation suffuses the body
when lovers meet in secret.

While the two of them were in the room playing at clouds and rain, who would have thought that everything they did was so clearly seen and heard by Ying-ch'un from her vantage point outside the window that she might well have exclaimed: "Is it not delightful?"¹⁴

She could hear everything that they said.

"How old are you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked the woman.

"I was born in the year of the ram," said Li P'ing-erh, "so, this year, I'm twenty-two."

She then went on to ask, "How old is your first lady?"

"My wife was born in the year of the dragon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "which would make her twenty-five."

"So she's three years older than I am," said the woman. "One of these days I ought to buy a set of presents and go pay a call on your First Lady. My only fear is that she may not be any too friendly."

"My wife has always had a most accommodating disposition," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If that were not the case, how could I ever manage to keep so many bedmates around the place?"

"When you came over here, just now," the woman went on to ask, "did the First Lady know about it or not? If she should ask you about it, what would you say?"

"My wives all live in the rear compound," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "four courtyards back from the front of the house. The only exception is my fifth concubine, née P'an, who lives all by herself in a two-storied belvedere in the front garden, but she doesn't dare interfere with me."

"And how old is the Fifth Lady?" the woman asked.

"She was born in the same year as my wife," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That's good," the woman said. "If she doesn't think it presumptuous of me, I'd like to acknowledge her as an elder sister. Someday soon, if you can get hold of the outlines of the First Lady's and the Fifth Lady's feet for me, I'll make two pairs of shoes for them, myself, and take them over with me, as a token of my feelings."

The woman then pulled out two gold pins from among those that held her headdress in place and gave them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, enjoining him, "If you should go into the licensed quarter, don't let Hua Tzu-hsü see them."

"I understand," Hsi-men Ch'ing promised.

Thereupon, the two of them:

Like glue and like lacquer,
dallied with each other until the fifth watch, when:
The cock crowed outside the window, and
The eastern horizon began to grow light.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, fearing that Hua Tzu-hsü might come home, got up and put his clothes in order.

"You can climb over the wall the same way you came," the woman said.

The two of them agreed on a set of signals between themselves. Whenever Hua Tzu-hsü was safely out of the way, a maidservant on this side would look over the wall and give a surreptitious cough as a signal, or first throw a piece of tile over the wall to see if the coast was clear before climbing up to communicate with him. Hsi-men Ch'ing could then use a ladder to climb over the wall, where he would find another already in place to receive him. The two of them could thus: Communicate across the intervening wall,¹⁵
as they engaged in:

Pilfering jade and purloining perfume.¹⁶

As long as they did not go in and out the main gates, there would be no way for the neighbors in the vicinity to find out about their clandestine affair.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In your eating, go easy on the salt and vinegar;
Don't bother to go places where you don't belong.
If you want to be respected, study diligently;
If you don't want a deed discovered, don't do it.¹⁷

To resume our story, as the day dawned, Hsi-men Ch'ing climbed back over the wall the way he had come and went to P'an Chin-lien's room.

Chin-lien, who was still in bed, asked him, "Where did you go off to yesterday without anyone's knowing it? You didn't come home all night, and you didn't tell me where you were going."

"Once again," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was Brother Hua the Second who sent a page boy over to invite me to join him on an excursion into the licensed quarter. We've been drinking half the night, and I came home as soon as I could tear myself away."

Although Chin-lien believed him, the shadow of a doubt still lingered in her mind.

One day, after dinner, she and Meng Yü-lou were sitting in the pavilion in the garden doing some needlework together when a piece of tile came flying over the wall and landed right in front of them. Meng Yü-lou was so preoccupied with stitching the sole of the shoe she was working on that she didn't notice anything. But P'an Chin-lien swiftly surveyed the scene and caught an indistinct glimpse of a white face that poked over the top of the wall and then immediately withdrew.

Chin-lien nudged Yü-lou, pointing to the place where the head had appeared, and said, "Look, Sister Three, that was the older of the two maidservants in the Hua household next door. She must have climbed up to look at our flowers over the wall and then, on seeing us here, gotten down again."

Although this is all that she said at the time, she didn't let it go at that.

Later the same evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home after a social engagement and came into Chin-lien's quarters. When she helped him off with his outer garments and asked if he wanted anything, he expressed no interest in food or tea of any kind, but made a beeline for the front garden. P'an Chin-lien, on the principle that: One thief knoweth another, decided to spy on him and observed that, after he had sat there for some time, the same maidservant as before peeked over the wall, whereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing clambered up a ladder and disappeared over the wall himself.

Once there, he was met by Li P'ing-erh, who conducted him into her room for a rendezvous, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

P'an Chin-lien returned to her room where, all night long, she:

Tossed first this way and then that,
but could not get to sleep.

At dawn the next day, who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who pushed open the door to her room and came inside. The woman pretended to be asleep and did not pay him any attention. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already feeling somewhat uneasy about the situation, came up and sat down beside her on the edge of the bed.

When the woman saw what he was doing, she jumped up into a sitting position herself, took hold of him by the ear with one hand, and berated him, saying, "You unfaithful scoundrel! Where did you really go off to last night, anyway; leaving your old mother to fret the whole night through?"

"No sooner do I let you out of my sight," she continued, "than you're up to your old tricks. But I already know all about them, and you're beginning to try my patience. Tell me the truth at once, all this while, how many times have you made out with that whore in the Hua household next door? If you confess to everything, I may let you off the hook; but if you try to deceive me by so much as a single word, the next time you set one foot over there, I'll raise such a hue and cry before you can get your other foot over the threshold, you fickle jailbird, that: You'll die without a plot to be buried in."¹⁸

"You've been arranging to have your cronies latch onto her husband and keep him overnight in the licensed quarter while you're here making out with his wife. If it's trouble you want, I'll give you enough so that: When you've had your fill, there'll be enough left over

for you to wrap up and take home with you.

No wonder, yesterday, when Sister Meng the Third and I were in the garden doing our needlework, what should appear but that elder maidservant from her place: Sticking out her head and craning her neck, over the wall? It turns out she was nothing but a ghost-snatching demon sent by that whore to snatch you away. You think you can fool your old mother, do you? The other night when that cuckold of hers supposedly invited you to join him for an excursion into the licensed quarter, it was his own home that was the licensed quarter, wasn't it?"

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he was flustered enough to adopt the posture of a dwarf.

Stamping his feet in exasperation, he knelt down on the ground with an ingratiating laugh and pleaded with her, saying, "You crazy little oily mouth! Not so loud! The truth of the matter is that, thus and so, she asked how old the two of you were and said that, someday soon, if she can get hold of the outlines of your feet, she'll make a pair of shoes for each of you. She'd also like to acknowledge you both as elder sisters. She's quite content to be a younger sister to you."

"I don't need that whore to acknowledge me as any older brother or older sister," exclaimed Chin-lien. "She steals other people's husbands and then comes around offering to do them little favors as a means of cementing the relationship. Your old mother is: Not the sort of person to let dust

be thrown in her eyes."¹⁹

She thinks she can get away with that kind of mischief right under my nose, does she?"

As she spoke, she pulled open his trousers with one hand, exposing to view his limp and flaccid organ, which still had a silver clasp fastened around it.

"Tell me the truth," she demanded. "How many times did you make out with that whore last night?"

"Only once that would really count," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You'll have to swear an oath on that all too vigorous body of yours before you can get me to believe that," said the woman. "One time only and it's: As soft as driveling snot and thick as gravy."²⁰

It might as well have been stricken with paralysis. The slightest sign of vitality would be cause for hope."

As she spoke, she removed the clasp with a single motion of her hand, and continued to berate him, saying, "You shameless ruffian!

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail.
No wonder I turned the place upside down looking for it, and all the time it was you who had spirited the thing away in order to screw around with that whore."

Affecting an ingratiating smile, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You crazy little whore! You'll be the death of me yet. She has repeatedly asked me to convey the message that someday soon she'll come over and kowtow to you. And she's going to make a pair of shoes for you too. Yesterday she sent her maidservant over for an outline of the feet of the one from the Wu family. And today she asked me to deliver this pair of hairpins in the shape of the character for long life to you as a present."

Thereupon he took off his cap, pulled them out of his headdress, and presented them to Chin-lien. Taking them into her hand and looking them over, Chin-lien saw that they were a pair of gold, openwork pins, in the shape of the character for long life, which had been deeply chased in intaglio and inset with azurite. It was obvious from the extraordinary intricacy of the craftsmanship that they had been manufactured for imperial use and came from the palace.

Chin-lien was utterly delighted and said, "Well, if that's the way things stand, I won't say any more about it, that's all. When you go over there in the future, I'll act as a lookout, so the two of you can screw away to your hearts' content. How would that be?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted he put both arms around her and said, "My precious child, if you really do that, it will prove the truth of the adage: You don't raise a child in the hope it will

shit gold and piss silver;

All you can hope for is that it will
respond empathetically to you.²¹

Tomorrow I'll go myself and buy you a set of patterned clothing to express my gratitude."

"I don't trust that:

Honeyed mouth and sugared tongue,
of yours," the woman responded. "If you want your old mother to fix things up for the two of you, you'll have to agree to three conditions."

"No matter how many conditions you impose, I'll agree to them all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The first condition," the woman said, "is that you will have to give up frequenting the licensed quarter. The second condition is that you must do as I say. The third condition is that when you go over to sleep with her, when you come home, you must tell me all about it, without deceiving me by so much as a single word."

"Those conditions are no obstacle," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll agree to all of them, and make an end to it."

From this time on, whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing came back after spending the night next door, he would regale the woman with an account of his adventures.

"Li P'ing-erh has a naturally fair complexion," he would say. "Her face is shaped like a melon seed. She's very amorous and she drinks like a fish. We often bring a box of delicacies inside the bed curtains and play cards there and drink for half the night before going to sleep."

One day, he reached into his sleeve and pulled out an object, which he handed to Chin-lien to look at, saying, "This is an album of paintings from the Palace Treasury that the old eunuch director obtained during his service in the Imperial Household Department. The two of us consult it by lamplight and then attempt to emulate the proceedings."

Chin-lien took the album in her hand and opened it up to take a look. There is a lyric that testifies to this: Mounted on patterned damask in the imperial palace,

Fastened with ivory pins on brocade ribbons;
Vividly traced in outlines of gold,
enhanced by blue and green colors;
The square painting on each folio leaf
is neatly framed.
The women vie with the Goddess of Witches' Mountain,
The men resemble that handsome paragon, Sung Yü.²²
Pair by pair, within the bed curtains, they show
themselves to be practiced combatants.
The names of the positions are
twenty-four in number;²³
Each one designed to arouse the
lust of the beholder.

Chin-lien, having perused it from beginning to end, was reluctant to let it out of her hands and, turning it over to Ch'un-mei, said, "Put it away safely in my trunk so we can amuse ourselves with it whenever we want to."

"You can look it over for a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but then you'll have to return it to me. This is a prized possession, belonging to someone else, which I borrowed to bring home and look at, on condition that I return it to her afterward."

"If it belongs to her, what's it doing in my house?" demanded Chin-lien. "I didn't take it out of her hands. And even if I had, she couldn't get it out of me now."

"It wasn't you who asked her for it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was I who borrowed it. You crazy little slave. Stop fooling around."

As he spoke, he went after her and tried to wrest the album out of her hand.

"If you try to grab it," said Chin-lien, "I'll go you one better. I'll tear it to shreds and then nobody will be able to enjoy it."

"I guess I'm outmaneuvered," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "Do as you like with it, but return it when you're through, that's all. If you give this back to her, she's got another remarkable object I can borrow for you in the future."

“My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous?” said Chin-lien. “Bring it here first, and then I’ll let you have this album back.”

The two of them continued their badinage for some time.

That evening, in her room, Chin-lien:

Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt,

Deftly trimmed the silver lamp’s wick,

Made herself up alluringly, washed her private parts,

and, together with Hsi-men Ch’ing, opened up the album inside the bed curtains, preparatory to: Enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss.

Gentle reader take note: Black magic and sorcery have existed since ancient times. If you look at the way in which Chin-lien, from the time she prevailed upon the blind Stargazer Liu to effect a “turnabout” on her behalf, in no time at all contrived to so complicate the situation that Hsi-men Ch’ing’s: Annoyance and anger were transformed into favor, while her:

Seclusion and disgrace were transmuted to joy, with the result that he no longer dared to control her; can the existence of such arts be doubted? Truly: Though you may be as devious as any demon,

You’ll drink the water she’s washed her feet in.²⁴

There is a lyric to the tune “Partridge Sky” that testifies to this:

She remembers that time in the studio
when they had just met;
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together
were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate
alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp
shed only a half-light.

Thinking of the past,
Her dreaming soul deluded;
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy
the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them
will never be separated.²⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 14

HUA TZU-HSÜ SUCCUMBS TO CHAGRIN AND LOSES HIS LIFE; LI P'ING-ERH INVITES SEDUCTION AND ATTENDS A PARTY

The message in her eyes and expectation in her heart
will brook no further delay;
She is not content merely to fiddle with
her hairpin of jade.¹
When spring blooms on her smiling countenance
the flowers look seductive;
At the slightest perturbation of her delicate brows
the willows droop in sorrow.
While blushes suffuse her peachlike cheeks
she dreams of matrimony;
As the chill invades her orchid-scented chamber
she longs for togetherness.
If only she could contrive to comply
with Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's wishes;
Without suffering the fate of Cho Wen-chün
when she sang the "Song of White Hair."²

THE STORY GOES that one day when Wu Yüeh-niang was feeling out of sorts, her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, came to pay her a visit and she invited her to stay overnight.

While she was entertaining her visitor in her room, the page boy, Tai-an, happened to come in, carrying his master's felt bag, and reported, "Father's come home."

Wu K'ai's wife promptly moved over to Li Chiao-erh's quarters in order to get out of the way.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, took off his outer garments, and sat down. Hsiao-yü brought him a cup of tea, but he didn't drink it.

Yüeh-niang noticed that he looked rather worried and asked, "Why is it that you've come home so early from your club meeting today?"

"It was Ch'ang Shih-chieh's turn to entertain us today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he doesn't have room in his own house, so he invited us to make an excursion to the Temple of Eternal Felicity, at Wu-li Yüan, outside the South Gate. Then Brother Hua the Second invited Brother Ying the Second and several of the rest of us, four or five in all, to join him for a drink at Cheng Ai-hsiang's place in the licensed quarter. Just as we were beginning to enjoy ourselves, all of a sudden, a group of official lictors appeared, and:

Without permitting any further explanation,
arrested Brother Hua the Second and took him into custody. This development caught all of us completely off guard, and in my alarm I fled to Li Kuei-chieh's place and hid out for a while. Still uneasy about it, I sent someone to make inquiries.

"It turns out that Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, from Brother Hua the Second's branch of the old eunuch's family, are suing him for a share of the family property. They have filed a suit in the prefectural yamen at K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, and, since the suit has been accepted, the authorities in this district have been ordered to arrest the defendant. It was only after ascertaining the facts that we felt secure enough to break up and come home."

When Yüeh-niang had heard him out, she said, "It serves you right! You've been spending altogether too much of your time hanging around and playing the god with that bunch, without so much as thinking of coming home. All you want to do is fool around outside. It's only appropriate that something like this today should happen before you're ready to call it quits. If you don't give it over now, sooner or later you're going to get involved in a brawl in which they'll drag you off somewhere and:

Pound you into a bloody sheep's head,³
before you abandon this kind of behavior once and for all.

"When your legitimate wife, at home, gives you her well-meant advice, you seldom pay any attention. But whenever a whore in the licensed quarter says a few words to you, you prick up your donkey's ears and do as she says. Truly:

The words of your family
are wind in your ears;

The words of outsiders
are sutras in letters of gold.”

“Who would have the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to assault me?” scoffed Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“You good-for-nothing,” Yüeh-niang responded. “You’re given to shooting off your mouth at home all right, but if it came to the crunch, you’d be so terrified your tongue would hang out.”

As they were talking, who should come in but Tai-an, who reported, “Hua the Second’s wife, next door, has sent T’ien-fu to ask Father if he would step over there to have a word with her.”

This was just the signal Hsi-men Ch’ing had been waiting for, and he lost no time in starting on his way.

“One of these days,” said Yüeh-niang, “if you don’t watch out, it’s going to be you that gets nabbed.”

“It’s right next door,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “What harm can it do? I’ll just go over and see what she has to say.”

Thereupon, he went over to Hua Tzu-hsü’s place. Li P’ing-erh sent a page boy to invite him into the rear of the house for a talk. What should he see when he got there but the woman, with her:

Silk tunic in disarray, and
Pale countenance unadorned,
coming out of her room, so frightened her face had turned as sallow as wax?

Kneeling down before Hsi-men Ch’ing and making repeated supplications, she said, “Sir, there’s no help for it!
If you won’t do it for the priest’s sake,
do it for the Buddha’s.”⁴

As the saying goes:
When calamities strike the home,
Neighbors help each other out.

It’s all because of my poor husband’s refusal to take anyone’s advice, coupled with his unwillingness to pay any attention to serious family affairs. He reposes his trust in the people he fools around with outside and stays away from home for days at a time. It’s only appropriate that today he should have allowed himself to be taken advantage of and gotten himself into this kind of a fix.

“And now that it’s come to the crunch, at this late date, he sends his page boy to me and wants me to pull strings and get him off the hook. I’m only a woman, after all, about as much good as a legless crab; where does he think I’m going to go to find the strings to pull on his behalf? I get so angry when I think of his refusal to take anyone’s advice, I’m tempted to let him be dragged off to the Eastern Capital and beaten to a pulp. It would serve him right. The only thing that deters me is that it would reflect unfavorably on the late old eunuch director’s reputation.

“I hadn’t any alternative, sir, but to ask you to come over and appeal to your generosity. Forget about him! But if you could only find it in you, for my poor sake; if you know of any strings to pull, whatever happens, be good enough to pull one. I just don’t want to see him abused, that’s all.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw the woman kneeling before him, he quickly said, “Sister-in-law, please get up. It’s no problem. At first, today, I didn’t know what was going on. We were all at the Cheng establishment drinking wine together when a group of official lictors suddenly appeared and carried brother off to the Eastern Capital.”

“It’s a long story,”

the woman said. “The trouble is being caused by the nephews of my father-in-law, the late eunuch director, who belong to the same collateral branch of the family as the one from which my husband was adopted. The eldest nephew, Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, Hua the Fourth, and my husband are all natural brothers. The eldest is called Hua Tzu-yu, the third is called Hua Tzu-kuang, the fourth is called Hua Tzu-hua, and my husband is called Hua Tzu-hsü. They are all the consanguineous nephews of the old eunuch director.

“Although the old gentleman had succeeded in amassing a tidy fortune for himself, he saw clearly enough that this husband of mine would not amount to anything; so, when he came back from Kwangtung, he put his property into my hands for safekeeping. He even went so far, at times, as to give my husband a regular caning. The other nephews, too, had tasted enough of the stick at his hands not to dare to interfere.

“Last year, when the old gentleman died, Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth were given something in the way of furniture and household effects to take home with them, but they didn’t receive so much as a candareen’s worth of silver. I said at the time, ‘We’d better take care of them by giving them a little something.’ But this husband of mine spent all his time fooling around on the outside and was unwilling to pay any attention at all to serious matters. Now, today, they’ve been able to:

Act so quietly not a breath of air escaped,
and he’s allowed himself to be undone.”

When she had finished speaking, she let herself go and began to weep out loud.

“Don’t worry, Sister-in-law,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “I was afraid it would be something big. But, as it turns out, it’s only a case of members of the same branch of the family suing each other over the division of property. It shouldn’t be too difficult to handle. As long as you want me to, I’ll:

Treat my brother’s affairs as my own, and
Treat my own affairs as my brother’s.

No matter what you ask of me, I’ll be only too happy to comply.”

“If you’ll only deign to help out, sir,” the woman said, “everything will be fine. I’ll need to know, though, how much money will be required in order to pull the necessary strings, so I can get it ready.”

"It won't require all that much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand that Prefect Yang, who presides over the prefectural yamen in K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, is a protégé of the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, along with my kinsman by marriage at four removes, the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien, are both people who have the ear of the reigning emperor himself. If these two men can be induced to interest themselves on your behalf, and they both speak to Prefect Yang, he could hardly refuse to comply. No matter how important a matter it might be, that ought to take care of it. Now we will certainly need to make a present to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, but since Commander in Chief Yang is related to me by marriage, he will probably refuse to accept anything."

The woman then went into her room, opened a trunk, and brought out sixty large ingots of silver, weighing fifty taels each, making a total of three thousand taels, which she handed over to Hsi-men Ch'ing to expend, both high and low, as he saw fit, in the endeavor to pull the necessary strings.

"Half of that would do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need is there to use so much?"

"If there's anything left over, you can keep it for me, sir," the woman said. "Concealed behind my bed there are four lacquer chests decorated with gold tracery that contain python robes, jade-ornamented girdles, jeweled cap buttons, chatelaines, pendants, and bracelets, as well as valuable jewels and objets d'art. If you could take these off my hands at the same time, sir, and keep them over at your place, I could ask for them whenever I need anything. If I don't take precautions ahead of time, but leave everything to him, we're going to end up having trouble making ends meet. It's obvious that:

Three fists are no match for four hands.⁵

If we let ourselves be outnumbered, sooner or later they'll get the better of us and make off with the property, and I'll be left in the lurch with nowhere to turn."

"But what will happen when Brother Hua the Second comes home and starts looking for this stuff?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"These are all things," the woman replied, "that the old gentleman, while he was still alive, personally handed over to me for safekeeping. My husband doesn't know a thing about them. You can feel free to take charge of them, sir."

"If that's what you want me to do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send someone over to move them as soon as I get home."

Thereupon, he went straight home and consulted with Yüeh-niang about it.

"As for the silver," said Yüeh-niang, "we can send page boys over to carry it back in food boxes. But if we bring the stuff in the chests in at the front door, we can hardly avoid attracting the attention of the neighbors. The best thing to do is, thus and so; if we hoist it over the wall at night, it will be less conspicuous."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted by this suggestion and immediately dispatched the four servants, Lai-wang, Tai-an, Lai-hsing, and P'ing-an, with two sets of food boxes, to carry the three thousand taels of silver over to his house on their carrying poles. Later that evening, when the moon rose, Li P'ing-erh, on her side, together with her two maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, by putting a bench on top of a table, managed to hoist the chests up to the top of the wall. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on his side, accompanied only by Yüeh-niang, Chin-lien, and Ch'un-mei, set up a ladder to receive them. They spread a strip of felt over the top of the wall and then hoisted the chests over the top, one at a time, and deposited them in Yüeh-niang's room.

You may well ask:

"Can such things be?"

If you want to get rich,

You've got to take risks.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Wealth and success are often attained
by strokes of good luck;
Profit and fame, on the other hand,
bring troubles of their own.
If you are destined to attain them,
you will do so in the end;
If you are not destined to attain them,
no amount of effort will avail.⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing had succeeded in taking into his own possession a considerable quantity of his neighbor's disposable wealth, in the form of gold and silver and other valuables, without the other residents of the neighborhood being any the wiser. The same day he had the requisite monies packed up, requested a letter of introduction from his son-in-law's family, the Ch'en household, and sent a servant off to deliver them to the Eastern Capital.

Along the way this messenger:

Each morning took to the purple road;

Each evening tramped the red dust,⁷

until, one day, he arrived in the Eastern Capital and turned over the letter and presents to the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien. The latter, in his turn, requested the grand councilor and grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, to send a note to Prefect Yang in the prefectural yamen at K'ai-feng.

Now this prefect was named Yang Shih,⁸ his courtesy name was Kueishan, and he was a native of Hung-nung district in the province of Shensi. He had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1103 and had risen to the position of chief minister of the Court of Judicial Review before receiving his current appointment as prefect of K'ai-feng. He was an official of absolute integrity. But the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, had been his examiner in the *chin-shih* examination and Yang Chien was a favored and highly placed official, so he could hardly refuse to do the requested favor.

At the same time Hsi-men Ch'ing had also dispatched a letter to Hua Tzu-hsü, informing him of the steps that were

being taken on his behalf, and saying, "The officials involved have all been taken care of. When you appear in court and are interrogated about the whereabouts of the inherited property, simply say that all of the money has been spent and that nothing remains but the houses and real estate."

To resume our story, one day Prefect Yang Shih ascended the tribunal, and the functionaries of the six local offices stood in attendance. Behold:

His official conduct is honest and correct;
His actions reveal integrity and intelligence.
He always harbors a compassionate disposition;
He constantly possesses benevolent intentions.
In cases of disputes over the ownership of land,
He distinguishes between the crooked and the straight
before taking action.
In instances of mutual contention or affrays,
He weighs the lightness or heaviness of the offense
before passing sentence.
In moments of leisure he fingers the zither
or entertains guests;
He also devotes himself to the investigation
of the condition of the people.
Despite the fact that he is a presiding official
in the capital,
He really is a father and a mother to the people
in his jurisdiction.⁹

That day, Prefect Yang Shih ascended the tribunal and ordered that Hua Tzu-hsü be taken out of the lockup and brought before him. When the parties to the suit had been assembled in the courtroom and knelt down before the dais, the prefect began his interrogation as to the whereabouts of the inherited property.

All Hua Tzu-hsü would say was, "After the death of the old eunuch director, the money was all expended on the funeral and services for the dead. All that remains are two houses and a country estate. As for the furniture and household effects, they have all been divided up among the other members of the family."

"It is difficult to ascertain anything about the property of eunuchs," pronounced Prefect Yang. "It is a case of:

Easy come, easy go."¹⁰

Since the money has apparently all been spent, I hereby rule that the presiding magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district be ordered to depute functionaries to assess Eunuch Director Hua's two houses and country estate, to sell them off for their market value, to divide up the proceeds among Hua Tzu-yu and the other two plaintiffs, and to report back to me in writing."

Hua Tzu-yu and the others wanted to kneel down before the tribunal and petition the prefect to continue to hold Hua Tzu-hsü in custody until the whereabouts of the missing money could be determined, but Prefect Yang angrily rejected their petition, saying, "You rascals are lucky to have escaped a beating. When this eunuch director of yours died, why didn't you bring a suit at that time, instead of waiting until now when:

The affair is over and the circumstances have changed,
to kick up such a fuss and waste the paper and brushes required to file a suit?"

Thereupon, without beating Hua Tzu-hsü a single stroke, he signed an order authorizing the return of the defendant to Ch'ing-ho district, and the assessment of the real estate. But no more of this.

No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing's retainer, Lai-pao, ascertain the facts about the disposition of the case than he traveled back, post haste, to report to his master. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the prefect, Yang Shih, had proven responsive to pressure and had released Hua Tzu-hsü and allowed him to return home, he was extremely pleased.

Li P'ing-erh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over to her place to discuss the matter and said to him, "Why don't you get together a few taels of silver and buy the house we're living in? After all, it won't be long now before I'm completely yours."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went home and broached the issue with Wu Yüeh-niang.

"No matter what it's officially assessed at," Yüeh-niang said, "you ought not to enter into an agreement to buy that house. What will you do if her husband should start to suspect something?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing made a mental note of what she had said.

Not many days thereafter, Hua Tzu-hsü arrived home. The district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho deputed Vice Magistrate Yüeh to carry out the assessment, with the following results. The eunuch director's mansion, located on Main Street in An-ch'ing ward, was evaluated at 700 taels of silver. It was sold to a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang. The country estate outside the South Gate was evaluated at 655 taels of silver. It was sold to the commandant, Chou Hsiu. All that remained was the modest house in which Hua Tzu-hsü was currently residing. It was evaluated at 540 taels of silver, but because it was right next door to Hsi-men Ch'ing's property, no one dared to buy it.

Hua Tzu-hsü repeatedly sent people over to make representations, but Hsi-men Ch'ing stalled, maintaining that he couldn't afford it, and refused to rise to the bait. The district magistrate was anxious to settle the matter so that he could file the required written report. Li P'ing-erh, in desperation, secretly sent Old Mother Feng over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to suggest that he use 540 taels of the silver she had deposited with him to make the purchase. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing agree, and the silver was duly weighed out in the presence of the officials. Hua the Elder even signed the paper

that formalized the transaction.

That very day the necessary documents were completed and a report was sent up to the higher authorities. The sale of the old eunuch's real estate holdings had produced, in all, a total of 1,895 taels of silver, which was evenly divided among the three plaintiffs.

Hua Tzu-hsü had come out of this lawsuit without anything for himself. His money, his houses, and his landed property were all gone. Not a trace remained of the 3,000 taels of silver, in large ingots, that had been stored in his coffers.

In a state of severe perturbation he demanded an accounting of Li P'ing-erh. "How was the silver that you provided to Hsi-men Ch'ing actually spent? And how much of it is left over? After all, we have to come up with the money to buy another house."

The only result of these queries was that he had to endure four or five days of abuse at the hands of his wife.

"Phooey! You muddleheaded troll!" she railed at him. "Day after day you neglected your proper concerns, going out and:

Sleeping among the flowers and lolling
beneath the willows,

without bothering to come home. It only serves you right that someone should have been lying in wait for you and succeeded in luring you into this trap.

"Once you landed in jail, you sent someone to speak to me, urging me to pull strings on your behalf. I'm only a woman, after all. I've scarcely ventured out so far as the front gate.

I may be able to run, but I can't fly.¹¹

What do I know about such things? Who do I know, anyway, that might be able to pull strings for you?

Even if I were made of iron, how many nails
could you get out of me?

I had to run all over the place, saying 'Please sir' and 'I beg you, madam,' before I could find anyone that could be of any use. If you haven't planted any seeds in the past, when the going gets rough, who's going to pay any attention to you?

"Thank goodness, our next-door neighbor, Hsi-men Ch'ing, out of consideration for our former relationship, was willing, despite the coldness of the weather and the ugly winds that were blowing, to send his servant all the way to the Eastern Capital, where he succeeded in bringing this affair of yours to a satisfactory conclusion.

"But now that you've escaped the clutches of the law and find yourself with:

Both feet on level ground again,¹²

what do you do but:

Once your life's been saved, think of money;

Once your wound's been healed, forget the pain,

and come home to demand an accounting of your wife?

"Even if there were anything left over, it wouldn't be yours to fritter away on your own gratification. After all, I've still got the note you sent me. If I didn't have your written authorization, it's not very likely that I'd have laid out your money in order to pull strings for you entirely on my own hook, or have simply handed it over to somebody, is it?"

"Of course I sent you that note," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "But the truth of the matter is I was hoping there would be something left over. We've got to come up with enough money to buy another house and have something to live on before we can worry about anything else."

"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a nincompoop! I'm just wasting my breath on you. If you'd only paid some attention a little bit earlier, instead of:

Ignoring things when you're flush, and

Starting to worry when you're in the hole!

You may accuse me of spending too much a thousand times, or ten thousand times if you like, but where do you suppose those three thousand taels of yours went, anyway? I wouldn't underestimate the appetites of people like the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, or the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien, if I were you. If they had been offered any less, do you suppose you could have escaped with impunity from your bout with the law, without suffering so much as a lash with a wisp of straw on your cuckold's body, only so you could come home and shoot off your mouth?

"Hsi-men Ch'ing is no connection of yours. You've got no claim on him. And which of your beloved relatives or friends would have been willing to:

Travel north and journey south,

or go to such lengths or spend so much money, in order to come to your rescue? When you got home you should have laid on a feast and invited him over to express your appreciation, instead of:

Trying to sweep it all under the rug with a

single stroke of the broom,¹³

or demanding that everything be accounted for after the fact."

It did not take very many such pointed and derisive speeches to reduce Hua Tzu-hsü to silence.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an over with a gift to Hua Tzu-hsü to help calm his flustered spirits. Hua Tzu-hsü reciprocated by preparing a feast, hiring two singing girls, and extending an invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing to express his gratitude. He intended to take advantage of the occasion to ask what had become of his money, and he hoped to be able to rely on Hsi-men Ch'ing for the return of several hundred taels of silver, which would enable him to buy another house.

Li P'ing-erh did not want this to happen, so she secretly sent Old Mother Feng over to say to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Don't accept this invitation. Provide him with a false account of how the money was spent, claiming that it was all used up in taking care of the officials involved in the case, both high and low."

Hua Tzu-hsü did not catch on, but sent his servant over two or three times to press the invitation. Hsi-men Ch'ing actually went so far as to hide out in the licensed quarter, while ordering his servants to report that he was not at home. Hua Tzu-hsü was giddy with rage at this treatment, but all he could do was stamp his feet in frustration.

Gentle reader take note: As a rule, when a wife has had a change of heart and no longer sees eye to eye with her husband, even a man with the strength and resolution to chew up nails will find it difficult to defend himself against her secret wiles. It has always been true that:

Man is responsible for what lies outside the household;

Woman is responsible for what lies within it.¹⁴

Yet, on many occasions a man's reputation is ruined by a woman. Why is this so? It is always because he doesn't know how to handle her. To sum it up in a nutshell, the secret lies in the saying:

The husband sings and the wife follows.¹⁵

Where:

Beauty and virtue attract each other,

Affinities are mutually compatible,

The man admires the woman, and

The woman admires the man,

one can, perhaps, be confident that there will be no problem. But, if the slightest distrust develops between them, it will soon turn into revulsion and hatred. As for the likes of Hua Tzu-hsü, who spent his days in:

Insensate dissipation, and

Unrestrained license;

for such a man to hope that his wife would not get other ideas into her head, was futile indeed. Truly:

If one's own resolution is supported,

There is no tempest that can shake it.¹⁶

There is a poem that testifies to this:

If success and accomplishment could be won
by intelligence and effort;

In ancient times Tao Chih¹⁷ would have
been made a marquis.

If one's actions are righteous, one is truly
deserving of respect;

If one is lustful and uncaring, how can one fail
to be ashamed?¹⁸

The scion of the Hsi-men family was given over to
lust and dissipation;

His adulterous and fickle paramour was nothing but
a captivating wench.

Hua Tzu-hsü became so engorged with rage
his tender guts gave way;

But another day, in the court of the underworld,
he would be revenged.

To make a long story short, Hua Tzu-hsü could only scrape together 250 taels of silver, with which he bought a house on Lion Street for them to live in. He was already suffering from the ill effects of his rage, and no sooner had they completed their move than he was unfortunate enough to come down with an acute intestinal fever.

He took to his bed early in the eleventh month and was unable to get up again thereafter. Li P'ing-erh responded to his entreaties by calling in Dr. Hu from Main Street, but later had to dispense with him in order to save money. From then on it was merely a matter of time.

One day became two,

Two days became three,

until finally, on the last day of the month:

Alas and alack;

He stopped breathing and died.

At the time of his death he was twenty-three years of age. No sooner had he taken to his bed than his eldest servant, T'ien-hsi, absconded with five taels of silver and vanished without leaving a trace.

Once Hua Tzu-hsü was dead, Li P'ing-erh lost no time in sending Old Mother Feng to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing over for a consultation. A casket was purchased, the encoffining ceremony completed, sutras were duly recited, and Hua Tzu-hsü's body was escorted out to the graveyard and buried. Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, together with their wives, all came to offer their condolences, and after they had returned from accompanying the coffin to its final resting place they went their separate ways.



Hua Tzu-hsü Succumbs to Chagrin and Loses His Life

On the day of the funeral Hsi-men Ch'ing also had Wu Yüeh-niang arrange for a table of food and wine in their name so that they could offer a sacrifice at the graveside of the deceased.

That day, when Li P'ing-erh had returned home in her sedan chair, she procured a spirit tablet for her dead husband and set it up in her room. But, although she went through the motions of keeping vigil for him, all she could think of was Hsi-men Ch'ing. Even while Hua Tzu-hsü was still alive she had encouraged Hsi-men Ch'ing to make free with her two maidservants, and now that he was dead the two families became closer than ever.

Before long it was the ninth day of the first month and Li P'ing-erh had ascertained that it was P'an Chin-lien's birthday. Even though the fifth of the seven weekly commemorations of Hua Tzu-hsü's death had not yet been observed,

she bought presents, got into her sedan chair, all dressed up in a white satin jacket over a skirt of blue brocade, with a white hempen snood over her chignon, held in place with a pearl headband, and came to pay a call in honor of Chin-lien's birthday. Old Mother Feng carried her felt bag, and T'ien-fu escorted her sedan chair.

The first thing she did after crossing the threshold was to kowtow to Wu Yüeh-niang four times:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder, saying as she did so, "The other day at the graveside I'm afraid I provided you with but meager fare. And thank you very much for your lavish present."

After she had paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she asked to be presented in turn to Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou. It was only then that P'an Chin-lien came in.

"So this is the Fifth Lady," the visitor exclaimed, as she kowtowed once again, repeating as she did so, "Elder Sister, please accept my salutation."

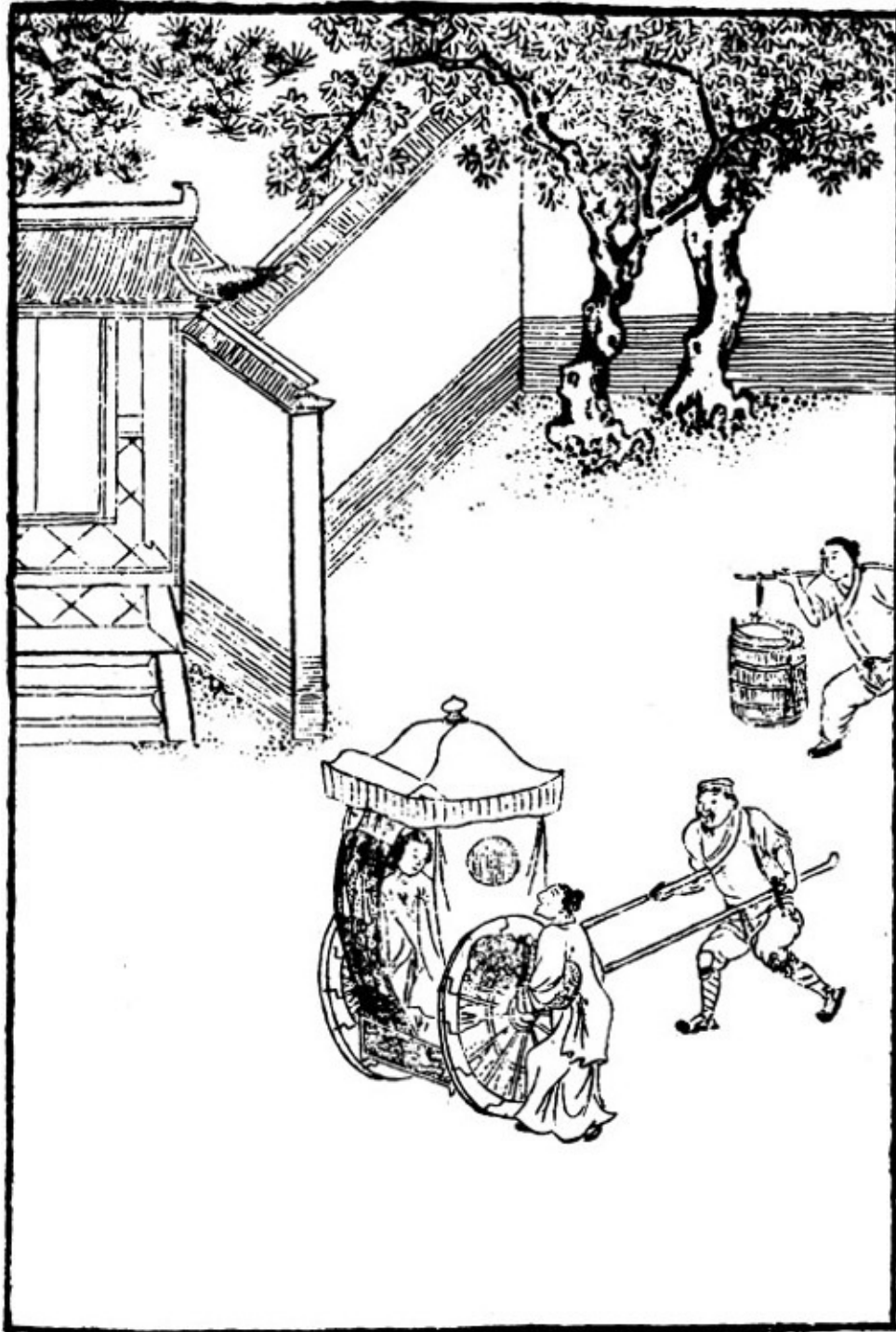
Chin-lien demurred at first and the two of them dickered politely for a while until they settled the matter by kowtowing to each other. Chin-lien thanked her for her birthday presents. The visitor was also introduced to Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of her elder brother, Wu K'ai, and to Chin-lien's mother, Old Mrs. P'an.

Li P'ing-erh then asked to be allowed to pay her respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but Yüeh-niang told her, "Today he's gone to the Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the Eastern Gate to attend the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal¹⁹ in honor of the Jade Emperor's birthday."

She urged her visitor to sit down, and another serving of tea was called for and consumed. After some time had passed, who should come wandering in but Sun Hsüeh-o.

Li P'ing-erh, observing that she was slightly less well dressed than the others, got up and asked, "Who might this lady be? Since I did not know of her, I'm afraid I didn't ask to be presented to her."

"She's just one of my husband's young ladies," said Yüeh-niang.



Li P'ing-erh Invites Seduction and Attends a Party

Li P'ing-erh hastily prepared to kowtow to her, but Yüeh-niang intervened, saying, "There's no need for you to go to all that trouble. A bow to each other will be quite sufficient."

When the two of them had finished saluting each other as directed, Yüeh-niang invited Li P'ing-erh into her own room to change her clothes and instructed a maidservant to set up a table in the parlor and serve tea.

Before long wine was brought in, and they:

Drew round the newly replenished brazier, and

Decanted the finest Yang-kao²⁰ vintage.

Thereupon, Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, and Li P'ing-erh, took the seats of honor, Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh assumed

the role of hosts, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien sat to one side, and Sun Hsüeh-o, not daring to presume on their company for too long, went back to look after things in the kitchen.

Yüeh-niang, observing that Li P'ing-erh never refused a drink, served a round of wine herself and then directed Li Chiao-erh and the others each to serve a round in turn.

They joshed with their guest freely, saying, "Mrs. Hua, you've moved so far away that we sisters must:

Spend more time apart than together."²¹

You no longer give us a thought. It would really be too cruel of you if you don't promise to visit us again."

"If it hadn't been for P'an the Sixth's birthday," said Meng Yü-lou, "you wouldn't even have come to see us today."

"My dear First Lady, and Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "thanks to the kindness all of you have shown me, I've wanted to come and pay you a visit for a long time. But, on the one hand, I'm still in mourning, and on the other hand, after my poor husband's death, there's been no one to look after the place. In fact, I've hardly observed my husband's fifth weekly commemoration yet. If I hadn't been afraid of offending the Fifth Lady, I wouldn't have ventured to come today."

She then went on to ask, "First Lady, when does your birthday come?"

"It's a bit early yet for my birthday," said Yüeh-niang.

"The First Lady's birthday," said P'an Chin-lien, taking over the conversational lead, "is on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. I hope, whatever happens, you'll be able to come visit us then."

"Needless to say," said Li P'ing-erh, "I'll be sure to come."

"Now that you're here," said Meng Yü-lou, "why don't you give us the pleasure of your company by making a night of it, and not bothering to go home?"

"I really would welcome the chance to have a good talk with all of you," said Li P'ing-erh. "To tell you the truth, I find myself living in reduced circumstances, a newcomer to the neighborhood, and ever since my poor husband died, there's been no one to look after the place. The back wall of my house abuts on the garden of that distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao. It's as desolate as can be, and at night there are often fox spirits about:

Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,"²²

and I'm afraid. We used to have two page boys, but the eldest of them has run away. T'ien-fu, here, looks after the front gate, but the back of the house is completely deserted. I'm entirely dependent on Old Feng. She's been with me a long time, and she often comes over to do the laundry and help the maidservants make shoes. I'm really beholden to her."

"How old is Mother Feng?" asked Yüeh-niang. "She certainly looks like a good, dependable body. I've never even heard her raise her voice."

"She's fifty-five years old this year," said Li P'ing-erh. "She was born in the year of the dog. She has no children of her own, either male or female, and depends on matchmaking for her living. I supply her with clothes from time to time. Ever since the recent death of my poor husband I've asked her to come over and keep me company. At night she sleeps on the same k'ang with the maidservants."

"There you are," said P'an Chin-lien, who was always quick on the uptake, "as long as you've got Old Feng to look after the house for you, you might just as well spend the night here. After all, since Mr. Hua is dead, there's no longer anyone to tell you what to do."

"If you'll do as I say," said Meng Yü-lou, "you'll send Old Feng home with the sedan chair and forget about going yourself."

Li P'ing-erh only smiled, without uttering a sound.

As they were talking:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed.

Old Mrs. P'an was the first to get up and make her way toward the front of the compound. P'an Chin-lien then followed in her mother's wake and went off to her own quarters.

"I've already had enough wine," Li P'ing-erh kept insisting, as she refused to accept any more, but Li Chiao-erh said, "How is it that you've been willing enough to drink at the hands of the First Lady and the Third Lady, but when I offer you wine, you refuse to drink any? It's really too discriminatory."

Thereupon, she picked up a larger cup and proceeded to fill it.

"My dear Second Lady," protested Li P'ing-erh, "I really can't manage any more. I'm not just pretending."

"After you've finished this cup," said Yüeh-niang, "you can rest awhile."

Only then did Li P'ing-erh accept the proffered cup and put it down in front of her while she continued to engage them in animated conversation.

Meng Yü-lou, noticing that Ch'un-mei was standing to one side, asked her, "What's your mother doing up front, anyway? You go up there and invite both your mother and Old Mrs. P'an to come back here. Tell them that the First Lady invites them back to help her keep Mrs. Hua company while she drinks wine."

Ch'un-mei had not been gone for long when she returned and said, "Old Mrs. P'an is not feeling well and has gone to bed. Mother is in her room putting on her makeup. She'll be here any minute."

"I've never seen anything like it," said Yüeh-niang. "After all, you're one of the hostesses, and yet, before anyone even knows what you're up to, you abandon your guest and run off to your own room. I don't know how many times a day this sister of mine has to redo her face. Whenever she feels like it she runs off to do it again. She's fine enough in other respects, but about this one thing she's still rather childish."

While she was still speaking, who should appear but P'an Chin-lien. She was wearing a saffron-colored jacket of Lu-chou silk that opened down the middle and was decorated with a motif of wild geese holding bulrushes in their mouths. It had a stiff-standing white satin collar with purpled edging and gilt buttons that depicted honeybees rifling

chrysanthemum blossoms. Beneath this she wore a drawnwork skirt with a foot-wide, gold-spangled border representing sea horses sporting in the waves, shoes of scarlet silk with high white satin heels, and figured ankle leggings. She also sported pendant onyx earrings and a pearl headband. In fact, she was dressed identically with Meng Yü-lou. Yüeh-niang, on the other hand, had on a scarlet silk jacket, a plain blue satin cloak, and a skirt of sand-green pongee, while on her head she wore a fret over her chignon, enclosed in a sable toque.

Meng Yü-lou was the first of the party to catch sight of Chin-lien as she made a conspicuous entrance:

Heavily made up and richly attired,
with a gold pin in the shape of the character for long life carelessly stuck in the hair over her temple.

She proceeded to josh her, saying, "A fine wench you are, Slavey Five. You're the one who was you know what 'under a lucky star'²³ this very day, yet you've abandoned your guest and run off to hide in your room. And you call yourself a human being!"

Chin-lien laughed loudly and gave her a playful slap.

"You're a pretty nerry wench, Slavey Five," exclaimed Yü-lou. "It's your turn to offer our guest a drink."

"I've already had more than a little at the hands of the Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh. "I've reached my limit."

"What you had to suffer at her hands is her business," said Chin-lien. "I, too, make bold to offer you a cup."

Thereupon, she tucked up her sleeves, filled a large cup to the brim, and presented it to Li P'ing-erh, who merely allowed it to sit in front of her, without venturing to take a drink.

Yüeh-niang, who had withdrawn into the master suite with her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, came out and saw that Chin-lien had sat down to help entertain Li P'ing-erh.

"Why doesn't Old Mrs. P'an come out and provide some company for our guest?" she asked.

"My mother isn't feeling well," replied Chin-lien. "She's stretched out in my room, and even if you send for her, she won't come."

Yüeh-niang caught sight of one of the pins in the shape of the character for long life that was visible in the hair over Chin-lien's temple and asked Li P'ing-erh, "Where was this pair of pins that you gave Sister Six made? They're really very fine. In the future I'd like to get them reproduced so we could each have a pair to wear."

"If you'd like some, First Lady, I still have a few more of them at home," said Li P'ing-erh. "One day soon I'll send over an additional pair for each of you. They are made to imperial specifications and were smuggled out of the palace by the old eunuch, my late father-in-law. Workmanship of this kind is not to be found on the outside."

"I was only having a little joke at your expense," said Yüeh-niang. "There are such a lot of us, you could scarcely be expected to have that many to give away."

As the group of womenfolk continued to drink and amuse themselves, the sun was gradually sinking in the west. Old Mother Feng, who had been plied with wine in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters at the rear of the compound, came out with a very red face and urged Li P'ing-erh to make up her mind either to leave or, if not, to send the sedan chair back home.

"Don't go," said Yüeh-niang to her guest. "Just tell Old Feng to go home with the sedan chair."

Li P'ing-erh merely said, "There's no one to look after the place. I'll come again sometime soon to pay my respects to all of you. There'll be time enough for me to stay the night another day."

"Why be so insistent on having your own way?" said Meng Yü-lou. "It looks as though none of us carries much weight with you, but if you won't send the sedan chair off, just wait until Father comes home in a little while; you can be sure he'll try to persuade you to stay, too."

This argument had the effect of overcoming Li P'ing-erh's objections. Taking out the keys to the house, she handed them to Old Mother Feng, saying, "Since all these ladies are so insistent on my staying, if I were to refuse, it would only show that:

I didn't know a favor when I saw one.

You can dismiss the sedan chair for today, but tell the bearers to come back for me tomorrow. When you and the page boy get home, be careful not to let anyone into the house."

She also called Old Mother Feng over to her and:

Whispered into her ear in a low voice,

"Tell my head maid, Ying-ch'un, to get the keys to the trunk in my bedroom and take four pairs of pins in the shape of the character for long life out of the small jewelry box with the gold tracery on it. Bring these to me first thing tomorrow morning. I want to give them to the four ladies here."

When Old Mother Feng had received her instructions she took formal leave of Yüeh-niang.

"Have something to drink before you go," Yüeh-niang said.

"I've had both food and wine just now in the quarters of the young lady at the rear of the compound," said Old Mother Feng. "I'll be back first thing tomorrow morning."

Whereupon, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,
she made her exit. But no more of this.

Shortly thereafter, when Li P'ing-erh refused to have anything more to drink, Yüeh-niang invited her into the master suite to have some tea with her sister-in-law.

All of a sudden, who should come in but the page boy, Tai-an, carrying his master's felt bag. Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, and his first words upon lifting aside the portiere and entering the room were, "So Mrs. Hua is here."

Li P'ing-erh jumped hastily to her feet and the two of them exchanged salutations, after which she sat back down

again. Yüeh-niang called Yü-hsiao to help Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his things.

Turning to Wu K'ai's wife and Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Today I've been attending the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal in celebration of the birthday of the Jade Emperor at his temple outside the Eastern Gate. It was my turn to preside this year. Otherwise, I would have come home after the vegetarian feast at noon. As a consequence I had to join the others in going over the accounts in Abbot Wu's room and, what with one thing and another, have been tied up all this time."

He then went on to ask, "I take it that Mrs. Hua is not going to go home today?"

"She kept refusing our invitations and proposing to leave," said Meng Yü-lou, "until, by combining our efforts, we carried the day by main force."

"There's no one to look after the place," said Li P'ing-erh. "I can't help worrying about it."

"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The night patrols have been very strict recently. What is there to be afraid of anyway?"

If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,
all I'd have to do is send a note to Commandant Chou Hsiu and he'd:

Act upon it even in defiance of the law."²⁴

"Why have you been neglecting Mrs. Hua so?" he added. "Has she been given anything to drink, or hasn't she?"

"All of us have been trying our hands at persuading her," said Meng Yü-lou, "but she affects an inability to drink."

"You're not up to the task," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let me give it a try. She's got no mean capacity."

Although Li P'ing-erh said the words, "I can't handle any more," she made no effort to withdraw.

Thereupon, the maidservants were instructed to reset the table and an elaborate spread of meat and vegetable dishes, along with other dainties of every kind, which had been prepared in anticipation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's return, was laid before them. Sister-in-law Wu, sensing that the time had come to take flight, asserted that she did not wish to have any more wine and withdrew to Li Chiao-erh's quarters to get out of the way.

Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh was seated in the place of honor, Hsi-men Ch'ing drew up a chair across from her and assumed the role of host, Wu Yüeh-niang sat on the k'ang with her feet on the frame of the brazier, and Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien sat down at the other two sides of the table. As soon as the five of them had taken their places they started to decant the wine. They didn't use small cups either, but called for large goblets of chased silver.

It was a case of:

First a cup for you,

Then a cup for me.

As the saying goes:

Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and

Wine is the go-between of lust.

As the cups passed back and forth, the woman continued to drink until:

Her painted eyebrows drooped low, and

Amorous glances escaped the corners of her eyes.

Truly:

A pair of peach blossoms bloomed upon her cheeks,²⁵

Her brows and eyes proclaiming her a wanton wench.

When Yüeh-niang saw that the two of them were:

As stuck on one another as sugar candy,²⁶

and that:

The conversation was becoming rather risqué,²⁷

she found it so offensive that she withdrew to her own room and sent for her sister-in-law to keep her company, leaving the other three to entertain their guest.

They continued drinking until the third watch. By that time Li P'ing-erh's:

Starry eyes were all a blur.

Hardly able to stand on her own legs, she asked Chin-lien to accompany her to the bathroom in the rear of the compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, too, was:

Swaying to the east and tumbling to the west,

as he went into Yüeh-niang's room to ask her where they should put their guest for the night.

"Let her sleep in the room of the one whose birthday she came to celebrate," said Yüeh-niang.

"Where shall I spend the night, then?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Spend the night wherever you like," said Yüeh-niang. "Or, better yet, go spend it with her if you want."

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he called for Hsiao-yü to help him off with his clothes. "I'll sleep in here tonight, then."

"Don't be so delirious," said Yüeh-niang. "Or do you want to provoke me into a real tirade? If you stay here, where do you suppose my sister-in-law is going to sleep?"

"Enough! Enough!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go and sleep with Meng the Third." Whereupon, he went off to Yü-lou's quarters to spend the night.

After she had accompanied Li P'ing-erh to the bathroom, P'an Chin-lien took her up to her own quarters in the front part of the compound, and that night she shared a bed with Old Mrs. P'an.

The next morning Li P'ing-erh got up and was combing her hair in front of the mirror when Ch'un-mei brought her some hot water to wash her face and helped her with her toilet. She noticed how clever Ch'un-mei was and, knowing that she was a maidservant who had enjoyed Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual favors, she made her a present of a gold chatelaine with three pendant charms in the shape of three miniature toilet articles.

Ch'un-mei immediately reported this gift to her mistress and Chin-lien was profuse in her thanks, saying, "I've put you to the additional expense of being so generous to her."

"You really are lucky, Fifth Lady, to have such a fine maid," said Li P'ing-erh.

That morning Chin-lien had Ch'un-mei open the gate to the garden and took Li P'ing-erh and Old Mrs. P'an on an extended tour of the entire premises.

Li P'ing-erh noticed that a gate had been opened in the wall that had formerly separated Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence from hers, and asked, "When is Father Hsi-men going to start construction on the new building?"

"Recently he had the yin-yang master come over to give him an appraisal," said Chin-lien. "He's planning to:

Break ground and start construction,

Put it up and top it off,

in the second month. He's going to tear down your old house and combine the two pieces of property into one, erect an artificial hill and a summer-house in the front, and make a large garden out of it. Then he's planning to build another three-room belvedere, to be called the Flower-viewing Tower, which will be lined up with my own to form one boundary of the grounds."

Li P'ing-erh made a mental note of everything she was told.

While the two of them were still talking together, Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü to invite them back to the rear of the compound for some tea. The three of them then made their way to the master suite where they found Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou keeping Sister-in-law Wu company as they waited for them, with the tea things already laid out.

Just as everyone was enjoying the tea and the snacks that accompanied it, who should suddenly appear but Old Mother Feng. When they had offered her a seat and served her some tea, Old Mother Feng pulled an old kerchief out of her sleeve, in which the four pairs of pins in the shape of the character for long life were wrapped, and handed it to Li P'ing-erh. No sooner had she accepted them than she presented one pair to Yüeh-niang, and afterward, a pair each to Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o.

"These must have cost you a pretty penny," said Yüeh-niang. "This will never do."

"My dear First Lady," laughed Li P'ing-erh, "It's not as though they were genuine rarities. I'm only offering them to you to give away to someone if you like."

Yüeh-niang and the others bowed in gratitude before venturing to stick the pins in their hair.

"I hear that your front door opens right on the Lantern Market," said Yüeh-niang. "It must be quite exciting. If we go for a look at the lanterns someday soon, we'll come pay you a visit. Pray don't pretend you're not at home."

"Let me extend an invitation to all of you ladies for that day," said Li P'ing-erh.

"You may not know it, elder sister," said Chin-lien, "but I've heard that the fifteenth is actually our guest's birthday."

"That settles it," said Yüeh-niang. "If it's really your birthday, every last one of us will come to wish you many happy returns."

"My humble abode is scarcely fit to accommodate a snail,"

laughed Li P'ing-erh, "but if you ladies deign to visit me, consider yourselves invited."

It was not long before they finished their morning repast, after which wine was served and they fell to drinking again. The time passed swiftly as they enjoyed each other's company until the sun began to sink in the west and the sedan chair came back to pick her up. Li P'ing-erh said her farewells, and her sorority of hostesses could not persuade her to stay any longer. Before leaving, she asked if she might be permitted to say good-bye to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He had to get up early this morning," said Yüeh-niang, "and go outside the city gate to see off the district vice-magistrate."

Only then, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

did Li P'ing-erh get into her sedan chair and go home. Truly:

The coupled halves of the peach stone
serve to evoke a chuckle;

Because inside, it will be found, lie

yet another couple.²⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 15

BEAUTIES ENJOY THE SIGHTS IN THE LANTERN-VIEWING BELVEDERE; HANGERS-ON ABET DEBAUCHERY IN THE VERDANT SPRING BORDELLO¹

As the sun sinks amid the western hills,
the moon rises in the east;
Even the span of a hundred years
is like wind-blown tumbleweed.
Before one knows it, the red-cheeked lad
one so admires,
In the twinkling of an eye turns into
a white-haired gentleman.
Do not waste the fullness of your youth,
so quickly does it pass;²
Even Heaven-scaling wealth and success
are as evanescent as clouds.
One might as well seek to divert oneself
among scarlet skirts;
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red
in houses of pleasure.

THE STORY goes that:

Light and darkness alternate swiftly, and before anyone knew it, the fifteenth day of the first month was at hand. The day before, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent his page boy, Tai-an, to deliver four trays of preserved fruit, two trays of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a jug of wine, a tray of birthday noodles, and a set of heavy silk brocade clothing to Li P'ing-erh in honor of her birthday. The gifts were sent in Wu Yüeh-niang's name, accompanied by a card that read, "Respectfully presented with straightened skirts by the lady, née Wu, of the Hsi-men household."

Li P'ing-erh had just gotten up and was still engaged in doing her toilet. Calling Tai-an into her bedroom, she said, "I'm afraid I imposed upon your First Lady's hospitality the other day, and now she has gone to the further trouble of sending me these gifts."

"Mother sends her greetings," said Tai-an, "and Father sends his greetings too. They told me to say, 'It's only a little something for you to give away to someone if you like,'"

Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to set up a small table outside in the parlor. There Tai-an was entertained with tea and four little boxes of delicacies. As he was about to leave, she gave him two mace of silver and a handkerchief of shot silk decorated with the symbolic representations of the "eight treasures."

"When you get home," she said, "please convey my greetings to all the ladies of the house. I'll send Old Mother Feng around with written invitations. Whatever happens, I hope they will all condescend to pay me a visit tomorrow."

When Tai-an kowtowed and went outside she also gave him a hundred cash for the two carriers who had brought the boxes containing her presents.

Li P'ing-erh lost no time in dispatching Old Mother Feng with a letter box containing five written invitations, inviting Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o to visit her on the fifteenth. At the same time she also sent Hsi-men Ch'ing a private note asking him to drop in on her later that evening to help celebrate her birthday.

The next day Wu Yüeh-niang, having told Sun Hsüeh-o to stay behind and look after the house, set out with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien in four sedan chairs. All of them were dressed in clothing of figured brocade. Accompanied by the page boys Lai-hsing, P'ing-an,³ Tai-an, and Hua-t'ung, they arrived in front of Li P'ing-erh's newly purchased house, which was located in the Lantern Market on Lion Street.

The house consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage and three interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. The first part of the building was a two-story structure with windows on the upper floor that opened directly over the street. Inside the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard there was a row of three rooms on either side and a formal reception hall. A passageway through an antechamber led into the third courtyard, which contained three bedrooms and a kitchen. The open space behind the third courtyard, abutted directly on the garden of a distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao.

Li P'ing-erh, knowing that Wu Yüeh-niang and the others were coming to see the lanterns, had furnished the second-story room that overlooked the street with standing screens, chairs and tables, and an array of decorated lanterns. She first ushered her guests into the formal reception hall and then, after they had performed the customary exchange of greetings, invited them back to the parlor in the rear courtyard for some tea. When they had finished changing their clothes in her room, tea was served, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

At noontime Li P'ing-erh invited her guests to return to the reception hall where four place settings had been provided and two singing girls, named Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan, had been engaged to entertain them as they enjoyed the feast. After: Five rounds of wine had been consumed; and

Three main courses had been served,
Wu Yüeh-niang and the others were invited to go up to the second-story room that overlooked the street to enjoy the

display of lanterns as they continued their feast.

Hanging blinds of speckled bamboo had been let down under the eaves, from which an array of brightly colored lanterns were suspended. Wu Yüeh-niang was wearing a full-sleeved jacket of figured scarlet material, a stylish green silk skirt, and a sable cloak. Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien all wore white satin jackets and blue silk skirts, over which Li Chiao-erh also wore a brocaded aloeswood-colored vest, Meng Yü-lou a brocaded green vest, and P'an Chin-lien a brocaded scarlet vest. On their heads: Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;

Phoenix hairpins were half askew, while, from just behind the hair over their temples, there dangled innumerable pendant earrings in the shape of miniature lanterns of every description.

Leaning out of the windows of the second-story room, they looked down on the Lantern Market below where: Crowds of people had congregated; and

The merrymaking was at its height.

Several tens of elaborate lantern-stands had been erected in the street, and peddlers were busy hawking their wares on all sides.

The men and women come to see the lanterns;
Were red as flowers and green as willows.
Carriages and horses rumbled like thunder;
Hills of lanterns soared into the Milky Way.⁴
What did this wonderful Lantern Market look like? Behold:
Insinuating themselves among the mountain rocks, a pair
of dragons sports in the water;
Concealed amid the sunset clouds, a solitary crane
ascends to the heavens.
Golden Lotus lanterns,
Tower of Jade lanterns,
Scintillate like a cluster of pearls;
Lotus blossom lanterns,
Hibiscus lanterns,
Scatter a thousand embroidered rosettes.⁵
Hydrangea lanterns,
Are chaste and immaculate;
Snowflake lanterns,
Are tumbled and tossed.
Scholar lanterns,
Bow and scrape, advance and retreat,
Preserving the manners of Confucius and Mencius;
Housewife lanterns,
Display virtuous demeanors and gentle dispositions,
Emulating the fidelity and resolve of Meng Chiang.⁶
There is a Buddhist monk lantern,
Depicting Yüeh-ming and the courtesan Liu Ts'ui;⁷
And an underworld assessor lantern,
Showing Chung K'uei seated with his little sister.⁸
There is a shamaness lantern,
Fluttering her feathered fan,
Pretending to subdue evil spirits;
And a Liu Hai lantern,
Bearing the golden three-footed toad on his back,
As it gobbles its string of cash.⁹
There are camel lanterns,
And green lion lanterns,
Bearing priceless rarities,
Snorting and roaring;
As well as gibbon lanterns,
And white elephant lanterns,
Proffering treasures fit to ransom cities,
Gamboling and playing.
All arms and legs,
Crab lanterns,
Cavort in the clear waves;
With gaping mouths and long beards,
Catfish lanterns,
Gulp down green algae.

Silver moths vie with one another in brilliance,
 Snowy willows compete with each other in beauty;
 Pair by pair, they follow in the wake of brocade sashes
 and dangling pomanders,
 Branch by branch, they brush against decorated pennants
 and turquoise carriage curtains.¹⁰
 Fish and dragons sport on the sand,
 As the Seven Perfected Ones and the Five Ancients¹¹
 present their vermilion texts;
 Tasseled portieres are suspended,
 While the Nine Barbarians and the Eight Tribes
 come to offer their tribute.
 Parading village mummers, Troupe after troupe, drum up a dreadful din;
 Peddlers of toys and knickknacks,
 Item by item, tout the uniqueness of their wares.
 Among the revolving lanterns,
 One comes, the other goes;
 Amid the suspended lanterns,
 One bobs up, another down.
 There are vitreous vases,
 Depicting only a beautiful woman or rare flower;
 As well as mica screens,
 Portraying paradises on both mountains and seas.
 To the east,
 There are bedsteads of carved lacquer,
 And bedsteads of inlaid mother-of-pearl,
 The golds and greens of which blend their hues;
 To the west,
 There are lanterns spangled with gold,
 And lanterns striped with colors,
 Producing brocade effects that dazzle the eye.
 To the north,
 There are exhibited antiques and curios;
 To the south,
 Calligraphy, painting, vases, and incense burners.
 Patrician youths are out in force,
 From beneath low balustrades their kickballs
 rise into the clouds;
 Wellborn young ladies escort each other,
 As within lofty belvederes they show off
 their good looks.
 The booths of the fortune-tellers are massed like clouds,
 The stalls of the physiognomists are arrayed like stars;
 They are prepared to expatiate on one's fortune
 in the impending spring,
 Or determine the success or failure of a lifetime
 with sure precision.
 Then there are those,
 Professional storytellers,
 Who, standing on a slope,
 Relate in doggerel and song the exploits of Yang Yeh;¹²
 And see those others,
 Itinerant Buddhist monks,
 Who, clapping their sounding cymbals,
 Elaborate upon the adventures of Tripitaka.¹³
 The sellers of Lantern Festival dumplings,
 Make imposing piles of their ingredients;
 The makers of artificial plum blossoms,
 Attach them ubiquitously to dead branches.
 Paper cutouts of spring moths,
 Stuck rakishly in the hair over the temples,
 quiver in the east wind;
 Gold-flecked gimcrack hairpins,

Twinkle atop chignons with a glitter
that rivals the sun's.
Standing screens depict the extravagant Shih Ch'ung
and his brocaded windbreak;¹⁴
Beaded portieres display the twin perfections
of plum blossom and moonlight.
Though the attractions of the hills of lanterns
cannot be exhaustively enumerated;
They surely must portend a bumper harvest
and a happy year to come.

Wu Yüeh-niang contemplated the spectacle for a while, after which, observing that the crowd below was getting rowdy, she and Li Chiao-erh withdrew to the table and sat down to enjoy their wine. P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou, however, along with the two singing girls, continued to lean out over the windowsills and gaze at the scene below. P'an Chin-lien went so far as to tuck up the sleeves of her white satin jacket, revealing the brocaded lining and exposing her ten slender fingers, which sported six gold stirrup-shaped rings. Leaning halfway out the window, she cracked melon seeds with her teeth and spit the empty shells onto the heads of the people below. All the while she and Meng Yü-lou maintained a steady stream of laughter and banter.

One minute she called out, "Elder Sister, come and see. Look at the two hydrangea lanterns hanging from the eaves of the house over there: One comes, the other goes;

Bobbing up, bobbing down.

They're really something to see."

The next minute she said, "Second Sister, come and see. On the stand just across the street there's a big fish lantern with all kinds of small fry, turtles, shrimp, crabs, and so forth, tagging at its heels. They're really fun to watch."

A minute later she called to Meng Yü-lou, saying, "Third Sister, just look at the old lady lantern and the old man lantern over here."

As she spoke, a sudden gust of wind blew up and tore a gaping hole in the abdomen of the old lady lantern. When Chin-lien saw what had happened she laughed uproariously.

This had the effect of attracting the attention of the sightseers below.

Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,

Lifting their heads and gazing upward;

Jammed together into an indivisible mass,

Treading on one another's heels,

in no time at all a considerable crowd of onlookers had gathered. Among them were to be found some dissolute young scamps who were not averse to offering their own assessments of the situation.

One said, "They must be dependents of some princely or noble household on an outing."

Another hazarded, "They must be the seductive concubines of some relative of the imperial family, come to see the lanterns. Otherwise, what are they doing dressed in palace style?"

Another ventured, "They must be whores from the licensed quarter that some big spender has engaged to entertain him while he enjoys the lanterns."

Still another strolled over and said, "I'm the only one who can identify them. None of you will ever guess right. If you take them for whores, how do you account for the other four at the back? I'll tell you who they are: those two women don't belong to just anybody. They might as well be mates of King Yama himself or concubines of the General of the Five Ways. They're the womenfolk of the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing who owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen and engages in moneylending to both officials and functionaries. You'd be well-advised to leave them alone. They must have come here along with his wife to see the lanterns.

"The one wearing the brocaded green vest I don't recognize, but the one wearing the brocaded scarlet vest with the turquoise beauty patch on her face looks like the wife of Wu the Elder who used to peddle steamed wheat cakes on the street. When Wu the Elder tried to catch her in the act of adultery in Dame Wang's teashop, the Honorable Gentleman just mentioned gave him such a kick that he died of the effects, after which he took her into his household as a concubine. Later on, her brother-in-law, Wu Sung, came back from the Eastern Capital and lodged a complaint against him, but ended up killing the lictor, Li Wai-ch'uan, by mistake, so that Hsi-men Ch'ing was able to get his assailant condemned to military exile, while he himself got out of the affair completely unscathed. She hasn't shown herself in public for the last year or two, but she's looking better than ever."

At this point another busybody chimed in, saying, "What's the point of wasting our time talking about the likes of them? Let's move along."

When Wu Yüeh-niang, from her vantage point in the upstairs room, became aware that a large crowd had assembled below, she told Chin-lien and Yü-lou to come back and join her at the table, where they listened to the two singing girls perform songs in celebration of the lantern festival while they drank their wine.



Beauties Enjoy the Sights in the Lantern-viewing Belvedere

After a while, Yüeh-niang indicated that she was ready to make her departure by saying to her hostess, "I've had enough to drink. The Second Lady and I will go ahead home, but we'll leave our two sisters behind to keep you company a little longer and show our appreciation for your hospitality. Our husband isn't at home today, so there's no one to look after the place. When only the maidservants are there, I can't help worrying about it."

Li P'ing-erh could hardly let them go without a protest.

"My dear First Lady," she said, "I've scarcely had a chance to show my respects to you. Since your arrival today I haven't even had the opportunity to help you to a proper serving of anything. It's a festival occasion, after all, and yet you want to go home before the lanterns are lit or dinner is served. Even if Father Hsi-men is out today, as long as the

young ladies are there, what is there to worry about? Wait until the moon rises, at least, and I'll see you all home myself."

"It's not that," said Yüeh-niang. "It's just that I'm not accustomed to drinking so much. If I leave my two sisters behind it will be just as though I were here myself."

"Even if you don't want any more yourself," said Li P'ing-erh, "that's no reason why the Second Lady shouldn't have another cup. The other day, at your house, I accepted cup after cup without demur, and you ladies refused to let me off. Now that you've been good enough to visit these cramped quarters of mine, though I have nothing to offer, you must let me do the best I can."

Thereupon, she took a large silver goblet and handed it to Li Chiao-erh, saying, "Second Lady, you must have a cup, no matter what. I know the First Lady has had enough, so I don't dare offer her a big one, but only a little one."

So saying, she filled a cup to the brim and offered it to Yüeh-niang, and then did the same for Li Chiao-erh, encouraging her as she did so with the words, "Second Lady, do drain this cup."

Yüeh-niang gave two mace of silver to each of the singing girls, and then, after waiting for Li Chiao-erh to finish her wine, got up to go.

Turning to Yü-lou and Chin-lien, she said, "The two of us will go on ahead. When we get home, I'll send a page boy back with a lantern to fetch you. Do come home then; there's no one to look after the place."

Yü-lou assented to this suggestion. Li P'ing-erh then saw Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh out the door and into their sedan chairs before returning upstairs to keep Yü-lou and Chin-lien company as they continued to drink wine. Gradually, as it grew late: The jade hare rose in the east,¹⁵ and the lanterns on the second floor were lit. The singing girls entertained them with songs as they drank their wine. But no more of this.

To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to dine with him at home, after which they set out together to enjoy the sights in the Lantern Market. When they arrived at the eastern end of Lion Street Hsi-men Ch'ing, because he knew that Yüeh-niang and the others were being entertained in the front second floor room of Li P'ing-erh's house and he didn't want his companions to see them, did not proceed to the western end of the street where the big lanterns were displayed, but came to a halt when he had gotten no further than the shop that sold gauze lanterns.

No sooner had he turned around than he ran into Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu, who saluted him with the words, "We haven't seen you for ages, Brother, but you've been very much in our thoughts."

Seeing that he was accompanied by Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, they upbraided them, saying, "A goddamned fine couple of fellows you are; going out on the town with our elder brother without giving us the word!"

"Brother Chu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're doing them an injustice. We've only just run into each other on the street."

"Well now, where are you headed, then, after you've seen the lanterns?" asked Sticky Chu.

"We might as well go to the Great Tavern right here on Lion Street and have a few drinks together," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'd invite you all home with me if it weren't for the fact that my womenfolk are all out at a party today."

"Rather than letting you treat us to a round at the tavern," said Sticky Chu, "why don't we all go into the licensed quarter together and pay a visit to Li Kuei-chieh? It's only appropriate on a festival occasion like this that we should go wish her a happy new year and have some fun together. The other day when we were over at her place she appealed to us, and actually broke down and cried, saying that ever since she became indisposed last month not even your shadow has been into the quarter to see her. All we could do was to say that you must be busy in order to cover up for you. Since you're free today, we'll be happy to accompany you inside to pay her a visit."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was preoccupied by his assignation with Li P'ing-erh later that evening, tried to excuse himself, saying, "I'm afraid I can't make it today; I've got something to do. How about tomorrow?"

But he was quite unable to withstand the urgings of his cronies who: Dragged him off, dead or alive. Thereupon, he consented to go into the licensed quarter with them. Truly: The shadows of the flowers under the willows hold down the dust on the road;

Each time one sets out to enjoy them
one's pleasure is renewed.
If one could only assess the sums spent for a smile
in the metropolis;
Who knows how many commoners' households
they would serve to support?¹⁶

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and his companions arrived at the Li family establishment they found Li Kuei-ch'ing, all made up, standing in the doorway. She ushered them into the main room and greeted each of them in turn.

Sticky Chu then called out in a loud voice, "Invite Auntie Li the Third to come out at once! It's only thanks to our combined efforts that we've induced the Honorable Gentleman to pay you a visit."

Before long, the old procuress made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick.

After they had finished with the appropriate amenities, she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I hope we haven't been remiss in the entertainment we've provided you, Kinsman. How is it that you haven't dropped in to see my daughter for such a long time? You must have taken up with a new sweetheart somewhere else."

"You've hit the nail on the head, madam," interjected Sticky Chu. "The Honorable Gentleman has recently had his eye on another tart of incomparable beauty and has been spending all his free time at her place. He doesn't give a thought to your Kuei-chieh any longer. In fact, if the two of us hadn't run into him in the Lantern Market just now and dragged him along with us, he wouldn't be here now. If you don't believe me, just ask Blabbermouth Sun here." Then, pointing at Ying

Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, he continued, "And this goddamned pair, for their part, are: Deities of the same persuasion."¹⁷

When the old procuress heard these words she cackled out loud, saying, "Well, Brother Ying, we've never done anything to get on the wrong side of you. Why don't you use your good offices to put in a word for us with our kinsman here? However complicated his affairs in the quarter may be, as the saying goes: A practiced profligate doesn't confine his attentions

to a single whore;

A practiced whore doesn't reserve her blandishments
for a single patron.

The hole in the cash has much the same shape
wherever you find it.

There's no need for me to boast about our Kuei-chieh's looks. The gentleman has eyes of his own and doesn't require anyone to point out the obvious to him."

"To tell the truth," interposed Blabbermouth Sun, "this new tart that Brother's taken up with isn't even an inhabitant of the quarter. She's an outsider who doesn't give a fuck for the insiders."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he chased Blabbermouth Sun around the room, pretending to hit him, exclaiming as he did so, "Madam, don't pay any attention to this: Goddamned and man-condemned,¹⁸ old oily mouth! All he ever does is plague people to death."

This exhibition only caused Blabbermouth Sun and the rest to collapse in a heap with laughter.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to pull three tael of silver out of his sleeve and hand them to Li Kuei-ch'ing, saying, "On this festival occasion I'd like to stand my friends a treat."

"I really couldn't agree to such a thing," Kuei-ch'ing affected to reply. "Give it to my mother."

"How now?" Auntie Li responded. "My kinsman must think so little of us that he doesn't think we can afford to furnish a feast, even on a festival occasion, for the entertainment of his distinguished friends. If you have to reach into your own pocket to defray the expenses, it will look as though we denizens of the licensed quarter are only interested in money after all."

At this juncture Ying Po-chüeh interrupted her, saying, "Auntie, if I were you I'd take what you're offered. As the saying goes: Don't risk your luck by refusing the first gleanings
of the New Year: stash them away.

Just bring on the wine, now, as quickly as you can."

"That will never do," said the procuress, but even as she persisted in her protestations she accepted the silver and slipped it into her sleeve.

Making a deep bow, she said, "Thank you for your generosity, Kinsman."

"Wait a minute, Auntie," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got a story for you. A certain young man was having an affair with a prostitute in the licensed quarter. One day, just for the fun of it, he disguised himself as a pauper and paid a visit to his regular establishment. When the madam saw how shabby his clothing was, she paid him no attention and let him sit there for some time without even offering him a cup of tea. The young man said, 'Auntie, I'm hungry. If you've got any rice, please bring me something to eat.' To which the old procuress replied, 'The bin is completely dry. Where would I get you any rice from?' 'Since you're out of rice,' the young man said, 'If you have any water, please bring me a little to wash my face with.' To which the old procuress replied, 'We haven't been able to pay the water carrier, so he hasn't delivered any water the last few days.' At this, the young man reached into his sleeve, pulled out a silver ingot weighing ten taels, put it on the table in front of him, and told her to buy rice and order water with it. This flustered the old procuress so much that she blurted out, 'Kinsman, would you rather eat your face before washing your rice, or wash your rice before eating your face?'"

Everyone laughed uproariously at this.

"I see you're still as quick to make fun of people as ever," said Auntie Li. "It so happens that, as the saying goes: Such a thing may be said, but

It ain't necessarily so."

"Lend an ear," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got something else to tell you. The Honorable Gentleman has recently engaged the services of Brother Hua the Second's former sweetheart, Wu Yin-erh, from the back alley of the quarter. He isn't interested in your Kuei-chieh any longer. If we hadn't dragged him along with us today, do you think he'd be here now?"

"I don't believe you," laughed the procuress. "Our Kuei-chieh can be said, without exaggeration, to be superior to Wu Yin-erh in every way. Our establishment and our kinsman's family are bound together by ties that: The sharpest knife could never sever.

What do you take our kinsman for, anyway? He's seen enough of the world, if you get right down to it, to know the value of true gold when he sees it."

When they had finished with their palaver, four folding armchairs were set up in the parlor, on which Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Sticky Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun sat down, in the positions of honor, while Hsi-men Ch'ing assumed the place of host, across from them. The old lady then excused herself in order to supervise the preparation of the wine and accompanying delicacies for the party.

Sometime after her departure, Li Kuei-chieh herself finally appeared. Her hair was done up in a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, fastened in place with a gold filigree pin. Her coiffure was further augmented by plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, a pearl headband, and gold lantern earrings. She was wearing a

white satin jacket that opened down the middle, with purpled edging and green brocade sleeve linings, over a red silk skirt. Indeed, she was so made up as to look as though she were: Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.

After having:

Neither correctly nor precisely, made a bow to the company and uttered a word of greeting, Kuei-chieh sat down with Kuei-ch'ing at the two unoccupied ends of the table. Before long, one of the girls of the establishment brought in seven cups of tea on a square tray of painted lacquer. The teacups were the color of snowy linen, the silver teaspoons were in the shape of apricot leaves, and the tea itself, which was flavored with attar of roses and the kernels of melon seeds, was of a bewitching fragrance. Kuei-ch'ing and Kuei-chieh served a cup to each of their guests and kept them company until the tea was finished and the raised saucers were cleared away.

A servant then came in to wipe off the table and began to lay out the delicacies to go with the wine. Just at this juncture, from behind the hanging blind over the door, a number of shabbily dressed young men, known to the trade as "cribbers," were observed: Sticking out their heads and craning their necks, awaiting the right moment to make their way inside and kneel down in front of the company.

They held three or four pints of melon seeds in their hands, which they presented to the host with the words, "A humble offering to Your Honor on this festival occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing recognized their leader as a fellow called Yü Ch'un, or Stupid Yü, and asked him, "Which of you are here today?"

"Tuan Mien, or Half-baked Tuan, Sha San, or Yokel Sha, and Nieh Yüeh, or Tiptoe Nieh, are just outside," replied Stupid.

Half-baked Tuan and the others then came inside and, noticing that Ying Po-chüeh was one of the company, kowtowed to him, saying, "Master Ying, you're here too."

Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up, announced that he would take the melon seeds, and then, rummaging in his purse for a tael's worth of silver, tossed it on the floor.

When Stupid Yü had picked it up, he and his companions kowtowed on their hands and knees, saying, "Thank you for your generosity, sir," and beat a hasty retreat.

There is a song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the conduct of these "cribbers."

Assembling at one place,
Congregating at another,
Their status may be low, but their pretensions
are great.
If you rub them the wrong way, they'll
give you a hard time.
No part of the licensed quarter
is off their beat.
At parties they'll join the fun,
Ever ready with idle conversation;

Only after doing their turn
will they disperse.
The money they make isn't much, So why do they make such a fuss?
They live off the spittle licked from
the tiger's mouth.¹⁹

As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had gotten rid of the "cribbers," wine was served and the party settled down to drink. Kuei-chieh: Filled the golden cups to the brim,
Dangling her pair of red sleeves.
Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits were provided just in season.
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
The flowers were gorgeous and the wine heady.

After:

Two rounds of wine had been consumed,
Kuei-ch'ing and Kuei-chieh, one playing the psaltery and the other the *p'i-p'a*, accompanied themselves as they sang the song suite on the beauties of spring, the first number of which, to the tune "Flowers in Brocade," begins with the words: The fair weather is balmy.²⁰

Just as they were in full voice, three young men appeared, wearing black clothing and brown leather boots, who were known to the trade as "ball clubbers."

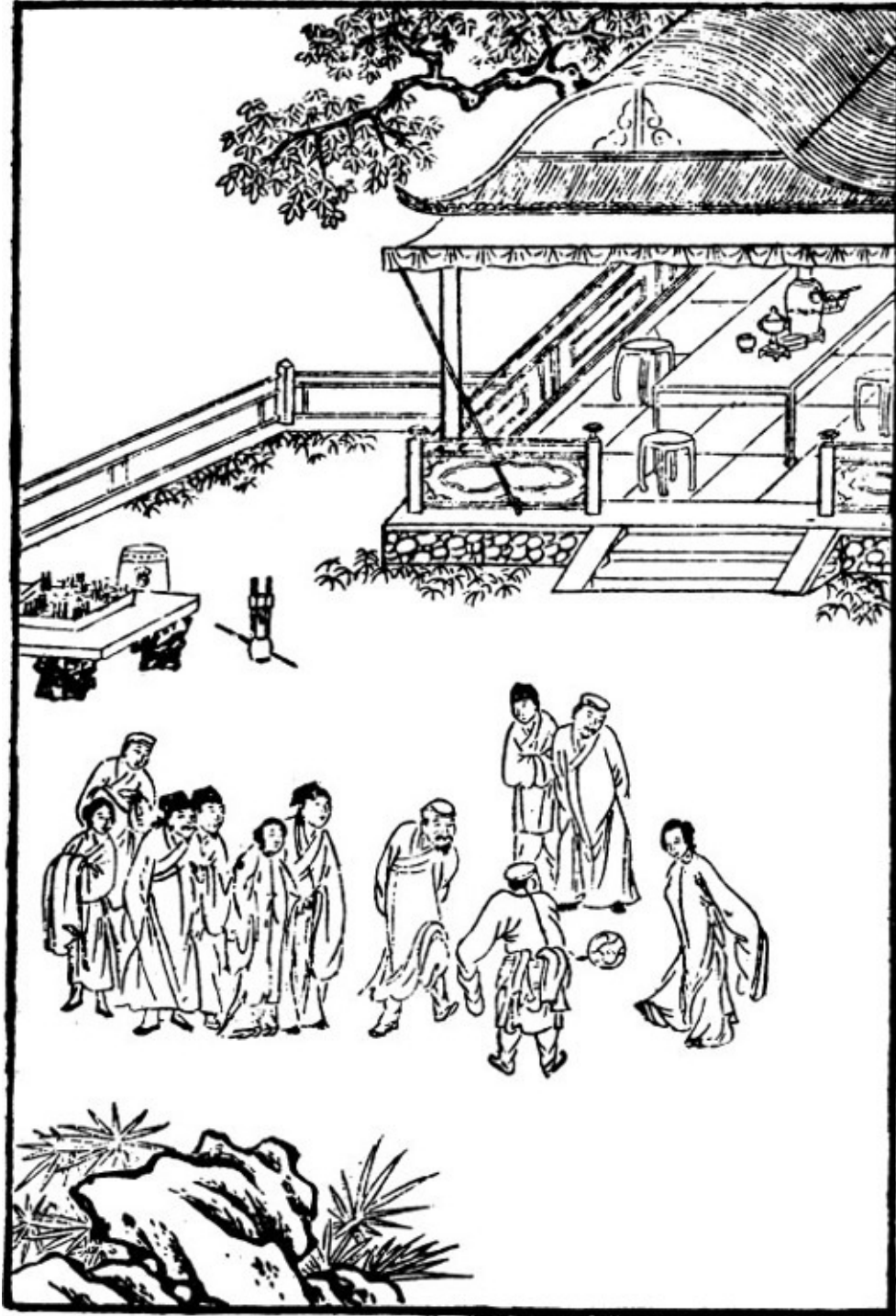
They held a gift box containing a roast goose and two bottles of vintage wine in their hands, which they presented to the company, after making a half obeisance, with the words, "A humble offering to Your Honor and his distinguished friends on this festival occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was already acquainted with them. The first was called Pai T'u-tzu, or Baldy Pai, also known as Mohammedan Pai, the second, Hsiao Chang Hsien, or Trifler Chang, and the third, Lo Hui-tzu, or Mohammedan Lo.

"Wait outside a little while," he said to them, "until we've finished our wine. Then we'll come out and kick three rounds with you."

So saying, he sent them on their way with four plates of delicacies from the table, a large jug of wine, and a saucerful of savories for their refreshment.

When the "ball clubbers" had eaten their fill and inflated their ball, Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside and played a round of kick-about with them in the courtyard. After him it was Kuei-chieh's turn, and she joined a pair of them to form a triangular threesome in which the other two faced off as receivers to field her endeavors. As she did her best to "hook" and "chip" with her kicks, they were lavish with meretricious praise, and whenever she made a mistake they were quick to retrieve the ball for her.



Hangers-on Abet Debauchery in the Verdant Spring Bordello

When they were through, they made up to Hsi-men Ch'ing in the hope of reward, saying, "Kuei-chieh's 'ball-handling' is more professional than ever. When she 'volleys' with a 'flick pass' or a 'chip kick' we hardly know what to do with ourselves. In another year or two she and her sister will rank among the best 'ball-handlers' on this side of the quarter. There won't be another 'hooker' or 'chippy' in the same league. Already they're ten times better than the girls from the Tung establishment on Second Street."

By the time Kuei-chieh had kicked two rounds:

Dust had settled about her eyebrows,
Sweat had moistened her cheeks;

She was panting and puffing, and
Her limbs ached with exhaustion.

Extracting a folding fan from her sleeve, she endeavored to cool herself with it while she stood hand-in-hand with Hsi-men Ch'ing and watched Kuei-ch'ing engage Hsieh Hsi-ta and Trifler Chang in the same three-cornered game of kick-about. Baldy Pai and Mohammedan Lo stood on the sidelines, emptily gesturing with their feet and running back and forth to retrieve the ball when any of the players made an error.

There is another song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the conduct of these "ball clubbers."

Idle when at home,
Forever on the make,
No honest trade for them,

Yet their kickballs are never
far from their sides.
Every day they haunt the street corners,
Paying no heed to the poor,
But toadying to the rich.
From early morning till late at night,
They seldom eat a full meal.
Though they never make much money,
They make ends meet by hiring out
the favors of their wives.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the licensed quarter, looking on at his companions as they challenged each other to backgammon, played at kickball, and drank wine, when Tai-an arrived on horseback to fetch him.

Approaching his master as inconspicuously as possible he:

Whispered into his ear in a low voice,

"The First Lady and the Second Lady have already gone home. Mrs. Hua told me to ask you to come over as soon as you can."

On hearing this message, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Tai-an whispered instructions to take the horse around to the back door and wait for him there. Then, without even taking another drink, he accompanied Kuei-chieh back to her room and sat down with her for only a few minutes, after which, feigning the need to answer a call of nature, he came out to the back door, jumped on his horse, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Before he had made good his departure, Ying Po-chüeh sent the servant of the house out to intercept him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing merely said, "I've got something to attend to at home," and refused to return.

He did remember, however, to leave Tai-an a tael and five mace of silver with which to take care of the three "ball clubbers." The proprietors of the Li family establishment were so worried lest Hsi-men Ch'ing be on his way to visit Wu Yin-erh's place in the back alley that they sent a maidservant after him who tailed him all the way to the gate of the quarter before coming home. Ying Po-chüeh and the rest continued drinking, and it was not until the second watch that the party finally broke up. Truly: If any curse me, curse away;

I'll have my pleasures anyway.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 16

HSI-MEN CH'ING IS INSPIRED BY GREED TO CONTEMPLATE MATRIMONY; YING PO-CHÜEH STEALS A MARCH IN ANTICIPATION OF THE CEREMONY

Doubt not the existence of beauties who can
topple kingdoms and cities;
Yet dreams of clouds and rain on Witches' Mountain
are ever deluded.
Too great an infatuation with rouge and powder
can melt the sturdiest bones;
And lead one to neglect the claims of friendship
in favor of moth eyebrows.
In Warm Soft Country one's prowess
is still undiminished;
Affected by the Alluring Breeze one's
carriage remains dashing.
The heedless fellow is not awake to
the evanescence of spring;
Having spent a thousand for a night of pleasure
he is reluctant to quit.

THE STORY GOES that as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had made his way out the gate of the licensed quarter that day, with Tai-an in attendance, he whipped up his horse and headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's house on Lion Street. Arriving at her front door and dismounting, he saw that the gate was tightly shut and surmised that her guests must already have returned home in their sedan chairs. He told Tai-an to rouse Old Mother Feng, who opened the door for them.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, Li P'ing-erh was standing in the candlelit reception room:

Her flowery headdress in perfect order,

Her white mourning-clothes very becoming,

as she leaned against the latticework of the door, cracking melon seeds with her teeth.

As soon as she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, she: Lightly moved her lotus feet,¹

Gently lifted her beige skirt,

and descended the steps to welcome him, saying as she did so, "If you'd come a little earlier your Third Lady and Fifth Lady would still have been here. They only got into their sedan chairs and departed for home a few minutes ago. Your First Lady left early today. She said you weren't at home. Where have you been?"

"This morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I set out with Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to see the lanterns. We had hardly passed by your front door when we happened to run into a couple of friends who dragged us off to visit one of the establishments in the licensed quarter. We've been carrying on there ever since. I was afraid you might be waiting for me, so when the page boy showed up I pretended to have to go to the bathroom and made my escape through the back door. If I hadn't taken matters into my own hands that crew would have hung onto me so tenaciously I could never have gotten away."

"Thank you very much, sir, for your generous presents," said Li P'ing-erh. "Your ladies refused to stay any longer. They kept saying there was no one at home to look after the place, but I can't help feeling rather left in the lurch."

Thereupon:

More vintage wine was poured, and

Another rare repast was spread.

In the reception room:

Decorated lanterns were lit up,

Heat-holding drapes were let down.

Animal-shaped briquettes replenished golden braziers,

The scent of ambergris wafted from jeweled censers.

On the festive board:

Rare delicacies rose in piles,

From the goblet's rim:

Fragrant wine overflowed.

The woman handed Hsi-men Ch'ing a cup of wine and then kowtowed to him, saying, "Now that my poor husband is dead I'm completely alone in the world. I offer you this cup of wine today in the hope that you will accept responsibility for me in the future. Sir, if you only saw fit not to reject me for my inadequacies, I'd be more than willing to: Make the beds and fold the quilts, for you. If you could just permit me to play the role of a younger sister among the ladies of your household: I'd be prepared to die if I must.

But I don't know what you think about this."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Is Inspired by Greed to Contemplate Matrimony

As she spoke her eyes brimmed over with tears.

Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the wine and said with a smile, "Please get up. Since you have deigned to express so much love for me, rest assured that where any request from you is concerned: It is imprinted in my heart.

As soon as your mourning period is over you can leave the rest to me. There's no need for you to worry any more about it. Today is your birthday. Let's drink to it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, drank off the wine and then, after refilling the cup, offered it in return to the woman. She bade him take the seat of honor, and Old Mother Feng went off to busy herself with the preparations in the kitchen. Before long she brought in a serving of birthday noodles.

As they ate, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who had provided the entertainment during the day, and Li P'ing-erh replied, "Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan were here today. When the party broke up they accompanied your Third Lady and Fifth Lady home to pick up some artificial flowers they had been promised."

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat on the left side of the table and the two of them fell to drinking together: Exchanging cups as they drank.

Li P'ing-erh's maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, stood in attendance, pouring wine and fetching food for them as occasion demanded. Who should come forward at this juncture but Tai-an, who prostrated himself on the floor and kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh, wishing her a happy birthday.

Li P'ing-erh promptly rose to her feet and returned his salute, telling Ying-ch'un as she did so, "Get Old Mother Feng to set aside some noodles and savories in the kitchen, along with a jug of wine, for Tai-an."

"As soon as you've finished eating," Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "you can go home with the horse."

"When you get there," said Li P'ing-erh, "if your mistress should ask, don't tell her that your master is here."

"Leave it to me," said Tai-an. "I'll just say that Father is spending the night in the licensed quarter and wants me to come and fetch him in the morning."

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded approvingly, and Li P'ing-erh was as pleased as could be. "What a clever lad," she said.

"He doesn't miss a wink."²

She ordered Ying-ch'un to fetch two mace of silver for him, saying, "Here's a little something to help you celebrate the festival. Buy yourself some melon seeds to crack. If you bring me the outlines of your feet sometime soon, I'll make a nice pair of shoes for you."

Tai-an hastily kowtowed, saying, "How could I dream of such a thing?" and then withdrew to the kitchen.

When he had finished eating he led the horse outside, and Old Mother Feng put the crossbar on the front door to secure it for the night.

Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing played at guess-fingers as they drank. After a while, a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes³ was brought out. A madder red strip of felt was placed over the table and the two of them played dominoes and drank by the light of the suspended lanterns.

They enjoyed themselves in this way for some time, after which Li P'ing-erh ordered Ying-ch'un to light the candles in her bedroom.

It so happened that after the death of Hua Tzu-hsü, Hsi-men Ch'ing had already enjoyed the favors of both Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, so there was no need to hide anything from them. They were instructed to prepare the bed and to bring along the food boxes and wine service from the reception room.

Thereupon, inside the bedstead, within the purple brocade curtains, the woman exposed her powder-white body and was joined by Hsi-men Ch'ing. With their: Fragrant shoulders huddled together, and

Jade bodies snuggled up against each other,
the two of them continued to play dominoes and drink wine out of large goblets.

As they were so engaged, Li P'ing-erh asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "When are you going to be finished with the reconstruction work you plan to do over there?"

"I'm only waiting until sometime next month to:

Break ground and start construction,"

replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm going to tear down your old house and combine the two pieces of property into one. Then I'll erect an artificial hill and a summerhouse in the front, and make a garden and pleasure ground out of it. I'm also planning to build another three-room belvedere, like the one I already have, and call it the Flower-viewing Tower."

"In the tea chest over there behind the bed," the woman said, pointing as she spoke, "I've got forty catties of aloeswood, two hundred catties of white wax, two jars of quicksilver, and eighty catties of imported pepper stored away. If you will have it taken away sometime soon and sold off for its cash value, I'll contribute the proceeds of the sale to your building expenses. If you don't see fit to reject me for my inadequacies, please, whatever happens, tell your First Lady when you get home that I'd be more than willing to play the role of a younger sister among the ladies of your household. It wouldn't matter where I was ranked in the hierarchy. Darling, I just can't go on without you."

As she spoke a cascade of tears began to fall from her eyes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing solicitously endeavored to wipe them away with his handkerchief, saying, "Your feelings are fully understood by me. But we'd better wait until your period of mourning is over, on the one hand, and until I've finished the new construction work, on the other. Otherwise, if I took you into my household, you'd have no place to stay."

"If you really intend to take me into your family," the woman responded, "be sure, whatever you do, to locate the quarters you build for me next to those of your Fifth Lady. I don't know what I'd do without her, she's such a nice person. She and the Third Lady, née Meng, who lives in the rear compound, were just as friendly as could be to me on our very first meeting. The two of them are so alike they seem less like fellow-wives than sisters born of the same mother. Only your First Lady seems somewhat ill-disposed, as though: Nobody amounts to much in her eyes."

"Actually," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this humble wife of mine, née Wu, has a most accommodating disposition. If that were not the case, how could I ever manage to have so many bedmates at my disposal? What I plan to do is to build a three-room belvedere on your former property for you to live in, just like the one on mine, and provide access through two postern gates. What do you think of that?"

"Sweetheart," the woman replied, "that would please me no end."

Thereupon, the two of them:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,

Indulging their lusts without restraint.
It was the fourth watch before they finally:
Fell asleep on the same pillow,
Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.

The next day it was past lunchtime before they stirred. The woman had not yet combed her hair when Ying-ch'un brought in some congee. She and Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly finished half a bowl of the congee when wine was brought in and the two of them fell to drinking again.

It so happened that Li P'ing-erh was fond of doing it doggie fashion. Getting down on all fours, she made Hsi-men Ch'ing sit on the pillow and insert himself into her inverted flower while she: Moved back and forth as she wished. Just as the two of them were approaching their climax, what should they hear but Tai-an knocking at the gate, having arrived on horseback to fetch his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing called him over to the window and asked him what was up.

"There are three merchants from Szechwan and Hu-kuang waiting for you at home," replied Tai-an. "They have some excellent stock to dispose of and would like to weigh it out with Uncle Fu the Second and settle accounts. They are asking only a hundred taels down to conclude a contract, with the balance due in the middle decade of the eighth month. The First Lady sent me to ask you to come home and take care of the matter."

"You didn't say I was here, did you?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I told her you were at Li Kuei-chieh's place in the licensed quarter," said Tai-an. "I didn't tell anyone you were here."

"She doesn't know how to handle things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she had to do was tell Uncle Fu the Second to take care of it. What need was there to send for me?"

"Uncle Fu the Second proposed to do just that," replied Tai-an, "but the merchants wouldn't agree to it. They refused to sign the contract until they had seen you in person."

"As long as they've sent the boy after you," said Li P'ing-erh:

"Business comes first.

If you don't go home you'll only upset the lady of the house."

"You don't know these lousy southern bastards," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They never come knocking at your door, trying to unload their goods, unless the market is slow and they've got nowhere else to dispose of them. You've got to buy on time, for three months or half a year. If you pay them off any sooner than that they'll start getting ideas. I've got the largest store in the whole Ch'ing-ho district and do the largest volume of business. It wouldn't matter how long I kept them waiting, they'd still have to come looking for me in the end."

"To refuse a business deal,

Is to risk making an enemy,"

said Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you do as I say; go on home, take care of them, and come back later? After all: There are as many days ahead of us as there are

leaves on the willow tree."⁴

Hsi-men Ch'ing acknowledged the force of Li P'ing-erh's rhetoric by slowly getting up, combing his hair and washing his face, donning his hairnet, and putting on his clothes. After Li P'ing-erh had provided him with something further to eat, without more ado, he put on his eye-mask and rode home on horseback.

There were four or five merchants waiting for him in the shop who went about their business as soon as he had supervised the weighing out of the merchandise, settled the account, and signed the contract.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters.

"Where did you go yesterday?" she demanded to know. "If you tell the truth, I'll forget it; but if you don't, I'll kick up a real rumpus."

"Since you were all out being entertained at the Hua house," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I went for a tour of the Lantern Market with a few of my friends, after which we went into the licensed quarter and made a night of it. I didn't get home until the page boy came to fetch me this morning."

"The page boy went to fetch you all right," said Chin-lien, "but I doubt if any part of the licensed quarter saw so much as your ghost. So much for that! You lousy two-timer, you still think you can fool me do you? That whore yesterday was so anxious to get us out of the way it was obvious she was: Up to her preternatural pranks.

She must have invited you over so you could screw the night away. She didn't let you go till you were screwed out, I dare say. And as for that lousy jailbird, Tai-an: He's such a practiced old hand, he had one story for the First Lady and another story for me.

"Initially, when he came back with the horse and the First Lady asked him, 'Why hasn't your father come home? Who's place is he drinking at?' he replied, 'He went for a tour of the Lantern Market with Uncle Ying the Second and that crowd. They're all in the licensed quarter now, having a party at Li Kuei-chieh's place. He told me to come back and fetch him in the morning.'

"Later on, however, when I called him into my room and interrogated him myself, he just giggled and wouldn't say anything. Only after I began to give him a hard time did he say, 'Father's really at Mistress Hua the Second's place on Lion Street.' The lousy jailbird! How did he know that you and I are: Of one heart and one mind? You must have told him it was all right to tell me."

"I did nothing of the sort," said Hsi-men Ch'ing evasively.

Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, however, he went on to tell her all about Li P'ing-erh's invitation of the previous night.

"When I arrived she offered me a cup of wine and apologized for the scant entertainment she had been able to provide

you. Then she started to weep and wail, telling me that her household was understaffed, that the rear part of the property was deserted, and that she was afraid to be alone there at night. Her one desire is that I will marry her. She asked when I was going to finish building the new house. She also showed me several hundred taels worth of aromatics, wax, and other valuable goods, and suggested that I broker them for her and keep the proceeds to help defray the building expenses. She wants me to start on the construction work as soon as possible so she can move in next to you and be a sister of yours. But I fear you may not agree to that."

"It's not as though I have:

A shadow too many,
here as it is," said the woman. "I only hope she does move in. That would be fine by me. This place of mine is completely deserted, and I'd love to have somebody to keep me company. It's always been true that: A multitude of boats need not clog the channel,

A multitude of carts need not block the road.⁵
I could hardly refuse her the same sort of welcome I once received myself. It's not as though she were trying to take my place away from me or anything like that. My only fear is that: Other people may not be as well disposed as I am. You'll have to find out what the First Lady thinks about it."

"It's only something to talk about at the moment," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Her mourning period isn't even over yet."

Their colloquy at an end, the woman was helping Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his white satin jacket when an object fell out of his sleeve with a tinkling sound. Taking it in her hand, she found it had a heavy feel to it and was about the size of a fowling pellet. She scrutinized it for some time but couldn't tell what it was. Behold: To the tune "Immortal at the River"

First introduced as a product
of the barbarian armies;
It has found its way by recommendation
to the capital itself.
Its body is miniature,
its interior hollow.

Once set in motion
by the merest touch;
It will roll around spontaneously,
stridulant as a cicada.

Adept at arousing consternation
in the beauty's heart;

A veteran contributor
to the vigor of the loins;
Its sobriquet is "Brazenfaced
Valiant Vanguard."

On the victory honors list
forever number one;

It has won renown as
"The Titillating Bell."⁶

The woman examined it for some time before asking, "What on earth is it? And why does it give me a numb feeling halfway up my arm?"

"This is something you wouldn't be familiar with," Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed. "It's called a 'titillating bell' and comes from the southern country of Burma. Good ones cost four or five taels of silver."

"What do you do with it?" the woman asked.

"If you put it in your 'crucible' before doing the deed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

"It's too wonderful for words."

"You've been experimenting with Li P'ing-erh, haven't you?" the woman said.

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave a full account of the events of the preceding night, with the result that Chin-lien's: Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Though it was broad daylight, the two of them:

Took off their clothes and went to bed.

Truly:

Who knows what reason there might be

that Wang-tzu Ch'iao,⁷

No sooner learned to "play the flute"

than he became transported.⁸

To make a long story short, one day Hsi-men Ch'ing met with the appropriate brokers and weighed out the aromatics, wax, and other goods that had been stored in the tea chest behind Li P'ing-erh's bed. In all he was able to realize 380 taels of silver by the sale. Li P'ing-erh kept only 180 taels out of this sum for her own expenses and turned over the balance to Hsi-men Ch'ing to help defray the cost of the new building.

The yin-yang master was consulted and the eighth day of the second month chosen to:

Break ground and start construction.

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned over five hundred taels of silver to his head servant, Lai-chao, and his manager, Pen the Fourth, and put them in charge of procuring the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone, supervising the work, and handling the accounts.

This Pen the Fourth, whose name was Pen Ti-ch'uan, or Scurry-about Pen, was a young man who was by nature: Dashing and affected,

Versatile and clever.

He had begun his career as a flunky in the household of one of the imperial eunuchs. But because he: Was not the sort to abide by his lot,

Took his cut of both outgo and income,⁹

and got caught cooking the books, he had been dismissed. He supported himself for a while as a catamite, after which he took a job as a servant in a well-to-do household. From this position he had subsequently absconded with a wet nurse, whom he took as his wife, and set himself up as a dealer in the secondhand clothes trade. On top of all this he was also a proficient performer on the *p'i-p'a*, the flute, and other wind instruments.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so impressed by the variety of his talents that he often patronized him, allowing him to weigh out the goods in his wholesale pharmaceutical business and earn commissions as a middleman. As a result, he had come to feel, in matters both great and small, that he could hardly do without him.

On the appointed day, Pen Ti-ch'uan and Lai-chao supervised the artisans of the various trades as they began the construction work. First they demolished the old house on what had been the Hua property and took down the intervening wall, then they laid the foundations and erected a summerhouse, an artificial hill, pavilions, terraces, and other recreational facilities. This was not the work of a day, but there is no need to describe it exhaustively.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly,

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had remained at home overseeing the construction of his new garden for more than a month when the hundredth-day anniversary of Hua Tzu-hsü's death, which fell in the first decade of the third month, became imminent. Li P'ing-erh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over beforehand to discuss the arrangements.

"I intend to burn Hua Tzu-hsü's spirit tablet," she said. "I don't know whether you plan to sell this house or not, but I wish you would send someone over to look after it and take me into your own household as soon as possible. I don't want to stay here any longer than necessary. At night it's completely deserted and I'm afraid. There are often fox spirits about doing their best to drive me to distraction. When you get home, please tell the First Lady that if she would only take pity on me it would save my life. It wouldn't make any difference where you chose to rank me in the hierarchy, I'd be more than willing to: Make the beds and fold the quilts, for you without repining." As she spoke:

Her tears fell like rain.

"There's no need to get so upset," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I already mentioned what you told me to my wife and Fifth Lady after I got home the other day. Just wait until the house I'm building for you is finished. By that time your mourning period will be nearly over. It won't be any too late to have you carried over the threshold then."

"Fine enough," said Li P'ing-erh. "But if it's really true that you intend to marry me, I wish you'd expedite the building of the house and take me over there as soon as possible. If I were able to live for even a day as a member of your

household: I'd be prepared to die if I must.

As long as I stay here:

Each day is like a year."¹⁰

"I understand what you're saying," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Even if the house isn't finished on time," said Li P'ing-erh, "once I've burnt the spirit tablet I could occupy the upper floor of the Fifth Lady's belvedere for a few days and then move into the new building after it's completed. Whatever else you do, when you get home speak to the Fifth Lady about it. I'll be waiting for your answer. The tenth of the third month is the hundredth-day anniversary of his death. I'll have to have a sutra reading and burn his spirit tablet then."

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave his assent and stayed overnight with the woman.

The next day he repeated everything she had said, word for word, to P'an Chin-lien.

"Of course, that would be fine," said Chin-lien. "I'd be perfectly happy to set aside a room or two for her to live in. It's the others I'd be worried about. You'll have to find out what the First Lady thinks about it. As far as I'm concerned: There's water enough in the channel

for all the boats."¹¹

It all depends on what our elder sister has to say."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went straight to Wu Yüeh-niang's room. He found her combing her hair and proceeded to give her a complete account of Li P'ing-erh's desire to marry into the family, from beginning to end.

"You really can't very well marry her," said Yüeh-niang. "In the first place: her mourning period isn't over yet. In the second place: you were formerly on intimate terms with her husband. And in the third place: you've already been engaged in hanky-panky with her, first buying their house and then stashing away all the valuables she entrusted to you for safekeeping. As the saying goes: The loom may stay put, but the shuttle gets around."¹²

I've heard people say that Hua the Elder from her husband's branch of the family is a tough customer. If any word of this should get about you'd only be: Inviting lice onto your own head to scratch."¹³

What I say is in your own best interests, but:

Be you Chao, Ch'ien, Sun, or Li;¹⁴

I've had my say, you may do as you please."

With these few words she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence. He went out to the front reception hall and sat down in a chair all by himself to ponder the situation. He didn't see how he could either convey this reply to Li P'ing-erh or refuse to go back and see her. After thinking it over for some time he returned to Chin-lien's room.

"When you went to see our elder sister, what did she say?" asked Chin-lien.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her everything Yüeh-niang had said.

"Her objections are certainly reasonable enough," said Chin-lien. "First you bought his house and now you want to marry his wife into the bargain, a woman with whom you only became acquainted through your long-standing relationship with her husband. And there's another thing to consider too. Since even between friends: Though there may be no secrets, there

are some constraints,

if it ever came to the attention of the authorities, they would take a dim view of it."

"I think I could handle that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What worries me is that bastard, Hua the Elder. No doubt he resents the fact that he: No longer has an arena for his tricks.

If he finds out about this and tries to make trouble on the grounds that her mourning period isn't over yet, what am I to do? Right now I'm at a loss how to reply to her."

"Phooey! What's so hard about that?" said Chin-lien. "Tell me, are you planning to give her your answer today or tomorrow?"

"She wants me to give her an answer of some kind today," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"When you go there today then," said Chin-lien, "this is what you do. Say to her, 'I talked it over with the Fifth Lady when I got home, but there are such quantities of raw pharmaceuticals in storage on the second floor of her belvedere that there'd be no place to put your furniture if you moved in. You might as well wait a little longer. Your house is 70 or 80 percent completed already. I'll urge the artisans to speed up their work on the decorating, painting and varnishing, and other finishing touches, and by the time they're through your mourning period will be nearly over. If I take you in then, everything will be in proper order. That would be a lot better than having you move in on top of the Fifth Lady right now, while you're still in a ritual status that makes you: Neither fish nor fowl.

You'd only get in each other's way and find it difficult to keep up appearances.' If you do as I suggest, I guarantee she'll give up the idea."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted by what he heard that he set out for Li P'ing-erh's house without delay.

"How did it go with that request of mine when you got home?" the woman asked.

"The Fifth Lady said," reported Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you'd do better to wait until they've finished painting and varnishing your new house before moving in. Right now there's so much stuff: Strewn about higgledy-piggledy, on the second floor of her place that if you went over there there'd be no place to store your things. And there's another problem as well. If your husband's eldest brother should complain that your mourning period isn't over yet, what would we do then?"

"He wouldn't dare interfere in my affairs," said the woman. "Quite aside from the fact that: Each of us has his own life to live, and that a formal settlement of the matter of the disputed property has already been reached; as far as I'm concerned: In

one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;
In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.
It's always been the case that:
Brothers and sisters-in-law do not
ask after each other.

My husband's eldest brother has no business interfering in my private affairs. As it is, he can see I'm having a hard time making a go of it, but what does he care? If he so much as lets off a fart, by the time I'm finished with him, he'll: Die in his chair,

Not daring to die in his bed.

You can relax on that score, sir. He won't dare give me any trouble."

"As for this house of yours," she then went on to ask, "how soon is it going to be finished anyway?"

"I've already instructed the artisans," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to give priority to the three-room belvedere I'm building for you. By the time they're done with the painting and varnishing it will be the beginning of the fifth month."

"My darling," the woman said, "push ahead with it as fast as you can. I'm willing to wait until then if I must."

When they had finished talking, a maidservant brought in wine and the two of them fell to enjoying themselves and drinking together for the rest of the night.

From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing came to see her every three to five days, without fail, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly.

The construction work in Hsi-men Ch'ing's residential compound had already been under way for more than two months, and the three-room belvedere, called the Flower-viewing Tower, was nearing completion. All that remained was the summerhouse, for which the foundation had not yet been laid.

One day the Dragon Boat Festival, on the fifth day of the fifth month, rolled around.

In each household artemisia leaves adorn the gate,

In every dwelling efficacious charms deck the door.¹⁵

Li P'ing-erh prepared a feast in honor of the occasion and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over to share the festival *tsung-tzu* with her, on the one hand, and to discuss the date she would be carried over his threshold, on the other. They decided that on the fifteenth day of the fifth month she would engage Buddhist priests to hold a sutra-reading and burn the spirit tablet of her deceased husband, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrange to have her carried over his threshold.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Li P'ing-erh, "On the day you burn the spirit tablet, are you planning to invite Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, or not?"

"I'll send them each an invitation," the woman replied. "They can come or not as they please."

Now that their plans had been made, all that remained was to wait for the fifteenth day of the fifth month. The woman engaged the services of twelve monks from the Pao-en Temple, who came to her home on the appointed day to perform the sutra-reading and preside over the burning of the spirit tablet.

The same day, Hsi-men Ch'ing wrapped up three mace of silver as a birthday present for Ying Po-chüeh. In the morning he also gave five taels of silver to Tai-an and instructed him to buy chicken, goose, duck, and whatever else was needed for a feast that evening to celebrate the end of Li P'ing-erh's mourning period. Then, taking P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung with him to look after the horse, he set out in the early afternoon for Ying Po-chüeh's house.

Among those attending the party that day were Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, Blabbermouth Sun, Heartless Wu, Welsher Yün, Cadger Ch'ang, Scrounger Pai, and the new recruit to the company, Scurry-about Pen. All ten members of the club were present, not one of them having failed to put in an appearance. Two boy actors had also been engaged to play and sing for them.

After everyone had been served with wine and they had taken their places at the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing called the two boy actors over to him. He recognized the first of them to be Wu Yin-erh's younger brother, Wu Hui.

The other, whom he did not recognize, knelt down and said, "I am Cheng Ai-hsiang's elder brother, Cheng Feng."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who occupied the seat of honor, rewarded each of them with two mace of silver.

The party continued until the sun began to sink in the west. At this juncture Tai-an arrived with a horse to fetch his master.

Coming right up to the table, he whispered into Hsi-men Ch'ing's ear, "The lady would like you to come over as soon as you can."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded with a wink, and Tai-an had started on his way out of the room when he was called to a halt by Ying Po-chüeh, who demanded, "You lousy dog-bone! Come over here and tell me the truth. If you don't tell the truth, I'll give your little ear a permanent twist. How many birthdays do you think your Daddy Ying has in a year, that you should come with the horse to fetch your father while the sun is still high in the sky? Where are you off to anyway? And who really sent you here? It may have been one of your mistresses at home, but it may just as well have been that 'Eighteenth Youngster'¹⁶ from the licensed quarter. If you don't tell me, a hundred years will go by before I ever put in a good word with your father to find this little dog-bone of his a wife."

Tai-an's only response was to say, "The truth is: nobody sent me. I feared it was getting late and thought Father might want to be on his way, so I brought the horse along early to await his convenience."

Ying Po-chüeh harassed him a while longer, without effect, and then said, "If you don't tell me what's afoot, and I find out about it later on, see if I don't settle accounts with you, you little oily mouth."

So saying, he poured out a cup of wine and selected half a saucerful of savories for Tai-an to eat when he had retired

from their presence.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing withdrew to the bathroom in order to adjust his toilet.

Summoning Tai-an, he drew him aside and asked him, "Who all showed up at the Hua house today?"

"Hua the Third is off in the country somewhere," reported Tai-an. "And Hua the Fourth is at home suffering from an eye ailment. No one came from either of their families. Only Hua the Elder and his wife showed up. After they had eaten their fill of the vegetarian fare, the husband went home first, leaving his wife behind. When she was ready to leave, Mistress Hua called her into her room and presented her with ten taels of silver and two sets of clothes, for which she actually kowtowed in gratitude."

"Did she have anything to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"She didn't venture so much as a word about it," replied Tai-an. "All she said was that when Mistress Hua is carried over your threshold she'd like to pay you a call on the 'third-day celebrations.'"

"Did she really say that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"How would I dare lie about it," responded Tai-an.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this his heart was filled with delight. "Are the oblations completed as yet?" he went on to ask.

"The monks left some time ago," replied Tai-an. "The spirit tablet has already been burned. Mistress Hua said she'd like you to come over as soon as you can."

"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go outside and take care of the horse."

Tai-an was on his way out when, unexpectedly, Ying Po-chüeh, who had been eavesdropping in the corridor, suddenly accosted him with a shout, which gave him quite a start.

"You lousy little dog-bone!" he cursed. "You wouldn't tell me anything, but I've already contrived to hear all about it. A fine thing your father and you are up to!"

"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't make such a fuss or everyone in the place will find out about it."

"If you'd taken me into your confidence in the first place," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I might not have said anything about it."

Thereupon he went right back to the table and, thus and so, told everyone the whole story.

Taking hold of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Brother, what sort of a person are you anyway?"

Can such things be,
that you should keep them to yourself without even letting your brothers in on them? Even if Hua the Elder had had anything to say about it, all you would have had to do was give us the word. Once we had spoken to him, he would have gone along with anything, never fear. If he had dared to utter so much as a single 'no,' we would have given him his lumps, make no mistake about it.

"Honestly, though, is this marriage set, or isn't it? Tell us all about it. Really! What are friends for, anyway? If there's anything we can do for you, we'd be willing to: Go through fire for you, or

Go through water for you.¹⁷

In fact:

We seek not to have been born the same day;

We seek only to die, every man for himself.¹⁸

As long as we're prepared to treat you this way, unless you have some reason you haven't disclosed, why should you want to keep us in the dark?"

Tagalong Hsieh picked up where he left off.

"Brother," he said, "if you refuse to tell us any more, we'll make such a fuss in the licensed quarter that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh will hear about it and everyone will be embarrassed."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "All right, then, I'll make a clean breast of it. The wedding has all been arranged."

"The day for the ceremony, when you have her carried over the threshold, hasn't been set yet, has it?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"The day you carry our sister-in-law over the threshold," said Tagalong Hsieh, "we'll come to congratulate you. Whatever else you do, Brother, you'll have to engage four singing girls and invite us to a wedding feast."

"That goes without saying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Of course, all of you will be invited."

"Rather than waiting to congratulate our brother on a future occasion," said Sticky Chu, "why don't we offer him a toast in advance?"

Thereupon, Sponger Ying presented the toast, Tagalong Hsieh held the flagon, Sticky Chu proffered some viands, and the rest of them all knelt down too, to keep them company. The two boy actors were also dragged into the act, being made to kneel down and sing the song suite entitled "Thirty Melodies," which begins with the words: How happy this auspicious day.¹⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing was made to swallow three or four cups of wine in a row.

"Brother," said Sticky Chu, "on the day you invite us to the feast, you must be sure to include Cheng Feng and Wu Hui as well. That's settled then. Whatever happens, the two of you must go."

Cheng Feng, deferentially covering his mouth with his hand, replied, "We promise to report to your home for duty at an early hour."

Before long, after everyone had been served with wine, they returned to their places, sat down, and embarked upon another bout of drinking.

The day gradually waned and Hsi-men Ch'ing grew restless. As soon as he thought no one was looking, he got up and

tried to slip away, but Ying Po-chüeh attempted to block the door and prevent his escape.

"Brother Ying," intervened Tagalong Hsieh, "let him go. We wouldn't want to spoil his plans and arouse the resentment of our sister-in-law." Hsi-men Ch'ing seized the opportunity to leap on his horse and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

When he arrived at Lion Street, Li P'ing-erh had already divested herself of her mourning and changed into a more colorful outfit. In the reception room: Ablaze with lamps and candles,²⁰ the table was laid with a full complement of wine and delicacies, with a single folding armchair standing at its head.

Not until Hsi-men Ch'ing had assumed the place of honor was a jug of wine broached and decanted. A maidservant held the flagon, from which Li P'ing-erh proceeded to fill a cup to the brim and offer it to her guest.

She then kowtowed to him four times:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
and said, "Today the spirit tablet of my poor husband has been burnt. If you, sir, deign not to reject me, I will enjoy the pleasure of: Waiting upon you with towel and comb,
thereby:

Fulfilling my desire for connubial bliss."

When she rose to her feet after completing her obeisances, Hsi-men Ch'ing also got up from his seat and proffered the woman a cup of wine in return. Only then did they sit down to enjoy themselves together.

"Did Hua the Elder or his wife have anything to say today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.



Ying Po-chüeh Steals a March in Anticipation of the Ceremony

"After the noon vegetarian meal," replied Li P'ing-erh, "I invited them into my room and told them about your intentions. He expressed nothing but pleasure at the news and didn't have a word to say against it. All he said was that he'd have his wife pay you a call on the 'third-day celebrations.' I gave them ten taels of silver and two sets of clothes. The two of them were as happy as could be and thanked me again and again on their way out the door."

"If that was their only response," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I might as well let them come calling; what does it matter? But if they utter a single word of criticism, I'll never forgive them."

"If either of them so much as lets a hot fart on the subject," asserted Li P'ing-erh, "I won't let them get away with it."

Thereupon, Old Mother Feng brought out some soup and an assortment of appetizers from the kitchen. Li P'ing-erh

had taken the trouble to: Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before personally preparing some miniature steamed dumplings with a stuffing of minced scallions and mutton. From a
chased silver goblet filled with southern wine, Hsiu-ch'un poured out two cups for her mistress and her visitor. Hsi-men
Ch'ing drank only the first half-cupful of his wine and presented the remainder to Li P'ing-erh.

One goes, the other comes;
and thus they proceeded to drink several cups in a row. Truly:

The sway of passion takes one's years away;
The force of setting makes the wine flow free.²¹

Because the day of her marriage was impending, Li P'ing-erh was even happier than usual. Her face was wreathed in
smiles.

"While you were drinking just now at the Ying place," she said, "you kept me waiting a long time. I was afraid you
might get drunk, so I sent for Tai-an to ask you to come over as soon as possible. Did anyone there catch on?"

"Beggar Ying, as usual, guessed that something was afoot," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He pressured the page boy into
letting out a few words about it, and then clowned around for a while. The members of the club demanded a chance to
offer their congratulations, so I guess I'll have to engage singing girls and throw a party for them. They also ganged up on
me and made me swallow a few cups of wine. As soon as I thought no one was looking, I tried to slip away, but they
blocked the door, and: Argued the pros and cons,
among themselves before letting me go."

"The fact they let you go shows they understand a thing or two," said Li P'ing-erh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having noticed that:

Her drunken demeanor invited license; and
Her passionate eyes expressed desire,
lost no time in abandoning all restraint. He:
Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue; and
Nuzzled her apricot cheeks.

Li P'ing-erh embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My darling, if you really do plan to marry me, make it as soon as
possible. It's inconvenient for you to have to come and go this way. Don't leave me here to long for you day and night."

When she had finished speaking, they:

Tossed first this way and then that;
Till they were intertwined into one.

Truly:

A beauty who could topple kingdoms and cities
belonged to Emperor Wu of Han;²²
A goddess who could make clouds and make rain
appeared to King Hsiang of Ch'u.²³

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In passion's thrall breast presses close to breast;
In tender aftermath arms are gently enlaced.
Let the silver lamp burn brightly as it will;
They're still afraid it's nothing but a dream.²⁴

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 17

CENSOR YÜ-WEN IMPEACHES COMMANDER YANG; LI P'ING-ERH TAKES CHIANG CHU-SHAN AS MATE

To the tune "Partridge Sky"

She remembers that time in the studio
when they had just met;
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together
were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate
alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp
shed only a half light.

Thinking of the past,
Her dreaming soul deluded;
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy
the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them
will never be separated.¹

THE STORY GOES that the twentieth day of the fifth month was the birthday of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command. When the day came, Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver and two handkerchiefs in a packet, as his contribution toward the cost of the celebration. Then, having dressed himself to befit the occasion, he mounted a large white horse and, accompanied by four page boys, set off for the commandant's home to offer his birthday greetings. Among the others attending the party were the judicial commissioner, Hsia Yen-ling, the militia commander, Chang Kuan, the battalion commanders Ching Chung² and Ho Chin, and other military officials. The guests were met with drinks at the door and received to the strains of martial music. A southern-style play, of the genre known as hsi-wen,³ was performed for their entertainment, and four singing girls had been engaged to ply the guests with wine.

Tai-an took Hsi-men Ch'ing's outdoor clothes and went home with the horse. When the sun began to sink in the west, Tai-an set out on horseback to fetch his master.

As he was passing by the western end of Lion Street he ran into Old Mother Feng and asked her, "Mother Feng, where are you going?"

"Mistress Hua sent me to ask your master over," replied Old Mother Feng. "Silversmith Ku has finished the jewelry she ordered for the betrothal ceremony and delivered it today in a box. She wants your master to come and see it. She also has something she wants to talk to him about."

"My master's at Commandant Chou's place attending a party today," said Tai-an. "I'm on my way to fetch him. You can save yourself a trip. When I get there I'll give him the message."

"I'm imposing on you," said Old Mother Feng, "but, whatever you do, be sure to mention it. Mistress Hua is waiting for him."

Tai-an whipped up his horse and headed straight for the commandant's headquarters. The officials at the party were devoting themselves to their cups and having a high time of it.

Tai-an went up to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place at the table and said to him, "On my way back from home with the horse just now, I ran into Old Mother Feng in the street. Mistress Hua had sent her to invite you over. She said that Silversmith Ku had delivered the jewelry and she wanted you to come and see it. She also has something she wants to talk to you about."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he gave Tai-an some savories, soup, and rice to eat and prepared to make his departure. Commandant Chou was reluctant to let him go, blocking the door and foisting a large cup of wine upon him.

"Since you do me the honor, sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will drink this cup at your behest. But there is something I must attend to that prevents me from enjoying your hospitality to the full. Forgive me. Forgive me."

Thereupon, he:

Drained it in one gulp,
bade farewell to Commandant Chou, got on his horse, and headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's house. When he had finished the tea with which the woman welcomed him, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Tai-an to take the horse home and come to fetch him in the morning.

After Tai-an had left, Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to get the jewelry out of its box for Hsi-men Ch'ing to look over. All ablaze like golden fire, it was a fine set of jewelry indeed.

When it had been put away, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You won't have to wait any longer than the twenty-fourth for the presentation of the betrothal gifts, and we'll hold the ceremony proper next month, on the fourth."

The woman's heart was filled with delight. She promptly brought out the wine, and she and Hsi-men Ch'ing drank deeply and unburdened themselves to each other. After they had been drinking for a while, she ordered a maidservant to

wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat in her room, and the two of them took their places inside the gauze netting.

The incense was redolent of orchid and musk;

The bedspread was fashioned of mermaid silk.

Taking off their clothes, they sat:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh;

Drinking wine and making merry with each other.

After some time:

The glint of spring pervading their eyes;⁴

They were carried away by lecherous desires.

Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by engaging the woman in the sport of clouds and rain for a while. After that, responding to a drunken whim, he ordered her to lie down across the mat and indulge him by "toying with the flute." Behold: To the tune "Moon on the West River"

The scent of orchid and musk pervades
the gauze netting;

The delicate beauty lightly proceeds
to "play the flute."
Her snow-white jade body is visible
through the bed curtains;
It's enough to make one's "ethereal and
material souls take flight."

A single cherry might describe
her tiny mouth;
Tender stalks are not as gentle
as her fingers.

The talented gentleman is moved
to remark to his partner,
"I never knew the magic rhinoceros horn
could feel so good."⁵

At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in his cups, playfully asked the woman, "In the old days, when your Hua Tzu-hsü was still alive, did you ever do anything like this with him?"

"When he wasn't asleep he was in dreamland,"

the woman replied. "How could I ever have had the patience to do this sort of thing with him? All he ever wanted to do was fool around outside. And even when he came home, I wouldn't ordinarily let him touch me. Moreover, as long as the old eunuch director was alive, we slept in separate rooms. As for my husband, I used to curse him till he looked as though: His head had been sprayed with dog's blood."⁶

If he gave me any trouble, all I had to do was tell the old eunuch about it and he'd give him a regular caning. He scarcely counted as a human being. What sort of stuff do you think he was made of, anyway? If I had played around this way with him it would only have given me the creeps. Who is there besides you who could suit me so perfectly? You're just what the doctor ordered. By day and by night, all I do is long for you."

The two of them fooled around for a while and then got back to business. Ying-ch'un waited on them, bringing in a small square box filled with assorted dainties, including nuts, rissoles, chicken and goose giblets and feet, and rose-and chrysanthemum-flavored cakes. A small gold flagon was: Filled to the brim with carnelian-hued nectar.

From dusk, when the lamps and candles were lighted, they intermittently played with one another and drank until the time of the first watch.

All of a sudden they were interrupted by the sound of loud knocking at the outer gate. When they sent Old Mother Feng to open the door and see who it was, it turned out to be Tai-an.

"I told him to come and fetch me tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What's he doing coming back at a time like this?"

When he called him into the room to question him, the page boy made his way as far as the door in a state of obvious agitation. Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman were still in bed, so he did not dare go inside, but he spoke to them from the other side of the portiere.

"Your daughter and son-in-law have arrived," he said, "along with a large number of boxes. The First Lady sent me to ask you to come home as quickly as possible to discuss the situation with her."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he didn't know what to make of it.

"At such an hour, what could have happened?" he wondered. "I'd better go home and see what's going on."

He got up hastily. The woman helped him on with his clothes and heated a cup of warm wine for him to drink.

Whipping up his horse, he went straight home, where he found the rear reception room brightly lit with lamps and candles. His daughter and son-in-law were both there, along with a large pile of boxes, beds and curtains, and other family belongings.

Hsi-men Ch'ing could hardly believe his eyes.

"What are you doing arriving home at such an hour?" he demanded.

His son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, kowtowed and said, with tears in his eyes, "Recently our kinsman, the venerable Yang Chien, was impeached by a supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny, with the result that an imperial edict has come down ordering his arrest and incarceration in the South Prison to await the final disposition of his case. His protégés, relatives, and employees have all been tentatively sentenced to public exposure in the cangue and military exile. Yesterday his factotum, Yang Sheng, by traveling day and night, managed to get word of this to my father. My father was thrown into such a state of consternation by the news that he directed me to take your daughter, along with some boxes of family belongings, and seek temporary lodging with you until things blow over. He himself immediately set off for my paternal aunt's place in the Eastern Capital, to find out whatever more he could. When things return to normal: Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

He will never dare to forget it."

"Did your father give you a letter, or anything?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I've got his letter right here," said Ch'en Ching-chi, pulling it out of his sleeve and handing it to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing broke open the seal and found that it read as follows:

Respectfully indited by his devoted servant, Ch'en Hung,⁷ for the perusal of my most virtuous kinsman, Hsi-men Ch'ing: I will dispense with the customary formalities. The northern barbarians are currently encroaching upon our frontiers, and their incursions have extended beyond the borders of Hsiung-chou. The failure of the minister of war, Wang Fu,⁸ to dispatch adequate defense forces has resulted in a military debacle in which our kinsman, the venerable Yang Chien, is also implicated. They have both been impeached on charges of the utmost gravity by a supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny.

His Majesty is incensed and has ordered their arrest and incarceration in the South Prison, pending a formal inquiry by the Three Judicial Offices. Their protégés, relatives, and employees have all, in accordance with precedent, been tentatively sentenced to military exile in frontier guard units.

On hearing this news, my entire family has been thrown into consternation, having no place to turn. I have taken the initiative of sending my son and your daughter, along with what they are able to carry with them in the way of boxes of family belongings, to seek temporary refuge in your household. I am leaving immediately for the capital, where

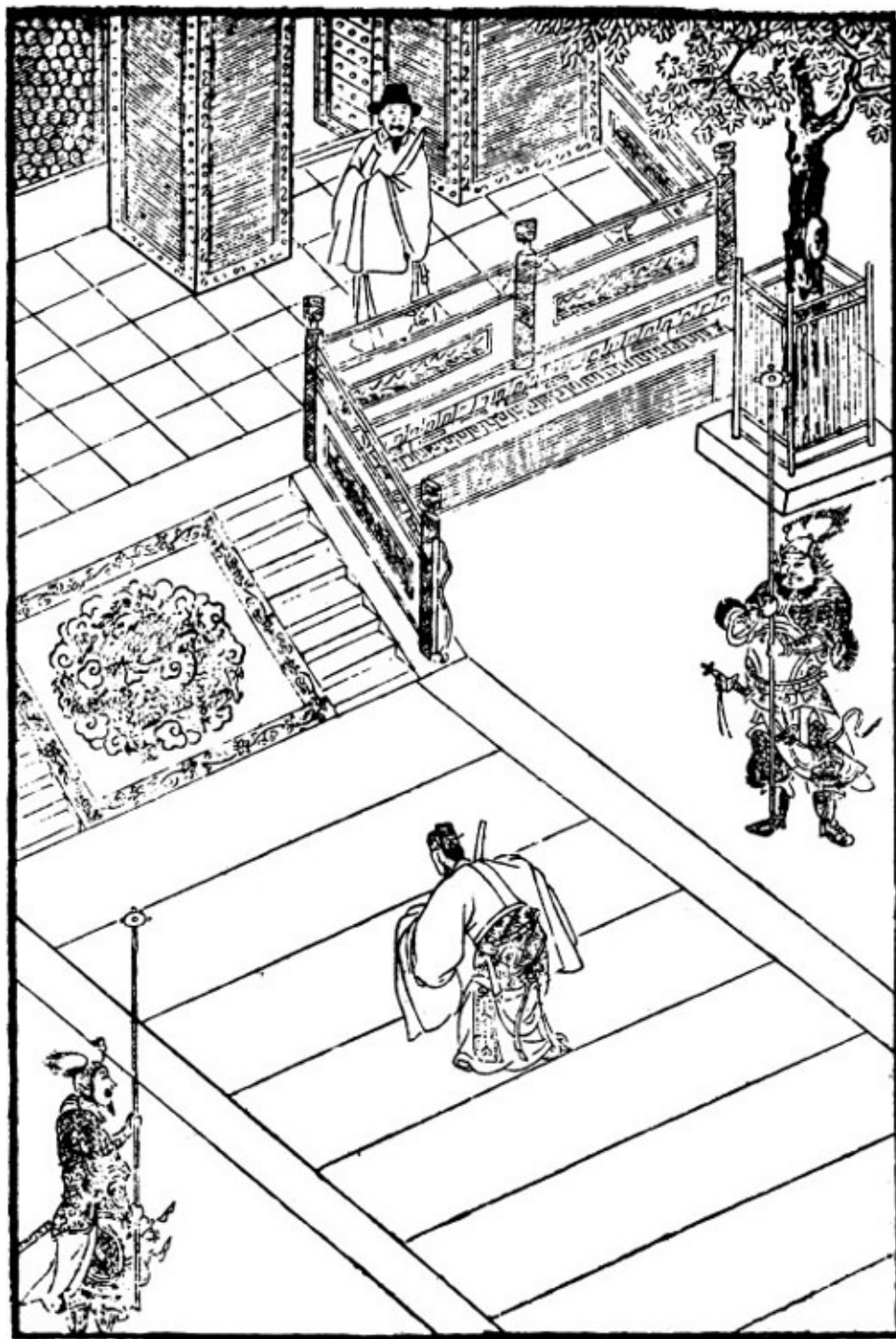
I plan to stay with my elder sister's husband, Chang Shih-lien,⁹ and await word of the final disposition of the case.

Once my affairs are in sufficient order to permit my return home:

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it.

Fearing that there may be some repercussions in the district, I have also ordered my son to provide you with five hundred taels of silver, in the hope that, as my kinsman, you will do what you can to cope with the situation.



Censor Yü-wen Impeaches Commander Yang

I shall endeavor to requite you
in the future;

Not forgetting your kindness
as long as I live.¹⁰
Written in haste, by lamplight, I am unable to express myself more fully.
Date: The twentieth day of the middle month of summer.
Signed: Hung, again, respectfully salutes you.

By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing finished reading the letter he was extremely perturbed. He instructed Wu Yüeh-niang to prepare food and wine for his daughter and son-in-law, and ordered the servants to sweep out the three rooms on the eastern side of the courtyard in front of the main reception hall for the couple to stay in. The boxes of valuables were all stored away in Yüeh-niang's room in the master suite. Ch'en Ching-chi brought out the five hundred taels of silver and turned them over to Hsi-men Ch'ing to cover whatever expenses might be incurred in attempting to cope with the situation.

Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned his manager, Wu Tien-en, and gave him five taels of silver, along with instructions to go that very night to the office of the chief clerk in the district yamen and make a copy of whatever relevant documents had come down from the Eastern Capital. What did the texts in the government gazette actually say?

Memorial Submitted by Yü-wen Hsi-chung,¹¹ Supervising Secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for War, and Others In Re: An Urgent Request for an Imperial Decision in Favor of Summary Execution for the Traitorous Ministers Who Abuse Their Power and Betray the National Interest, with a View toward Reinvigoration of Our Armed Forces and Elimination of the Barbarian Threat Your servant has heard that the danger posed by the barbarians has existed since ancient times. In the Chou dynasty, the Hsien-yün; in the Han, the Hsiung-nu; in the T'ang, the T'u-chüeh; and in the Five Dynasties, the Ch'i-tan, all gradually became strong. And since our own Imperial Sung dynasty was established, the Great Liao has made incursions into the Central Plain for no little while. But I have never heard of a state being threatened by barbarians from without when it did not already harbor barbarians within.¹² As the proverb says: When frost descends, the bell

of Feng-shan sounds;
When rain falls, the plinth under
the pillar sweats.¹³

That like breeds like is a necessary principle. The situation is analogous to that of a sick individual whose vital organs have long been ravaged by disease. When his natural vitality is sapped from within, he becomes susceptible to the penetration of malign influences from without. Once the entire body has become infected, not even Pien Ch'üeh of Lu¹⁴ would be able to save him. How could he then long endure?

The present situation of the empire is just like that of an invalid in the final stages of debilitation. The ruler resembles his head; the chief ministers resemble his vital organs; and the lesser officials resemble his four limbs. If Your Majesty sits in state upon the throne above, and your officials fulfill their responsibilities below, the natural vitality of the body politic will be replenished within; its defenses will be strong without; and the menace of barbarian invasion will be eliminated.

At the present time, among those whose conduct has led to the menace of barbarian invasion, no one is more culpable than the grand academician of the Hall for the Veneration of Governance, Ts'ai Ching. His artful, specious, cunning, and dangerous nature, further abetted by the lack of integrity or shame, permits him to engage, indifferently, in slander and flattery. Above, he is incapable of supporting his sovereign in the exercise of his prerogatives, assisting in the primary tasks of ordering and transforming the realm. Below, he is incapable of promoting virtue or implementing policy, protecting and cherishing the common people. Solely devoted to fattening himself at public expense, he curries imperial favor in order to consolidate his position; engenders factions in order to conceal his traitorous designs; deceives his sovereign by keeping him in the dark; and underhandedly stigmatizes men of worth. The corps of loyal servants of the state has been dispersed;¹⁵ the hearts of the citizens of the realm have turned cold; yet an unbroken stream of high officials, clad in crimson and purple, continues to congregate at his door.

Recently, as a result of the failure of his policy in the Ho-Huang region, the initiation of hostilities with the Liao, the cession of the three commandaries, the revolt of Kuo Yao-shih,¹⁶ and the sudden proliferation of our losses, the Chin barbarians have broken their covenant and encroached upon the heartland of the empire. These egregious examples of betrayal of the national interest are all due to Ts'ai Ching's malfeasance.

Wang Fu is rapacious, mediocre, and unreliable; his conduct more befitting that of a buffoon. Having been dredged up by Ts'ai Ching, to whose recommendation he owes his post in the government, he was, before long, mistakenly entrusted with military power. He is ready to engage in appeasement in order to maintain his position, but is quite without any policy to advance. Recently, on the occasion of Chang Ta's annihilation at T'ai-yüan,¹⁷ he was too panic-stricken to know what to do. And now that the barbarians are threatening the interior, he has fled south with his wife and children, concerned only for his personal safety.¹⁸ The enormity of this betrayal of the national interest is such that execution is too good for him.

Yang Chien was originally nothing but a gilded and pampered youth who, by availing himself of inherited privilege, and thereby exploiting the favor shown to the dead, has succeeded in obtaining access to military power and unwarranted responsibility for external defense. He is but an arrant traitor, feigning loyalty,¹⁹ whose pusillanimity knows no parallel.

These three officials have conspired to form a cabal that fosters corruption in both the capital and provinces and is like a noxious venom gnawing at Your Majesty's vitals. For years now, their conduct has invited catastrophes and induced anomalies, destroying the health and vitality of the body politic. The burdens of corvée and taxation are heavy and vexatious; the common people are dislocated and scattered; banditry is rife; the barbarians have ceased to be loyal; the resources of the empire are exhausted; and the moral bonds that hold society together have broken down. Though we were to pluck out the hairs of our heads, they would not suffice to enumerate the crimes of Ts'ai Ching and his coadjutors.²⁰

If your servants, who but await punishment in the aforesaid office in the discharge of their responsibilities as censors, were to see these traitorous ministers betray the national interest without calling the fact to Your August Majesty's attention, they would fail in their obligations to ruler and father, above, and violate the principles to which they have devoted a lifetime of study, below. We, therefore, humbly request an imperial decision, whether it be to relinquish Ts'ai Ching and the other malefactors of his faction to the hands of the penal authorities, in order to display your clemency; to subject them to the extreme penalty, in order to demonstrate their conspicuous disgrace; or to sentence them to public exposure in the cangue, in accordance with precedent, and condemn them to military exile on the distant frontier,²¹ where they may contend against monsters and demons.²²

Should such measures be adopted, there would be reason to hope that the favor of Heaven might be restored²³ and the hearts of the people made glad. Should the law of the land be thus reaffirmed, the barbarian threat would dissolve of itself. The empire would then be fortunate indeed! Your subjects would then be fortunate indeed!

This memorial had elicited an imperial rescript that read as follows:

Let Ts'ai Ching remain in office, for the time being, in order to assist Us in Our government. Let Wang Fu and Yang Chien be remanded to the Three Judicial Offices, which will conduct a joint inquiry and report the result to Us.

Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.

There followed a quotation from the report of the joint inquiry by the Three Judicial Offices, which read as follows: Wang Fu, Yang Chien, and the other malefactors of their faction are found guilty of malfeasance in regard to their military commands. In permitting the barbarians to penetrate deeply beyond our frontiers and wreak havoc with our populace, they have sustained heavy losses of officers and men and abandoned control of our territories. For such crimes the penalty prescribed by law is execution. Among the henchmen, clerical subofficials, functionaries, relatives, and adherents who have abetted them in their iniquities are Tung Sheng, Lu Hu, Yang Sheng, P'ang Hsüan, Han Tsung-jen, Ch'en Hung, Huang Yü,²⁴ Hsi-men Ch'ing,²⁵ Liu Sheng, Chao Hung-tao, and others. For all of the above whose names have been ascertained, the recommended sentence is: public exposure in the cangue for one month, followed by military exile in frontier guard units.

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not read these documents nothing might have happened, but having read them: In his ears all he heard was a

sighing rush of air,
As his ethereal and material souls fled
he knew not where.

Truly:

The shock affected all six of his vital organs,
including liver and lungs;
The fright damaged the three bristles and seven
apertures of his heart.²⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately turned his attention to the task of getting together a quantity of gold, silver, and valuable antiques, and seeing that they were properly packed.

He then summoned his servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang, into his bedroom and gave them secret orders: Thus and thus, and

So and so:

"Hire horses for yourselves and leave for the Eastern Capital this very night to find out what's happening. Make no effort to seek out the place where my relative by marriage, Ch'en Hung, is staying. If you get wind of any adverse repercussions, do your best to fix things up by any means you can think of, and hurry back to report to me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing had already provided the two men with twenty taels for their traveling expenses. Early in the fifth watch they hired drivers and set out on their way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to get to sleep all night long. Early the next morning he directed Lai-chao and Pen the Fourth to put a stop to the construction work in the garden and send all the artisans of the various trades home for the time being. He gave orders that the main gate of his compound was to be kept tightly closed every day, that his servants were not to venture outside the premises except on specific business, and that if anyone were to knock they should not be admitted.

Hsi-men Ch'ing confined his activities to his own quarters, restlessly walking outside and then back in again from time to time.

Worry piled upon worry;
Depression augmented by depression;²⁷

he was just like:

A millipede on a hot surface,²⁸

and forgot his undertaking with Li P'ing-erh as effectively as though it had been: Relegated to outer space, beyond the nine heavens.²⁹

When Wu Yüeh-niang saw the way he kept to his room every day:

His brows contracted by melancholy;
His face exhibiting a worried hue;³⁰

she said to him, "It's a matter that primarily concerns the family of our kinsman by marriage, Ch'en Hung. After all: For every injustice there is a perpetrator;

For every debt there is a creditor;³¹

why should you be so upset over something that hardly concerns you?"

"You're only a woman; what would you know about such things?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Ch'en Hung is our relative by marriage, and those two karmic encumbrances, my daughter and son-in-law, have moved into our house to live. This is an inescapable fact. The neighbors in the locality who have had reason to be annoyed with us in the past are extremely numerous. As the saying goes: The loom may stay put, but the shuttle gets around.

When the sheep is beaten, the colt and donkey tremble.³²

If there should be any troublemakers about to point the finger at us or:

Pull up the trees to investigate the roots,³³

you and I would be hard put to protect ourselves."

Truly:

Though you sit in your house behind closed doors,
Catastrophe may yet strike you out of the blue.³⁴

Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home in a state of deep depression, but we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, Li P'ing-erh waited first one day and then another, but nothing happened. She sent Old Mother Feng to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place twice in succession, but the main gate was: Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that

Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.

She waited around half the day, but nobody came out, so there was no way for her to discover what was going on.

When the twenty-fourth finally arrived, Li P'ing-erh again sent Old Mother Feng to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to deliver the jewelry she had had made for their betrothal and to ask him to come and have a word with her. Unable to get anyone to open the gate, she was waiting under the eaves of the house across the street when who should appear but Tai-an, who came out to water the horse.

On catching sight of her, Tai-an said, "Old Mother Feng, what are you doing here?"

"Mistress Hua sent me to deliver the jewelry," said Old Mother Feng. "Why is there so little sign of activity around here? She wants your master to come over and have a word with her."

"My master has been occupied with inconsequential affairs for some days," said Tai-an, "and hasn't had any free time. You'd better take the jewelry back with you for the time being. When I get done watering the horse I'll be sure to tell my master what you've said."

"My good fellow," said Old Mother Feng, "I'll wait right here if you'll just take the jewelry inside and speak to your master about it. Mistress Hua is annoyed enough with me as it is."

Tai-an was prevailed upon to tether the horse and go back inside. After some time he came out again and reported, "I've told my master what you said and he's agreed to accept the jewelry. He wants you to tell Mistress Hua to wait a few days longer until he's able to pay her a visit and speak to her in person."

Old Mother Feng went straight home and reported this message to her mistress, who had no alternative but to wait a few days longer.

Before she knew it, the fifth month came to an end and she found herself in the first decade of the sixth month.

Pining by day and longing by night;
Of news from her lover she has none.
Beset by dreams, harried in spirit;
Her day of consummation is delayed.

Truly:

Too indolent to paint her moth eyebrows,
Too abashed to retouch her powdered face;
Her bosom swells with unexpressed resentment,
Her jadelike spirit is utterly distraught.

The woman waited expectantly for Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he did not come. Every day: Her intake of tea and food diminished,

Her spirits became ever more deranged.

At night:

Sleeping alone upon her pillow,
She tossed and turned obsessively.

Suddenly she heard a knocking at the gate and seemed to see Hsi-men Ch'ing coming in. The woman: Welcomed him at the door with a smile, and

Led him into the room by the hand.
She asked him why he had failed to keep their tryst, and Each of them expressed their innermost thoughts.
Inseparable and impassioned,
They devoted the night to pleasure.
Only when the cock crowed and the day dawned,
Did he extricate himself and return home.

The woman awoke with a start and gave a great cry, but:

Her soul had already escaped.

Old Mother Feng hurried into the room to see what was amiss.

"Hsi-men Ch'ing just left," the woman said. "Have you locked the gate after him yet?"

"Your longing has addled your wits," said Old Mother Feng. "How could the Honorable Gentleman have been here? I haven't seen so much as his shadow."

From this time on, the woman's:

Dreamscapes were haunted.

Night after night she was disturbed by fox spirits with:

Assumed names and appropriated identities,

who came to sap her vitality. Gradually her countenance grew wan and emaciated; she lost her appetite and took to her bed.

One day Old Mother Feng said to the woman, "I've asked that doctor, Chiang Chu-shan, who lives at the end of Main Street, to come and see you."

This man was still young, no more than thirty.

Petite in stature,
Precious in bearing;

he was as frivolous and untrustworthy a person as you could find.

Invited into the woman's bedroom, he found her with:

Misty locks and cloudy tresses,
Lying huddled in her bedclothes;

looking, for all the world, as though she were suffering from insurmountable grief.

After he had consumed the obligatory tea, a maidservant placed a cushion in the appropriate spot and Chiang Chu-shan approached the bed and proceeded to palpate the patient's pulse. The fact that the woman was good-looking was not lost upon him as he embarked upon his diagnosis.

"In attempting to ascertain the cause of your indisposition just now, I find that your hepatic pulse is thready, becoming full after passing the *ostium pollicare*³⁵ on the wrist; whereas your yin pulses are sluggish in their ascent from the *ostium pollicare* to the *linea piscis*³⁶ at the foot of the thenar eminence. This indicates a condition, engendered by the six desires and seven passions, in which: Yin and yang contend with one another,

Producing alternate fevers and chills;
and is characterized by a feeling of internal melancholic congestion that cannot be dissipated.
It appears to be malaria but is not malaria,
It seems to be the ague but is not the ague.

By day you feel:

Enervated and sleepy,
Lacking all vitality;

and by night:

Your spirit will not keep to its abode,
But dallies with demons in your dreams.

If not treated in time, it may develop into a consumptive inflammation of the bones, which is nearly always fatal.³⁷ What a pity! What a pity!"

"If you will be good enough to prescribe an efficacious remedy," the woman said, "should I recover I will see that you are amply rewarded."

"I will, of course, do my best," said Chiang Chu-shan. "If you take my medicine I am sure you will be restored to perfect health."

When the consultation was over he got up to go. Li P'ing-erh gave Old Mother Feng five mace of silver and sent her after him to fetch the prescription.

That evening the woman took the medicine he had prescribed and was able to sleep undisturbed. Gradually her appetite improved and she began to comb her hair again and get up and about. In the space of a few days her spirits were back to normal.

One day, having prepared a feast and set aside three taels of silver, she sent Old Mother Feng to invite Chiang Chu-shan to come over so she could thank him for his pains.

Now, ever since Chiang Chu-shan had diagnosed Li P'ing-erh's illness he had been coveting her³⁸ for no little while. Thereupon he no sooner heard the invitation than he changed his clothes and presented himself. He was ushered into the reception room where the woman, resplendantly attired, came out to greet him. After the tea had been twice replenished, she invited him into her boudoir where: Wine and viands were already laid out,

Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk.

The young maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, stood in attendance, ready to present him with the three taels of silver on a platter decorated with gold tracery.

The woman:

Lifting high a jade goblet,
came forward and saluted him, saying, "The other day, when I was feeling so out of sorts, you were good enough to prescribe an efficacious remedy that provided immediate relief. Today I have prepared a meager cup of watery wine and invited you here to express my gratitude."

"That was only my professional responsibility" said Chiang Chu-shan, "something that principle required. What need is there to make so much of it?"

Then, seeing the three taels that were being offered in return for his services, he said, "How could I presume to accept such generous remuneration?"

"It is but a paltry expression of my gratitude, far less than propriety would demand," the woman said. "I sincerely hope that you will be good enough to accept it."

Only after repeated demurrals did Chiang Chu-shan consent to take it.

The woman presented him with the wine and they took their seats. After:

Three rounds of drinks had been consumed,

Chiang Chu-shan stole a glance at the woman and saw that she was:

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade;

Astonishingly seductive and voluptuous.

Without further ado he determined to see if he could get a rise out of her.

"I hardly dare ask," he said, "how old you are, young lady?"

"I'm twenty-three," the woman responded.

"There's another thing I'm curious about," he said. "Why on earth should someone like you, still in the flower of youth, born and bred in respectable circumstances, with ample means to supply all your needs, have been suffering the other day from a melancholic congestion and feeling of insufficiency?"

When the woman heard this, she smiled, and said, "I will not deceive you, sir. Since my poor husband passed away my domestic circumstances have been desolate. I am all alone in the world and beset by worry and longing. How could I avoid falling ill?"

"How long has it been, in fact, since your husband died?" asked Chiang Chu-shan.

"My poor husband," the woman replied, "during the eleventh month of last year, came down with an acute intestinal fever and died. It must be nearly eight months ago by now."

"Who prescribed for him?" asked Chiang Chu-shan.

"Dr. Hu from Main Street," the woman replied.

"You don't mean that Hu the Quack who lives in Eunuch Director Liu's house on East Street, do you?" said Chiang Chu-shan. "He never attended the Imperial Academy of Medicine as I did. What does he know about the pulse? Why did

you call upon someone like that?"

"It was only because my neighbors recommended him," the woman said, "that I engaged his services. But my poor husband was simply not fated to live. It had nothing to do with him."

"Do you have any boys or girls?" Chiang Chu-shan went on to ask.

"No," the woman replied.

"What a pity," said Chiang Chu-shan, "that in the youthful prime of life you should be living the lonely life of a widow, without any children to keep you company. Why don't you seek some means of improving your lot? If you resign yourself to such melancholy seclusion how can you help becoming ill?"

"Recently I have entered into an engagement to be married," the woman said. "I'll be crossing my husband's threshold sometime soon."

"May I ask who it is you plan to marry?" inquired Chiang Chu-shan.

"It's the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing, who owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen," the woman replied.

When Chiang Chu-shan heard this, he said, "That's bad! That's bad! Why would you want to marry him? I've often been called on to perform medical services in his household and know all about it. He's nothing but an influence peddler in the district yamen, and a loan shark as well. His home is a veritable flesh market. Not counting the maidservants, he's already got five or six bedmates, of higher and lower status, about the place, whom he subjects to a regular caning if they get out of hand. Whenever one of them fails to please him in any way, however slight, he calls in a go-between and disposes of her without more ado. He's: The foreman of the wife-beaters,

The leader of the lotharios.

"It's a good thing you told me about it. Otherwise, if you had entered his household, it would have been like: A moth darting into the flame.³⁹

You would have been trapped, unable to escape in any direction, and it would have been too late to think better of it. Moreover, he has recently been implicated in an affair involving his kinsman by marriage and is holed up in his home, unable to come out. The construction work he has undertaken is only half-finished and has all been abandoned. Documents have been dispatched from the Eastern Capital ordering the prefectural and district authorities to arrest the implicated parties. It looks as though the buildings he was working on are likely to end up being confiscated by the government. Why on earth, for no good reason, would you want to marry someone like that?"

With this single speech he reduced the woman to tight-lipped silence. On top of everything else, there were all the valuables that she had stashed in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

She pondered this for some time and kicked herself, thinking, "No wonder when I invited him again and again he never showed up. It really was because he was embroiled in something at home."

She also noticed that Chiang Chu-shan's conversation was animated and his demeanor unassuming and respectful.

"If I could only manage to marry someone like that in the future," she thought to herself. "I wonder if he already has a wife or not."

"I am much indebted to you for your advice," she went on to say. "If any family of your acquaintance should have a suitable match to propose, I would have no reason to refuse it."

Chiang Chu-shan rose to the bait. "May I ask what sort of person you have in mind, so I can come tell you about it if I should hear of anyone that fits the bill?"

"It really wouldn't matter to me whether his social status were high or low," the woman said. "Someone just like you would be fine."

If Chiang Chu-shan had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them: His joy was so great,

He lost his bearings.⁴⁰

Thereupon, he got up from his seat, knelt down before her, and said, "I will not deceive you. I have lost my helpmate and no longer have anyone to look after me.⁴¹ I have been living the life of a widower for some time and have no children. If you should be so considerate as to bestow your affections upon me and consent to a marriage alliance, it would fulfill the wish of a lifetime. Though I should have to: Carry rings and knot grass,⁴²

I will never dare to forget it."

The woman smiled and took him by the hand, saying, "Please get up. I don't even know how long you've been a widower, or how old you are. If you would like to marry me, you must engage a go-between to propose the match in order to fulfill the demands of propriety."

Chiang Chu-shan went down on his knees again and importuned her as follows: "I am twenty-eight years old and was born on the twenty-seventh day of the first month at six o'clock in the morning. Unfortunately, my poor wife died last year. I possess but meager resources and my origins are humble. Since you have been good enough to grant your gracious consent, what need is there for the intercession of a matchmaker?"⁴³

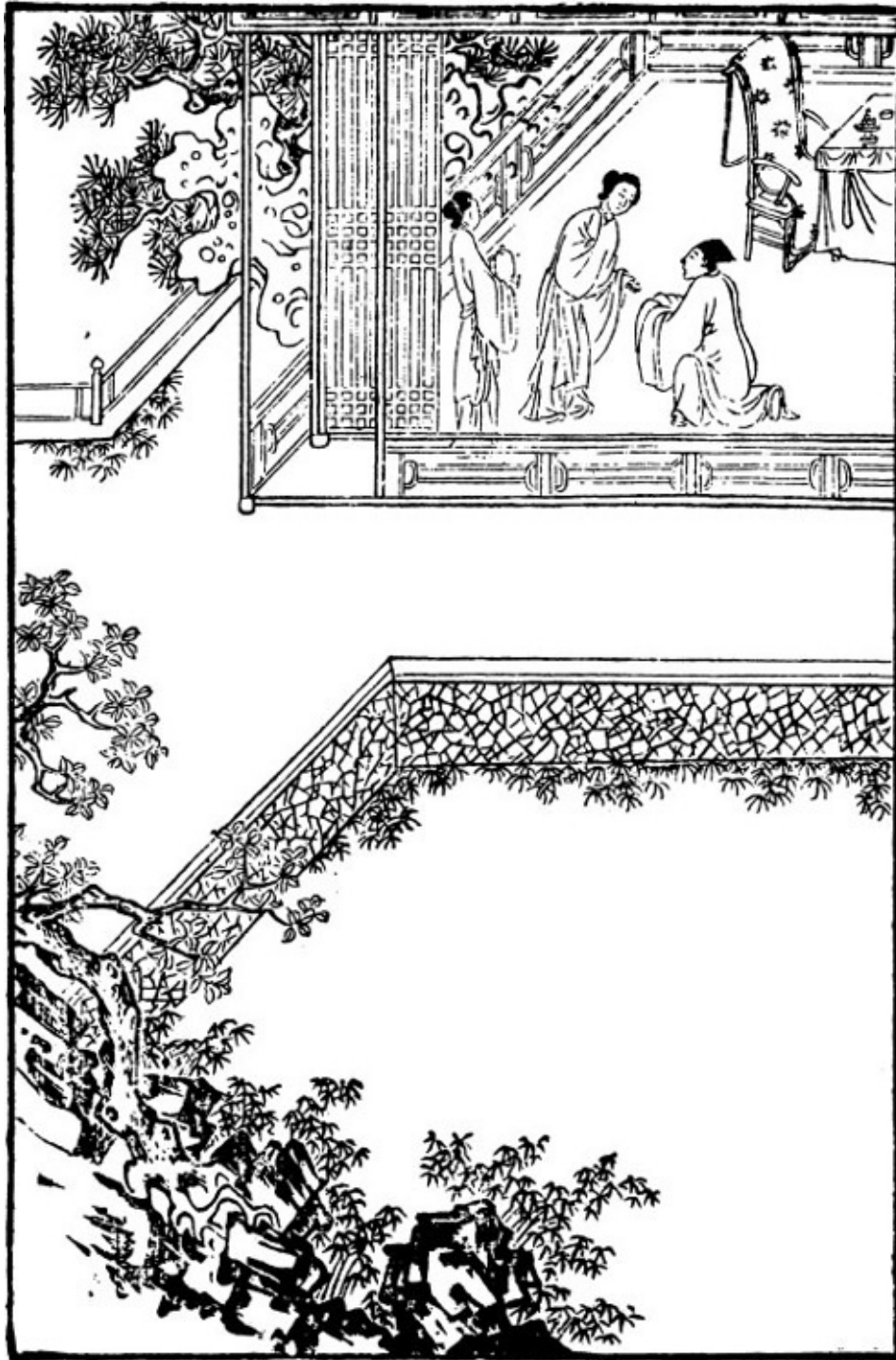
When the woman heard these words she smiled, saying, "If you don't have any money, I have an old waiting woman here, named Feng, who can serve as go-between and witness. There's no need for you to present any betrothal gifts. All we need to do is pick an auspicious day and I will take you into my household as my husband. What do you think?"

Chiang Chu-shan hastily threw himself at her feet, with the words, "Young lady, you are like: Another set of parents to me,

A reborn father and mother.⁴⁴

This must have been fated in a prior existence,⁴⁵

Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.”⁴⁶



Li P'ing-erh Takes Chiang Chu-shan as Mate

Then and there, in the room they were in, the two of them exchanged loving cups, and the marriage contract was concluded. Chiang Chu-shan continued to drink with her until evening before going home.

The woman discussed the situation with Old Mother Feng, saying, "Since Hsi-men Ch'ing's household is implicated in such an affair: The outcome is unpredictable.

Moreover, I'm so alone here that when I fell ill I was lucky to escape with my life. Under the present circumstances, I might just as well take this doctor as my husband and try to make a go of it with him; why not?"

The next day she sent Old Mother Feng to communicate with him. She had selected the eighteenth day of the sixth month as the most auspicious date for the occasion, and when the time came she brought Chiang Chu-shan across the threshold and they became man and wife.

After the “third-day celebrations” were over, the woman got together three hundred taels worth of capital and had a twelve-foot-wide segment of the frontage of her residence opened up to serve as a dispensary for Chiang Chu-shan. As a result: Everything was put on an entirely new footing.⁴⁷

Originally, when he made calls on his patients, he had had to go on foot. But now he was able to buy a donkey to ride. He cut quite a figure as he came and went in the streets. But no more of this. Truly: Even a puddle of stagnant water,

completely undisturbed,
May yet find its surface ruffled
by the spring breeze.⁴⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 18

LAI-PAO TAKES CARE OF THINGS IN THE EASTERN CAPITAL; CH'EN CHING-CHI SUPERVISES THE WORK IN THE FLOWER GARDEN

It is deplorable, but man's heart is
more venomous than a snake;¹
Who is aware that the eye of Heaven rolls as
relentlessly as a wheel?
The property once purloined from one's
neighbor to the east;

Will someday revert to the
family on the north.

Unrighteous riches are like snow
sprinkled with scalding water;

Unearned property is like sand
propelled by the tide.
If one takes craft and cunning to be
the secret of success;
It will prove as evanescent as the
morning and the evening clouds.²

AT THIS POINT the story divides into two. We will say no more, for the moment, about Chiang Chu-shan's marriage into Li P'ing-erh's household, but return to the story of Lai-pao and Lai-wang's trip to the Eastern Capital to fix things up on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf.

Every morning they took to the purple road;
Each evening they tramped the red dust.
When hungry they ate, when thirsty they drank;³
Proceeding by moonlight, enveloped in stars.⁴

One day, they arrived at the Eastern Capital, entered through the Myriad Years Gate, and sought out an inn at which to take lodgings for the night.

The next day, they set out to see what they could learn in the streets. By listening to the "wind-borne words"⁵ of passersby, who:

Put their heads together to whisper,⁶
Gossiping in the streets and discoursing in the alleys,⁷

they ascertained that on the previous day the report of the joint inquiry with regard to the minister of war, Wang Fu, had elicited an imperial rescript confirming the sentence of execution after the Autumn Assizes. But because not all of the relatives and adherents of Commander Yang Chien had yet been apprehended, a final determination of his case was still pending, though further developments were expected to occur that very day.

Lai-pao and his companion, carrying their presents with them, lost no time in making their way to the gate of Ts'ai Ching's residence. Since they had come to the capital to take care of things twice before, they already knew their way around. Taking their stand beneath the commemorative arch on Dragon's Virtue Street, they waited to see what they could find out about the situation inside the mansion.

Before long, they saw a figure, clad in black, hurriedly coming out of the grand preceptor's residence and heading toward the east. Lai-pao recognized him to be the factotum, Yang Sheng, on the domestic staff of Commander Yang Chien.

He was on the verge of stopping him to ask how matters stood when he thought to himself, "The master didn't tell me to call on him." So he held his peace and let him go his way.

After waiting for some time, the two of them went up to the door of the mansion and saluted the gatekeeper with a deep bow, saying, "Might we ask, is His Honor, the grand preceptor, at home or not?"

"His Honor is not at home," the gatekeeper replied. "He has not yet returned from the deliberations at court. Why do you ask?"

"If you would be so kind," Lai-pao continued, "as to invite out the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien; I have something to report to him."

"The majordomo, Uncle Chai, is also not in," the functionary replied. "He went out together with His Honor."

"Wait a minute," Lai-pao thought to himself. "He's not being very forthcoming. He must be expecting to receive a little something for his pains."

Thereupon, he pulled a tael's worth of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to him.

The functionary took it and then asked, "Is it His Honor you want to see, or His Excellency, the academician? If it's His Honor you want, the person to go through is the principal majordomo, Chai Ch'ien. If it's His Excellency you want, the person to go through is the secondary majordomo, Kao An. Each of them has his own responsibilities. Moreover, His Honor has not yet returned from court; only His Excellency, the academician, is at home. If you have something to take up with him, I can invite out Majordomo Kao for you. Whatever your business may be, he can arrange an interview with His Excellency for you. It's all the same."

Lai-pao took advantage of the occasion by equivocating, "We are here on business from the household of Commander Yang."

When the functionary heard this, he dared not be remiss, but went straight into the mansion. After some time, Kao An appeared.

Lai-pao hastily made his obeisance and offered him ten taels of silver, saying, "I am a servitor of Commander Yang's who came to get the news from His Honor along with the factotum, Yang Sheng. Because I stopped on the way to get something to eat, I'm a bit late. It never occurred to me that he would come right ahead, so I was unable to catch up."

Kao An accepted the gratuity, saying, "Your factotum, Yang Sheng, left just a minute ago. His Honor is still detained at court. If you will wait a little bit, I'll see if I can arrange an interview for you with His Excellency."

So saying, he conducted Lai-pao past the great reception hall in the second courtyard, through an interior gate on one side, and up to a spacious eighteen-foot-wide structure that was situated with its back to the north and its front facing south. This building was adorned with a green-painted balustrade and displayed a vermilion plaque over the lintel that had been presented by the emperor himself. It was inscribed with four large gold characters in the imperial hand, set off against an intaglio ultramarine ground, that read "The Academician's Music Chamber."

It so happened that Ts'ai Ching's son, Ts'ai Yu,⁸ was also a favorite of the emperor's. At the time in question he held

concurrently the posts of academician of the Hall of Auspicious Harmony, minister of rites, and superintendent of the Temple of the Supreme Unity.

Lai-pao waited outside the door while Kao An went in to confer with his master. When he came out, he summoned Lai-pao to follow him inside and kneel in the middle of the hall. A beaded blind was suspended at the upper end of the room, behind which Ts'ai Yu was seated, wearing an informal gown and a soft cap.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"I am a servant of Commander Yang's kinsman, Ch'en Hung," Lai-pao replied. "I came in the company of the commander's factotum, Yang Sheng, in order to ask His Honor for news. Unexpectedly, he got a head start on me, and I have been unable to catch up with him."

Thereupon, he pulled a document out of his breast pocket and handed it up.

When Ts'ai Yu saw that the words "Five hundred piculs of white rice"⁹ were written on it, he called Lai-pao to come up closer, and said to him, "His Honor, because of the allegations against him on the part of the censors, has for some days now avoided participation in the work of the Secretariat. Responsibility for such matters, including yesterday's report of the joint inquiry of the Three Judicial Offices, is in the hands of the minister of the right, Li Pang-yen.¹⁰ It is said that, with regard to the accusations against Commander Yang, news leaked out of the palace yesterday that His Majesty is disposed to be magnanimous and will reserve the matter for special treatment. Those of his subordinates and employees whose names have been ascertained will be tried as soon as the investigation is completed. You would be well advised to go to Li Pang-yen's place to make your plea."

Lai-pao kowtowed repeatedly, saying, "I have no entrée to Minister Li's mansion. I hope that Your Excellency will deign to show me some consideration, for Commander Yang's sake."

"Go to the area just north of the Heavenly River Bridge," Ts'ai Yu responded, "and look for a great gateway standing at the top of a rise. Ask for the residence of the minister of the right, grand academician of the Hall for Aid in Governance, and concurrently minister of rites, Li Pang-yen. Everyone will know where it is. However, I might as well send someone from my staff to take you there."

There and then, he ordered an usher to fetch a sheet of stationery, affixed his seal to it, and sent the majordomo, Kao An, to escort him to Minister Li's place and argue, thus and so, on his behalf. Kao An took the document and accompanied Lai-pao out the gate of the mansion, where they picked up Lai-wang to carry the presents. After traversing Dragon's Virtue Street they headed straight for the gate of Li Pang-yen's mansion above the Heavenly River Bridge.

It so happened that Li Pang-yen had just returned home after the morning audience. He was at the door, dressed in a scarlet crepe robe, with a jade-ornamented girdle about his waist, in the act of seeing off a senior official, who got into his sedan chair and went his way. When he returned to the reception hall, the gatekeeper announced that His Excellency, the academician Ts'ai Yu, had sent his majordomo to see him. He first summoned Kao An into his presence and talked to him for a while before calling on Lai-pao and Lai-wang to come inside, where they knelt down below the dais at the upper end of the hall. Kao An stood to one side and passed up Ts'ai Yu's sealed letter and the list of presents. Lai-pao then proceeded to make a formal presentation of the gifts from below.

When Li Pang-yen saw them, he said, "In view of the fact that you are asking a favor on behalf of His Excellency, Ts'ai Yu, and that you also represent a kinsman of Commander Yang's, how could I ever accept these presents? Moreover, as far as Commander Yang is concerned, yesterday His Majesty's heart was moved to clemency, so his problems are already over. The only thing is that a number of his subordinates, because of the gravity of the charges brought by the censors, are sure to be tried and sentenced."

There and then, he ordered an attendant clerk to fetch the list of names that had been forwarded by the Office of Scrutiny the day before and show it to Lai-pao. It read as follows:

Under the name of Wang Fu: clerical subofficial Tung Sheng; henchman Wang Lien; and foreman Huang Yü.

Under the name of Yang Chien: miscreant clerical subofficial Lu Hu; factotum Yang Sheng; domestic clerks Han Tsung-jen and Chao Hung-tao; foreman Liu Sheng; relatives and adherents Ch'en Hung, Hsi-men Ch'ing, Hu the Fourth, etc.

All of the above-named persons:

Fall into the category of
mere falcons and hounds;¹¹
Are of the same ilk as the

“fox who flaunted the tiger’s might.”¹²

By manipulating their superiors they have been able to take advantage of their power to do harm to others. In rapaciousness and cruelty they are without parallel, and the catalogue of their abuses has reached mountainous proportions. On their account the common people have been made to knit their brows and the marketplaces are in an uproar.

We humbly request that Your Majesty relinquish the members of this entire faction to the hands of the judicial authorities and either condemn them to military exile on the distant frontier, where they may contend against monsters and demons, or subject them to condign punishment, in order to reaffirm the law of the land. They ought not to be permitted to remain at large for even a single day.

When Lai-pao read this document, he was thrown into consternation and kowtowed repeatedly, pleading, “I am a retainer of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s. I hope Your Honor will see fit to open wide your all-embracing heart and save my master’s life.”

Kao An also got down on his knees and made a plea on his behalf.

When Li Pang-yen saw that he was being offered five hundred taels of silver to deal with but a single name, he could hardly refuse to do the requested favor. There and then, he ordered his attendants to bring in his writing desk, took up his brush, and so altered the name on the document that, instead of reading Hsi-men Ch’ing, it read Chia Lien.¹³ At the same time he indicated his acceptance of the presents and had them put away.

When Li Pang-yen had finished taking care of the matter, he wrote a note in reply to the academician Ts’ai Yu, and also rewarded Kao An, Lai-pao, and Lai-wang with a sealed packet containing fifty taels of silver. Once they were out in the street, Lai-pao and Lai-wang took their leave of the majordomo, Kao An, and went back to their inn, where they got their luggage together, paid the bill, and set out posthaste to return to Ch’ing-ho district.

As soon as they arrived home, they went to see Hsi-men Ch’ing and told him, from beginning to end, everything they had done in the Eastern Capital. When Hsi-men Ch’ing heard what they had to say it was:

Just as though he had been dunked in a
tub of ice water.

“It’s a good thing I sent someone to take care of things,” he said to Wu Yüeh-niang. “Otherwise, who knows what might have happened?”

Truly, on this occasion, Hsi-men Ch’ing’s life was like:



Lai-pao Takes Care of Things in the Eastern Capital

The setting sun that has already sunk
 behind the western hills;
 When it is summoned forth once more
 to scale the Fu-sang tree.¹⁴
 Only then did he feel as though:

The stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground.

By the time two days had gone by, his gate was no longer closed, the construction work in his garden was resumed, and he began, gradually, to appear in public again.

One day, Tai-an was riding on horseback along Lion Street when he noticed that a large pharmaceutical shop had been opened in the front part of Li P'ing-erh's residence, with sizable stocks of raw and prepared pharmaceuticals visible within. There was a small red counter, a lacquered plaque over the door, and a shop sign hanging outside. Business appeared to be brisk.

When he got home, he told Hsi-men Ch'ing about it.

Not yet knowing that Chiang Chu-shan had married into Li P'ing-erh's household, Tai-an merely said, "Mistress Hua has acquired a manager somewhere and opened a pharmaceutical shop."

On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing only half believed it.

One day, in the middle decade of the seventh month, when:

The autumn wind begins to sigh, and

The jade dew grows more chilly,¹⁵

Hsi-men Ch'ing was riding his horse along the street when he ran into Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta.

The two of them called him to a halt and when he dismounted saluted him, saying, "Brother, where've you been keeping yourself all this while? We went by your place several times but saw that the gate was shut and didn't venture to intrude. We've been utterly at a loss for lo, these many days. Really, Brother, what have you been up to at home, anyway? Have you taken our new sister-in-law to wife? You haven't invited us yet to help celebrate the occasion."

"It was something I didn't feel like mentioning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Because the Ch'en family, to whom I'm related by marriage, got into a sticky predicament, I had to busy myself with their affairs for a few days. The wedding has had to be postponed."

"We didn't know you had anything to worry about," said Ying Po-chüeh. "But now that we've run into you today, we're not about to let you get away scot-free. Come share three cups with us at Wu Yin-erh's place in the licensed quarter. It will help dispel your gloom."

So saying:

Without permitting any further explanation, they dragged Hsi-men Ch'ing off into the licensed quarter, leaving Tai-an and P'ing-an to follow after them with the horse. Truly:

On the return trip one only grieves
that the days are short;
When homesick one is prone to regret
that the horse is slow.
Worldly wealth, painted faces, and wine
in the sing-song houses;
Who is there who is not deluded
by these three things?¹⁶

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing allowed himself to be dragged off to Wu Yin-erh's place by the two of them, where they proceeded to drink the day away. Not until evening began to fall and he was half inebriated did they let him go.

Whipping up his horse, he was passing by the end of East Street on his way home when he ran into Old Mother Feng, who was coming from the south in a great hurry.

Hsi-men Ch'ing reined in his horse and asked, "Where are you going?"

"Mistress Hua sent me to attend the Ullambana¹⁷ services at the temple outside the South Gate," replied Old Mother Feng. "She asked me to have a coffer of paper money burned on behalf of the deceased Hua Tzu-hsü. I have had to hurry in order to get back before the gates are closed."

"Is Mistress Hua at home and well?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, drunkenly. "I'll come have a word with her tomorrow."

"Why should you ask after her anymore, sir?" demanded Old Mother Feng. "You had a ready-made, fully cooked meal there for the asking, but you let someone snitch the pot away from under your very nose."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was astonished.

"You don't mean to say she's married someone else?" he asked.

"Mistress Hua sent me over to your place to deliver the jewelry again and again," Old Mother Feng replied. "But I was never able to see you. Your gate was closed. I persuaded your servant to go inside and urge you to action, but you didn't pay any attention. Now someone else has taken her. What have you got to say about it?"

"Who is it?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Old Mother Feng told him the whole story, from beginning to end. How, during the third watch in the middle of the night, the woman had been troubled by fox spirits and had fallen ill. How she gradually approached the brink of death. How she had engaged Dr. Chiang Chu-shan who lived on Main Street to come and see her. How she had taken his medicine and subsequently recovered. How, on such and such a day, she had brought him across the threshold and they had become man and wife. And how she had now produced three hundred taels worth of capital and set him up with a pharmaceutical shop of his own.

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this nothing might have happened, but having heard about it, he was so angry he tried to stamp his feet though he was still on horseback.

"That's bad!" he called out. "If you'd married anyone else, it wouldn't bother me. But how could you bring yourself to marry a stunted little cuckold like that? What can he do for you?"

Thereupon he whipped up his horse and headed straight home. He had just dismounted and was going through the inner gate when he came upon Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and his daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in the courtyard outside the front reception hall, where they were amusing themselves by skipping rope¹⁸ in the moonlight. As soon as they saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh withdrew to

the rear of the compound. P'an Chin-lien, alone, remained behind, leaning against one of the pillars of the reception hall while she fiddled with her shoe.

"So you whores are bored enough to scream, are you!" Hsi-men Ch'ing shouted at her, drunkenly. "Don't you have anything better to do than jump rope?"

As he spoke, he went up to Chin-lien and kicked her twice. When he arrived in the rear of the compound, instead of going into Wu Yüeh-niang's room to change his clothes, he went back to an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard that he was accustomed to use as a study, where he demanded his bedding and proposed to spend the night. All the while, he proceeded to:

Beat the maidservants, and

Abuse the page boys,

giving every indication of being in a foul mood.

His womenfolk huddled together in consternation, not knowing how to account for it. Wu Yüeh-niang was very critical of Chin-lien.

"You could tell he was drunk when he came in," she said. "All you had to do was take a few steps to get out of his way. Instead of which, you did everything you could to attract his attention, doubling up with laughter and fiddling with your shoe. As a result:

The locust and the grasshopper,

Are cursed in the same breath."¹⁹

"It's bad enough to abuse us," said Meng Yü-lou, "but how can he call our elder sister a whore? The unprincipled good-for-nothing!"

"It seems I'm the only one in the house fit to be taken advantage of," said Chin-lien, picking up where Yü-lou had left off. "The three of you were all there, just as I was, but I'm the only one who got kicked. It would appear that some people are more privileged than others."

This incensed Yüeh-niang, who said, "Then why didn't you get him to give me a kick too, just for starters? If you're not privileged around here, I'd like to know who is? You don't know your place, you lousy baggage, but at least I keep quiet about it; while you're always spouting off, yakkety-yak, with that mouth of yours!"

When Chin-lien saw that Yüeh-niang was angry, she tried to deflect the conversation in an effort to cover her tracks.

"Sister," she said, "that's not it at all. The fact is, whenever he gets upset anywhere, for whatever reason, he vents his spleen on me. He's always opening his eyes wide and threatening a thousand, if not ten thousand, times to beat me to a stinking pulp."

"Whoever told you to provoke him in the first place?" Yüeh-niang demanded.

If he doesn't beat you,

Should he beat the dog instead?"

"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "why don't you call in the page boy and ask him where he's been drinking today? Why should he have gone out in a perfectly good mood in the morning and come home in such a state?"

In no time at all, Tai-an was summoned into their presence and subjected to interrogation.

"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang railed at him. "If you don't tell the truth, I'll send for one of the older servants to hang you up and give you a real flogging. You and P'ing-an will both get ten strokes with the heavy bamboo."

"Don't beat me, mistress," said Tai-an. "I'll tell you the truth. Today the master, along with Uncle Ying the Second and company, had a drinking party in the Wu family establishment in the licensed quarter. They broke up early and, as he was passing the end of East Street on the way home, he ran into Old Mother Feng. She told him that Mistress Hua, having waited for him in vain, had married that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan who lives on Main Street. The master was as upset as could be all the way home."

"I can well believe it," said Yüeh-niang. "So that shameless perverted whore had such hot pants she couldn't wait to get married, did she? And now he comes home and vents his spleen on us."

"Mistress Hua didn't marry herself off to Dr. Chiang Chu-shan," said Tai-an. "She brought him across the threshold into her own household. And now she has put up the capital he needs to open a really prosperous big pharmaceutical shop. When I came home and told the master about it, he didn't, at first, believe it."

"If you stop to consider it," said Meng Yü-lou, "how long has her husband been dead, anyway? To marry someone like that, before her mourning period is even over, simply won't do at all."

"Nowadays," said Yüeh-niang, "who pays any attention to what will, or won't, do? It's not as though she were the only one with such hot pants she couldn't wait to get married until the mourning period for her husband was over. From whores like that, who spend all their time with their lovers:

Lolling in their cups, or

Snoozing in a stupor,²⁰

what kind of marital fidelity can you expect?"

Gentle reader take note: This speech of Yüeh-niang's;

Hit two people with one swipe of the stick.²¹

Both Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien had remarried before their mourning periods were over. When they heard these words, all they could do was return to their quarters, feeling somewhat discomfited. But enough of this. Truly:

One may find things less than satisfactory

eight or nine times out of ten;

But it is seldom wise to tell anyone about

even two or three of them.²²

To resume our story, that evening Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard.

The next day, he arranged to have his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, cooperate with Pen the Fourth in the task of supervising the construction work in the garden and handling the accounts, and he reassigned Lai-chao to responsibility for the main gate. His daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, spent the daylight hours in the rear of the compound, joining in the amusements of Wu Yüeh-niang and the other womenfolk, and only in the evening returned to the rooms on the eastern side of the front courtyard to sleep. Ch'en Ching-chi, on the other hand, spent his days in the garden supervising the construction work and did not venture as far as the rear reception hall unless asked. His meals were brought out to him from the back of the compound by page boys. As a result, the female members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had not even had a chance to meet him.

One day, Hsi-men Ch'ing was away from home, attending a farewell party for Battalion Commander Ho Chin of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Wu Yüeh-niang had been feeling concerned for some time that ever since Ch'en Ching-chi had moved in with them he had been working hard supervising the construction in the garden, and they had never even invited him for a meal to express their appreciation for his labors.

On this occasion, she said to Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh, "I've wanted to do something about it, but have been afraid my husband would criticize me for interfering; if I don't do anything, though, it just doesn't seem right to me. When someone else's child is visiting you and gets up early and goes to bed late every day, working as hard as he can, to accomplish some task on your behalf, is it right that no one should think of some way of thanking him for his efforts?"

"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "you're the mistress of the household. If you don't concern yourself about it, who else is going to do so?"

Wu Yüeh-niang thereupon sent orders to the kitchen to prepare a table of wine, delicacies, and savories, and at noon she invited Ch'en Ching-chi to come in and share a meal with them.

Ch'en Ching-chi dropped his work, told Pen the Fourth to take over, and went straight into the rear compound. When he had finished bowing and paying his respects to Yüeh-niang, he sat down to one side. Hsiao-yü provided him with tea and, after he had done drinking it, brought in a table for him and served up a selection of vegetable dishes and hors d'oeuvres.

"Son-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you've been working hard every day supervising the construction in the garden. I've wanted to invite you in for a visit, but haven't had the opportunity. Today your father-in-law is not at home and I'm not otherwise engaged, so I've prepared a cup of watery wine as a means of expressing our appreciation for your labors."

"Your son is much indebted to both of you for your kindness," said Ching-chi. "What labors have I performed that you should put yourself to so much trouble?"

Yüeh-niang offered him a drink and Ching-chi sat down again to one side. Before long, the full complement of delicacies arrived, and Yüeh-niang kept him company for a while as he drank.

"Go and invite our daughter to join us," she said to Hsiao-yü.

"Mistress Ch'en is busy right now," said Hsiao-yü. "She'll be here in a minute."

Before long, they heard the sound of dominoes²³ being played in the inner room.

"Who is it playing dominoes?" Ching-chi asked.

"Your wife is playing dominoes with my maidservant, Yü-hsiao," replied Yüeh-niang.

"You can see she has no sense of propriety," said Ching-chi. "When you call for her, she doesn't come, but stays in the room and goes on with her game."

Sometime later, Hsi-men Ta-chieh lifted aside the portiere and came into the parlor, where she sat down across from her husband to have a drink with him.

"Is our son-in-law any good at dominoes?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"He knows something of the rudiments," said Mistress Ch'en.

At that time, Wu Yüeh-niang thought of Ch'en Ching-chi only as a worthy son-in-law and did not realize that, in fact, he was a young scamp. When it came to poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies; backgammon and elephant chess; or the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, there was:

Nothing he had not mastered,

Little he did not know.

There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:

Artful and accomplished from his youth,
Romantic and dashing as can be;
He loves to wear duck green, spend
newly minted silver,
Or take a hand at backgammon
or elephant chess.

Master of the *p'i-p'a*, pipes, and woodwinds;
Adept at fowling, horse racing, and kick-ball;
There is only one chink in his armor:
When he sees a pretty face he's a goner.

"Since your husband knows his dominoes," said Yüeh-niang, "why don't we all go inside and play a few hands together?"

"You and my wife play, Mother," said Ching-chi. "Your son really oughtn't to presume."

"It's all in the family, Son-in-law," said Yüeh-niang. "What is there to worry about?"

So saying, she led the way into the inner room. There they found Meng Yü-lou sitting on the bed, over which a madder-red strip of felt had been placed, playing with the dominoes.

On seeing Ch'en Ching-chi come in, she got up to go, but Yüeh-niang said, "It's only our son-in-law, not an outsider. Just give him a bow in greeting."

Then, turning to Ch'en Ching-chi, she said, "This is your Third Lady."

Ching-chi promptly made her a bow and Yü-lou returned his salute.

Thereupon Yü-lou, Mistress Ch'en, and Yüeh-niang played a threesome together, while Ching-chi kibitzed on the sidelines. After they had played for a while, Mistress Ch'en lost and stepped down, allowing Ching-chi to take her place.

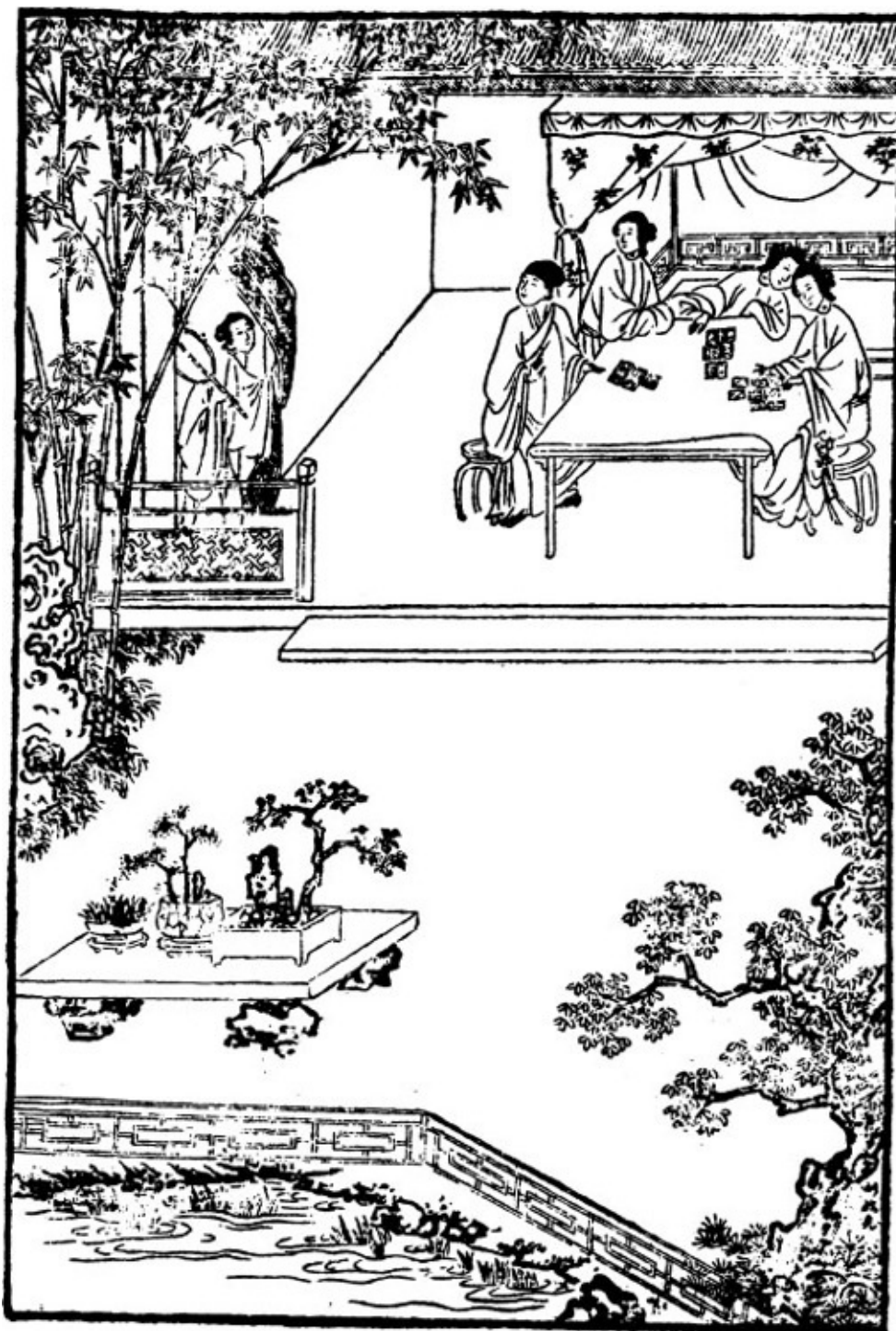
When play was resumed, Meng Yü-lou melded a double six, a one-six, and a double one to produce the combination known as "Heaven and Earth Separated."²⁴ Ch'en Ching-chi added a five-six and another double six to Yü-lou's double six to produce the combination known as "One Spot Short."²⁵ Wu Yüeh-niang put down a pair of double fours and a double three, attempting to make the combination known as "Eight that Don't Add Up,"²⁶ but could not play her double three on the double one.

Trying first this and then that, she was unable to combine her dominoes with those on the board in order to make a scoring combination.

Just at that moment, P'an Chin-lien lifted aside the portiere and walked in. She was wearing a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree into which she had inserted a fresh cactus flower.

Looking as captivating as ever, she laughed, saying, "I was wondering who it could be in here, and it turns out to be Master Ch'en."

When Ch'en Ching-chi swiveled his neck to see who had come in, she burst upon his sight to such effect that:



On Seeing P'an Chin-lien Ch'en Ching-chi Loses His Wits

His heart quivered, his eyes wavered, but
His soul had already escaped.

Truly:

Five hundred years ago these lovers were
fated to meet this day;
Thirty years of bliss may be the result of
just such an encounter.²⁷

"This is your Fifth Lady," said Yüeh-niang. "Just give her a bow in greeting, Son-in-law."

Ching-chi promptly stepped forward to make her a deep bow, and Chin-lien returned his salute.

"Take a look at this, Sister Five," said Yüeh-niang. "The young fledgeling has got the old corbie beat."

Chin-lien stepped closer, leaning against the bedrail with one hand and flirting a white gauze circular fan with the other, as she advised Yüeh-niang, saying, "That's not the best way to play your dominoes, Elder Sister. If you put the double three over there instead, you'll have the combination "Heaven All Different,"²⁸ which will beat Master Ch'en and Sister Three."

Just as the group of them were in the midst of enjoying their domino game, who should come in, carrying his master's felt bag, but Tai-an, who said, "Father's come home."

Yüeh-niang hurriedly told Hsiao-yü to escort Master Ch'en out by the postern gate.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had dismounted and come inside he went first to the front part of the compound to take a look at the construction work and then slipped into P'an Chin-lien's quarters.

Chin-lien made haste to receive him and helped him off with his outdoor things, saying, "You're home early from your farewell party today."

"Battalion Commander Ho Chin of the Provincial Surveillance Commission has just been promoted to the post of commander of Hsin-p'ing Stockade," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All his acquaintances from the entire guard battalion went out to the suburbs to see him off. Since he sent me an invitation, I could hardly decline to show up."

"You could use something to drink," said Chin-lien. "I'll tell the maidservant to bring you some wine."

Before long, a table was prepared for a drinking party and appropriate dishes were set before them. As they were drinking, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought up the fact that the ridgepole of the summerhouse in the garden would be put in place within a few days. A lot of friends and relatives would be invited, who would bring boxes of candied fruit, wine, and congratulatory red banners to commemorate the occasion; and they would have to hire caterers to supply a feast for their entertainment.

When they had talked for a while, it began to grow late. Ch'un-mei took a lamp and returned to her room, leaving the two of them to go to bed by themselves.

Because he had gotten up early to go to the farewell party, Hsi-men Ch'ing was tired. After only a few cups of wine he became drunk. No sooner did his head hit the pillow than he was:

Snoring thunderously;

Stertorously unwakable.

The weather was that of the third decade of the seventh month, so the nights were still rather hot. Under the circumstances, how could P'an Chin-lien be expected to get to sleep?

Suddenly, she became aware of the thunderous drone of mosquitoes inside the green gauze netting. Standing up, stark naked, she took a lighted candle in her hand and searched the interior of the net for mosquitoes, burning them one at a time as she found them.

Looking down, she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, lying faceup on the pillow, fast asleep. She shook him but could not wake him up. The organ that lay between his loins was constricted by a clasp so that:

It was tumid and long.²⁹

Before she knew it, her:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Putting down the candlestick, she began to manipulate his organ with her slender fingers. After she had toyed with it for a while, she squatted down and began to suck it, moving it first this way and then that.

Hsi-men Ch'ing woke up and cursed at her, "You crazy little whore! Your daddy's asleep and you still want to plague him to death."

So saying, he got up and sat on the pillow, telling her to stay where she was and suck away. Meanwhile, he:

Bent his head to observe the action,³⁰

In order to augment his pleasure.³¹

Truly:

No wonder the beauty has become

so extremely libidinous;

Late at night she practices in secret

on the purple phoenix flute.

There is a lyric composed of double meanings on the subject of the mosquito that testifies to this:

To the tune "Treading the Grass"

I love its diminutive body,
And its attenuated waist.

With its throbbing sussuration
it's forever buzzing about.
At dusk, when people forget to close
their red doors,
It surreptitiously sneaks inside
the gauze netting.

Gently nuzzling the fragrant flesh,
Casually enamored of the jade body,

Whatever its mouth touches
it stains with rouge.
In one's ears it produces
a constant hubbub;
Late at night, refusing
to let one sleep.

The woman continued to toy with him for about the time it would take to eat a meal when Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly had an idea. He summoned Ch'un-mei to decant some wine and stand beside the bed with flagon in hand. Then he moved the candle onto the backboard of the bed and ordered the woman to turn around and get down on all fours in front of him. Inserting his organ into hers in order to:

Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains,³²
he told her to move back and forth as she liked while he proceeded to drink and enjoy himself from his superior vantage point.

"You insinuating ruffian!" the woman cursed at him. "Since when did you come up with this brand new way of doing things? How weird can you get? With the maidservant looking on to boot! What do you think you're up to?"

"I've told you before," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your sister P'ing-erh and I often used to do it like this. We'd get her maidservant, Ying-ch'un, to hold the flagon and pour the wine for us. It's amusing to do it this way."

"I'd only be wasting my breath on you!" said the woman. "My sister P'ing-erh! Sister my prick! What are you dragging that whore into it for? As far as I'm concerned:

Even the best intentions go quite unrequited.³³
That whore had such hot pants she couldn't wait for you, but went off and married somebody else, didn't she?

"The other day, when you came home after you'd been drinking and found the three of us skipping rope in the courtyard together, you singled me out to vent your spleen on. I was the only one you chose to kick; and for that I was even given a hard time in certain quarters. It would seem that I'm the only one fit to be taken advantage of around here."

"Who gave you a hard time?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"After you came in the other day," the woman said, "the lady in the master suite got into quite an altercation with me. She accused me of talking back to her and called me a baggage who didn't know my place. The more I think about it, the more it seems that:

All you get for raising toads is dropsy.³⁴
So now everyone's down on me."

"That's not it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm not down on you. What happened the other day was that brother Ying the Second and that bunch dragged me off to Wu Yin-erh's place for a drink. On my way home I ran into Old Mother Feng in the street and she told me, thus and so, all about it. I was so angry I was stupefied. If she'd married anyone else, I could have taken it; but Dr. Chiang Chu-shan, that lousy stunted little cuckold! It's a wonder Hua the Elder hasn't bitten his balls off! What can he do for her that she should take him into her household and set him up with the capital to open a rival store and start doing business, as cool as you please, right under my nose?"

"It's a wonder you have the face to mention it," the woman said. "Didn't I tell you at the time that:

The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat?³⁵
But you didn't pay any attention to me and insisted on getting Elder Sister's permission. As the saying goes:
To defer when you differ,
Is to give up the dipper.³⁶

It was your mistake. You've got no one to blame but yourself."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so exasperated by these few words of the woman that:

The fire that ignited in the core of his crater,
Turned half the cloud-capped volcano into magma.

"Let her do as she likes," he said. "If that undutiful whore says another word about it, she'll find out soon enough how much attention she can expect to get from me."

Gentle reader take note: It has always been true that malicious words and deceitful conduct are not unknown even between rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and elder and younger brothers; to say nothing of friends. If even so worthy and chaste a wife as Wu Yüeh-niang, who enjoyed the status of principal consort, could become abruptly alienated from her husband merely because Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to listen to the mischievous pillow talk of P'an Chin-lien, how much the more should one be on one's guard in matters of more moment.

From this time on, relations between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang were so embittered that they refused to speak to each other when they met. Yüeh-niang let him spend the night with whomever he liked and made no attempt to interfere. No matter whether he arrived late or departed early, she paid no attention. Even when he came into their rooms to get something she would tell the maidservant to deal with it and pay him no heed. Thus the two of them let their feelings for each other grow cold. Truly:

Though the preceding carriages have overturned
by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.

To resume our story, from the time that relations between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang became embittered,

P'an Chin-lien saw that her husband had succumbed to her wiles and believed that she had gained her objective. Every day she plucked up her spirits and:

Tricked herself out conspicuously,
To curry favor and court affection.

As a result of her meeting with Ch'en Ching-chi in the rear compound that day, she had noticed that the young scamp was:

Artful and accomplished,
and got it into her head to see if she could seduce him; but she was too afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing to dare try anything. Whenever her husband was out of the house, however, she would send her maidservant to invite him into her room for a cup of tea, and they often spent their time playing board games together.

One day, the ridgepole of Hsi-men Ch'ing's newly constructed summerhouse was ready to be put in place, and relatives and friends came to commemorate the occasion by hanging up congratulatory red banners. Many of them also brought boxes of candied fruit. The artisans of the various trades were all presented with gifts in reward for their services. The male guests were entertained in the main reception room, and it was sometime in the afternoon before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing waited to see that everything was properly put away and then went back to the rear compound to get some sleep.

Ch'en Ching-chi came into Chin-lien's room and asked for some tea.

Chin-lien, who was sitting on the bed fiddling with her *p'i-p'a*, said, "You mean to tell me they've been celebrating up front for half the day, ever since the ridgepole was put in place, and you haven't had anything to drink, but have to come into my room looking for tea?"

"Your son would not deceive you, ma'am," said Ching-chi, "but since I got up in the middle of the night I've been busy these ten hours or more and haven't had anything to eat or drink."

"Where's your father-in-law?" the woman asked.

"He's gone to the rear compound to get some sleep," Ching-chi replied.

"Well, if you really haven't had anything," the woman said, turning to Ch'un-mei, "Get some of those stuffed steamed-shortcake pastries out of my cabinet and give them to Master Ch'en to eat."

Thereupon, four saucers of savory appetizers were dished up on Chin-lien's bed table for the delectation of the young scamp.

As he ate, he noticed that the woman was strumming her *p'i-p'a* and asked her, playfully, "Fifth Lady, what tune is that you're playing? Why don't you sing me a song?"

"My good Master Ch'en," the woman laughed, "I'm not the one you're after. Why should I sing you a song? Just wait till your father-in-law gets up and see if I don't tell him what you've been doing."

Ching-chi promptly fell to his knees with an ingratiating giggle and pled with her, "I beseech you, Fifth Lady, take pity on me. Your son will not dare do it again."

At this, the woman couldn't help laughing.

From that time on, the young scamp and the woman:

Became more intimate by the day.³⁷
Drinking tea and eating meals;
Traversing rooms and entering chambers;³⁸
Engaging in badinage and repartee;
Rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows;³⁹
They carried on without restraint.

Wu Yüeh-niang, taking him to be no more than a boy, allowed her disingenuous son-in-law the run of the house. By so doing she showed herself to be blind to her own shortcomings. Truly:

Knowing only how to rifle flowers
in order to elaborate honey;
The bee knows not for whom it labors
to provide something sweet.⁴⁰

It is deplorable, but Hsi-men Ch'ing's vigilance
leaves much to be desired;
This fact encourages his peach and plum blossoms
to smile in the spring breeze.
Under his layers of embroidered quilts
there sleeps a rogue;
With three meals of delicacies a day
he nurtures a tiger.
Enamored of her person, his son-in-law
covets his concubine;
Attracted by his wealth, he is prepared
to do his father-in-law in.
And there is yet another privilege
of which he can boast;

Traversing rooms and entering chambers
he can dally as he likes.⁴¹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 19

SNAKE-IN-THE-GRASS SHAKES DOWN CHIANG CHU-SHAN; LI P'ING-ERH'S FEELINGS TOUCH HSI-MEN CH'ING

When flowers bloom they do not disdain
the plots of the poor;
The moon shines on mountains and rivers
so that all are bright.
In this world the heart of man alone
remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven
show him favor.
The foolish, the deaf, and the dumb
everywhere prosper;
While the clever and the intelligent
suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth
determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled
by fate rather than man.¹

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing had been constructing a formal garden and summerhouse in his residential compound for nearly half a year before the final decorating, painting, and varnishing were completed. From front to back: Everything was put on an entirely new footing.

The housewarming celebrations lasted for several days. But no more of this.

One day, during the first decade of the eighth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to help celebrate the birthday of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling at his newly purchased country estate. He had engaged the services of four singing girls, a band of musicians, and a troupe of tumblers and acrobats to entertain his guests. At ten o'clock in the morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having dressed himself to befit the occasion, set off on horseback, accompanied by four page boys.

Wu Yüeh-niang, during her husband's absence, prepared a feast of wine and delicacies and invited Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, Mistress Ch'en, and P'an Chin-lien to join her. They opened the gate of the new garden and proceeded to enjoy it at their leisure. When they surveyed the scene within: Flowers and trees, pavilions and terraces,

Stretched before them as far as the eye could see.²

Truly, it was a fine garden. Behold:

At the main entrance, fifteen feet high,
There stands a red-lacquered memorial arch;
All the way round, in twenty segments,
There stretches a crenellated wall of crushed limestone.
At the portal there is a gate tower;
Terraces and kiosks spread in all directions.
There are artificial hills and genuine waters;³
Blue-green bamboos and glaucous pine trees.
The structures that are high but not pointed
are called terraces;
Whereas those that are lofty but not forbidding
are called kiosks.

If one wishes to enjoy the four seasons, there are places for each of them:

In spring there is Swallow-flight Hall,
Where cypress and cedar vie in verdancy.
In summer there is Brookside Lodge,
Where lotus and water lily display their colors.
In autumn there is Halcyon House,
Where the golden chrysanthemum braves the frost.
In winter there is Hidden Spring Grotto,
Where the white plum blossom gathers snow.

Just see how:

Capricious blossoms immure the narrow paths;
Lissome willows brush the carved balustrades.
Tossed in the breeze, willow fronds
raise their mothlike eyebrows;
Laden with raindrops, flowering crab apples
display their delicate features.
Before Swallow-flight Hall,

The daffodils seem about to open but haven't opened;
Behind Hidden Spring Grotto,
The holly is in half bloom but not yet full bloom.
The pale plum blossoms east of the Lowland Bridge
bloom and fade;
The redbuds above the Cloud Repose Pavilion
are not yet in flower.
By the ornamental rocks,
The elecampane has just blossomed;
Beside the painted railings,
The dianthus has just appeared.
With a flutter of wings the purple swallows
penetrate the curtains;
In a burst of song the yellow orioles
traverse the shadows.

And there are also:

Moon windows and snowy grottoes;

Not to mention:

Waterside retreats and breezy pavilions.
The banksia rose arbor,
Runs into the rose-leaved raspberry trellis;
The peach tree with its thousand leaves,
Confronts the willow of the three springs.

And there are also:

Lilacs,
Mimosa,
Caragana,
Yellow roses,
Jasmine,
And narcissus.

In front and behind the summerhouse there are:

Juniper hedges and bamboo-lined walks,
Serpentine streams and square pools.
Plantains and palm trees shade the steps;
Helianthus and pomegranate catch the sun.

Amid the waterweeds frolicking fish
startle the beholder;

Among the flowers powdered butterflies
dance in pairs.

Truly:

The peonies have hardly begun to reveal
their bodhisattvas' faces;
Before the litchis are ready to put forth
their mārārājas' heads.⁴

Thereupon, Wu Yüeh-niang led the other womenfolk into the garden.

Some hold hands as they wander
along the flowery paths;

Others, seated on the fragrant grass,
compare botanical specimens.

One, approaching the balustrade to survey the scene,
Playfully picks red lovers' beans
to toss at the goldfish;

Another, leaning on the railing to enjoy the flowers,

Gigglingly flirts her silken fan
to startle the butterflies.

Wu Yüeh-niang made her way to the highest point in the garden, the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where she proceeded to play a board game with Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh. P'an Chin-lien, along with Mistress Ch'en, and Sun Hsüeh-o, ascended the Flower-viewing Tower, from which they could see extending before them: The tree peony grove,

The garden peony bed,
The crab apple bower,
The seven sisters trellis,
And the banksia rose arbor;

Not to mention:

That "cold-enduring gentleman," the bamboo,⁵
And that "snow-despising grandee," the pine.⁶

Truly:

All four seasons produce their
never-fading flowers;

All eight festivals appear one
everlasting spring.⁷

Such a vision is not exhaustible;
Such a view exceeds comprehension.⁸

Before long, the wine was served. Wu Yüeh-niang took the seat of honor, with Li Chiao-erh sitting across from her. To either side of them, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, P'an Chin-lien, and Mistress Ch'en sat down in order of precedence.

"I forgot to invite Master Ch'en," said Yüeh-niang. Turning to Hsiao-yü, she said, "Quickly! Run up front and ask our son-in-law to join us."

It was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi presented himself:

His head adorned with an ultramarine silk cap,
His body clad in an informal gown of purple satin,
His feet shod in white-soled black boots.

After making his bow of greeting, he sat down next to his wife, Mistress Ch'en.

After they had been drinking for a while:

With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,

Wu Yüeh-niang went back to playing board games with Li Chiao-erh and Mistress Ch'en, while Sun Hsüeh-o and Meng Yü-lou climbed the Flower-viewing Tower to enjoy the view.

Chin-lien wandered off by herself, beside the flower beds in front of the artificial hill, where she amused herself by batting at the butterflies⁹ with her round white-silk fan. Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had crept up behind her to see what she was up to, addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, you don't know how to go about batting a butterfly. Let me show you how it's done. These butterflies dart up one second and down the next, as if they can't make up their minds. They certainly are elusive creatures."

Chin-lien swiveled her powdered neck and gave him a sidelong glance. "You lousy short-life!" she berated him. "If anyone should overhear you, you'd be done for; though I suppose you're too far gone to care."

With a giggle, Ch'en Ching-chi pounced up to her, embraced her, and gave her a kiss. The woman responded by giving him a shove with her free hand that knocked the young scamp head over heels.

Though neither of them realized it, this scene had been observed from a distance by Meng Yü-lou, atop the Flower-viewing Tower, who now called out, "Sister Five, come over here. I've got something to tell you." Only then did Chin-lien abandon Ching-chi and go off to climb the tower.

Thus it happened that neither of the two butterflies were caught that day.

Though they may have made a swallows' tryst
or orioles' assignation,¹⁰

The bee's antennae had no more than grazed
the corolla of the flower.¹¹

Truly:

Though distracted bees and wanton butterflies¹²
are sometimes to be seen;

Once they fly into the pear blossoms
they disappear from view.¹³

On seeing that the woman was gone, Ch'en Ching-chi returned to his room without a word. Finding himself beset by melancholy, he improvised a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" in order to dispel his depression.

I saw her rakishly sporting a spray of blossoms;
Smiling as she toyed with her spray of blossoms.
On her ruby lips she wore no rouge;
But looked as though she did wear rouge.
When we met the other day,
And then met again today;
She seemed to have feelings for me,
But displayed no feelings for me.
Though she wished to consent;
She never gave her consent.
It looked as though she refused me;
But she really never did refuse me.
When can we make another assignation;
When will we ever see each other again?
If we don't meet,
She may long for me;
When we do meet,
I still long for her.¹⁴

We will say no more, for the moment, about Wu Yüeh-niang and the others as they feasted in the garden, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing's visit to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling's country estate outside the South Gate.

On his way home, after the party was over, he happened to pass through the Southern Entertainment Quarter.¹⁵

Now in days gone by, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been a habitu  of the:

Three quarters and two alleys,

of the pleasure precincts, so all the "knockabouts" there were known to him. The people called "knockabouts" at that time, during the Sung dynasty, corresponded to what are vulgarly referred to today as "bare sticks." Among these were two men, named Snake-in-the-grass, Lu Hua, and Street-skulking Rat, Chang Sheng, who had often been patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, and belonged to the: Chicken-pinching and dognapping ilk.

Hsi-men Ch'ing caught sight of the two of them that day as they were engaged in a gambling game and pulled up his horse in order to have a word with them. The two men immediately came up and greeted him by falling to one knee, asking, "Sir, where are you headed at such an hour?"

"Today is the birthday of His Honor, Hsia Yen-ling, of the Judicial Commissioner's Office," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He invited some of us to his country estate outside the South Gate to help celebrate the occasion. There is a favor I'd like to ask of you. Will you agree to do it or not?"

"Needless to say, sir," the two replied, "we are mindful of everything you've done for us in the past. If you now have a task for us to perform: Though we should have to go through fire and water,

We would not decline to suffer ten thousand deaths."¹⁶

"If that's the way you feel about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come to my house tomorrow and I'll give you your instructions."

"Why wait till tomorrow?" the two demanded. "Tell us about it now. Really, what's up?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then:

Whispered into their ears in a low voice,
and related the whole story of how Chiang Chu-shan had deprived him of Li P'ing-erh. "All I want you two fellows to do is to help me vent my spleen," he concluded.

Still on horseback, Hsi-men Ch'ing hitched up his clothes and groped for his wallet, which turned out to contain four or five taels worth of loose silver. Pouring it all out and handing it to the two men, he said, "Take this and buy yourselves some wine to drink. If you manage to pull this affair off successfully for me, I'll reward the two of you further."

Lu Hua refused to accept the money, saying, "It's not as though you haven't already done us any favors in the past, sir. I thought you might want to send us: Down to the floor of that great sea, the Eastern Ocean,

To wrest the horn from the Green Dragon's head;

Or up to the very summit of Mount Hua, the Western Peak,

To wrench the tusk from the White Tiger's jaws;

in which case, we might not be able to comply. But if it's only such a piddling task as this, where's the difficulty? This silver I absolutely refuse to accept."

"If you won't take it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't trouble you any further." Whereupon, he told Tai-an to repossess the silver, whipped up his horse, and started on his way.

Chang Sheng, however, stopped him, saying, "Lu Hua, you don't understand His Honor's disposition. If you don't take what you're offered, it will seem as though we're trying to get out of it."

Lu Hua then accepted the silver and kowtowed on his hands and knees, saying, "Just go home and relax, sir. In two days or less, you can absolutely rely on us to give you something to laugh about."

"As for me," said Chang Sheng, "if you could only manage, in the future, to wangle some sort of position for me with His Honor Hsia on the staff of the Judicial Commissioner's Office, that would be quite sufficient."

"Is that all?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That goes without saying."

Gentle reader take note: Afterward, Hsi-men Ch'ing did recommend Chang Sheng to Hsia Yen-ling, who got him a job on the domestic staff of Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command. But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.

These two "knockabouts" took their newly acquired silver and went back to gambling as before. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing had ridden into the city through the South Gate and arrived home, the sun was already setting in the west.

When Wu Yüeh-niang and the others heard that he had come home they all went back to the rear compound. Only P'an Chin-lien remained in the summerhouse to see that everything was properly put away. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go back to the rear compound but came straight into the garden. When he saw the woman supervising the clearing up in the pavilion, he asked, "What have you all been up to here during my absence?"

"Today," Chin-lien said with a smile, "Elder Sister and the rest of us decided to open up the gate and have a look at the garden for ourselves. How could we have known you would get home so early?"

"Hsia Yen-ling really put himself out today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was at his country estate. He had engaged four singing girls and four acrobats to entertain us, and there were only five guests there. Because I was worried about the distance, I left early."

The woman helped him off with his outdoor things and then said, "You could use something to drink. I'll tell the maidservant to bring you some wine."

"You can take the rest of the dishes away," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Ch'un-mei. "Just leave a few saucers of delicacies and decant a flagon of grape wine for me."

Sitting down in the place of honor, he noticed that the woman was wearing a blouse of aloeswood-colored moiré with variegated crepe edging, which opened down the middle, over a drawnwork skirt of white glazed damask. Shoes of scarlet iridescent silk, with white soles, satin high heels, and gold-spangled toes were visible beneath her skirt. On her head she wore a chignon, enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, in front of which there was a tiara of jade, encased with gold, representing the scene "plucking the cassia in the moon palace." Her hair was further adorned with plum-blossom shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and a host of trinkets were stuck about the temples, which had the effect of further enhancing: The fragrant redness of her ruby lips, and

The glossy whiteness of her powdered face.

Before he knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Taking her two hands in his, he embraced her and gave her a kiss. Shortly thereafter, Ch'un-mei brought in the wine and the two of them passed the same cup back and forth between them. As they drank they sucked each other's tongues so assiduously that the sound of the sucking was quite audible. The woman then hitched up her skirt and sat in his lap. Once there, she took a sip of wine and then proceeded to transfer it into the mouth of her companion like a bird feeding its young, after which she picked up a fresh lotus pod from the table with her slender fingers and fed it to him.

"That's not very appetizing," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why feed me that?"

"My son," the woman said, "don't push your luck. You'd do better not to refuse anything from your mother's hand."

Thereupon, she put a fresh walnut kernel in her mouth and passed it to him before desisting.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to play with the woman's breasts, so she unfastened the gold chatelaine with its three pendant charms that she wore at her collar and held it between her teeth while she pulled open her silk blouse, revealing: The beautiful unblemished jade, of

Her fragrant and creamy bosom;

Her tight and squeezable breasts.

Hsi-men Ch'ing fondled and caressed them for some time, sucking at the teats like a young calf. The two of them laughed and joked together as they: Enjoyed to the full the pleasures of connubial bliss.

In the midst of his euphoria, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the woman, "I've got something to tell you that will give you something to laugh about in a day or two. You may have heard that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan has opened a pharmaceutical shop right under my nose. Well, one of these days, you can rely upon it, he's going to look as though he's opened a fruiterer's shop on his own face."

"Why's that?" the woman asked.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her the whole story of how he had run into Lu Hua and Chang Sheng outside the South Gate that day.

"What a depraved creature you are," the woman laughed. "There's no telling how much evil karma you will have accumulated before you're through."

She then went on to ask, "Isn't that Dr. Chiang the same Dr. Chiang whom we often call in to perform medical services here? He always looks circumspect and polite enough to me. He lowers his gaze whenever he sees anyone. The poor fellow! You really oughtn't to give him such a hard time."

"He's got you fooled," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You say he lowers his gaze when he sees you. That's only the better to ogle your feet."

"You delirious oily mouth!" the woman exclaimed. "He actually ogles the feet of other people's wives!"

"You don't know the half of it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Someone nearby called on him once while he was on his way home carrying a fish from the market. When he was intercepted, he said, 'Let me take the fish home first, and come after that.' His interlocutor said, 'I've got someone seriously ill at home. Please, doctor! Come right away.' This Chiang Chu-shan then followed him home. The sick person was on the second floor so he was invited upstairs. It turned out to be a woman who was ill, and a good-looking one at that. When he came into the room, she stuck her hand out so he could palpate her pulse. The rascal had her wrist in his hand when he suddenly thought of his fish, which had been left hanging on a curtain hook downstairs, and forgot himself, asking, 'You don't have a pussy down there do you?' When her husband, who was standing there in the same room, heard this, he strode over, grabbed him by the hair, and beat him to a stinking pulp. He not only lost his fee, but had his clothes torn to tatters by the time he made his escape."

"A likely story!" the woman said. "I don't believe a cultivated man like that would do any such thing."

"If you go by appearances," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you'll miss the boat. As far as he's concerned:

Outside he may be the picture of propriety;

But inside he harbors cunning and villainy."

When the two of them had talked and laughed with each other for a while, they stopped drinking wine, finished putting the things away, and went back to Chin-lien's room to spend the night. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.

To resume our story, two months or so had now passed since Li P'ing-erh brought Chiang Chu-shan across her threshold in wedlock. Initially, out of his desire to please her, Chiang Chu-shan had concocted various aphrodisiacs. He had even bought some "Yunnanese ticklers,"¹⁷ "ladies' delights,"¹⁸ and the like in front of the city gate, in the hope of arousing her passion. What he failed to realize, however, was that the woman had already experienced every kind of: Violent storm and sudden downpour,¹⁹

at the hands of Hsi-men Ch'ing, so that his inexperienced efforts often left her unsatisfied. Little by little she began to despise him, until the day finally came when she smashed the sexual implements to smithereens with a stone and threw them all away.

"You're just like a shrimp or an eel," she railed at him, "with no real strength in your loins. What's the point of your buying all this junk to titillate your old lady with? I thought I was getting a real hunk of meat, but it turns out you're: Good enough to look at, but not fit to eat."²⁰

You're about as much use as a 'pewter spearhead'²¹ or a 'dead turtle'!"

Li P'ing-erh cursed her husband till he looked as though:

His head had been sprayed with dog's blood,

and drove him out to sleep in the shop up front, though it was the third watch in the middle of the night.

From then on, she could think of no one but Hsi-men Ch'ing, and she refused to let her husband into her bedroom. Every day she nagged him about the accounts and tried to monitor the expenditure of her capital.

One day, feeling that he had had a bellyful, Chiang Chu-shan had gone into the shop and was sitting there behind the narrow counter when who should appear but two men, staggering and stupefied with drink, who made their way in and sat down on a bench.

"Have you got any 'dog-yellow' in this shop of yours?" one of them demanded.

"You're pulling my leg," laughed Chiang Chu-shan. "I've only got 'ox-yellow.'²² Who ever heard of 'dog-yellow'?"

"Well, if you haven't any 'dog-yellow,' " his interlocutor continued, "I suppose 'ice-ashes' will do. Let me see some. I'll buy a few ounces from you."

"Pharmaceutical houses only carry 'ice-crystals,' "²³ said Chiang Chu-shan, "the best quality of which comes from Borneo in the South Seas. Who ever heard of 'ice-ashes'?"

"It's no use asking him," the other one said. "He's only been open a few days and could hardly be expected to carry pharmaceuticals like these. We'd do better to go to the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing's shop."

"Come over here," the first one said. "We'd better get down to serious business. Brother Chiang, there's no use pretending you're: Still asleep in dreamland.

The principal and interest on those thirty taels of silver you borrowed from Brother Lu here three years ago when your wife died are mounting up. We've come to collect from you today. If we'd simply demanded payment as soon as we entered the door, seeing as how you've managed to marry money and open a brand new shop, we were afraid it might reflect on your reputation.²⁴ So we thought we'd do you a good deed by starting out with a few words of nonsense, so you could see the need to take your medicine. If you refuse to take your medicine, you'll have to repay him the silver just the same."

When Chiang Chu-shan heard these words he was stupefied with amazement. "But I never borrowed any silver from him," he stated.

"If you didn't borrow the money," said his interlocutor, "why should we be dunning you for it? It has always been true that: Flies don't cluster on eggs

unless they're cracked.²⁵

You'd better not stick to that line."

"I don't even have the honor to know the names of you gentlemen," said Chiang Chu-shan.

"I've never met you before."²⁶

On what grounds can you simply appear and demand money of me?"

"Brother Chiang," his interlocutor stated, "you are mistaken. It has always been true that:

Those who achieve office are seldom poor, and

Those who repudiate debts are seldom rich.

Remember those days before you made a place for yourself when you had to peddle your nostrums with bell in hand like any mountebank. It was Brother Lu here who came to your aid then and made it possible for you to arrive at your present state."

"My surname is Lu and my given name is Hua," the other one asserted. "In such and such a year you borrowed thirty taels of silver from me to pay for your wife's funeral expenses. Including principal and interest, you owe me forty-eight taels by now. You'll have to repay me whether you like it or not."

"Since when did I ever borrow any money from you?" Chiang Chu-shan demanded in consternation. "And even if I did, there would have been a contract and a guarantor."

"I was the guarantor," stated Chang Sheng. Whereupon, reaching into his sleeve, he pulled out a contract and waved it in his face.

Chiang Chu-shan was so angry his face had turned as sallow as wax. "You gallows bird!" he cursed. "You servile cur! You think you can play the 'knockabout,' coming in here from out of nowhere and intimidating me, do you?"

When Lu Hua heard these words he reacted with outrage. From the other side of the narrow counter he sent a clenched fist whistling across that flew right into Chiang Chu-shan's face, knocking his nose to one side. At the same time he started pulling the pharmaceuticals off the shelves and hurling them into the street.

"You lousy 'knockabout!'" cursed Chiang Chu-shan. "How dare you despoil my merchandise?"

All he could do was call for T'ien-fu to come to his aid, but Lu Hua kicked him into a corner with one swing of his foot and he was too frightened to make a further move.

Chang Sheng pulled Chiang Chu-shan out from behind the narrow counter and made a show of staying Lu Hua's hand, saying, "Brother Lu, you've already waited long enough as it is. Give him another couple of days to come up with the cash, and make an end of it. What do you say, Brother Chiang?"

"I never borrowed his money in the first place," said Chiang Chu-shan. "But even if I had, you could have raised the issue more politely. What's the idea of all this rough stuff?"

"Brother Chiang," said Chang Sheng, I can see that:

You've swallowed the flesh of a bitter olive,

but the pleasing aftertaste is coming out;²⁷

You've only endured a slap with a flour sack,

but you've done a complete about-face.²⁸

If you had only changed your tune a little earlier, I might have asked Brother Lu to forgive you some of the interest. As it is, even if you have to do it in two or three installments, the only thing to do is pay it off. It won't get you anywhere to talk tough and refuse to acknowledge it. After all, you can hardly expect him to simply forget it."

When Chiang Chu-shan heard these words, he said, "I can't take any more of this! I'll go to court with him. Who ever

saw the color of his money?"

"Have you been hitting the bottle again this morning?" Chang Sheng responded.

Without any warning, Lu Hua struck Chiang Chu-shan another blow with his fist, knocking him flat on his back and nearly precipitating him headfirst into an open drain. His hairdo came undone, and his cap and headband were covered with filth.

"In broad daylight too!"²⁹ Chiang Chu-shan started screaming at the top of his voice. This attracted the attention of the head of the local mutual security unit, who proceeded, without more ado, to truss him up with a length of rope.

When Li P'ing-erh, inside the house, heard the sound of this altercation and came to peek out through the front door blind, she was just in time to see the local constable leading her husband away in bonds and was so angry she was stupefied. She sent Old Mother Feng out to take down the plaque over the door and the shop sign. The better part of the pharmaceuticals that had been thrown into the street had been appropriated by passersby. There was nothing to do but close up shop and return inside to sit it out.

It was not long before someone reported these events to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who immediately dispatched a message to the local constable telling him to hale the suspect before the Judicial Commissioner's Court first thing the following morning. At the same time he sent a personal note about the case to Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling.

Next morning, the prisoner was brought into the courtroom. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia had taken his position on the bench, he read the deposition of the arresting officer and summoned Chiang Chu-shan before him.

"I see that your formal name is Chiang Wen-hui," he said. "Why did you borrow money from Lu Hua and then not only refuse to repay it, but abuse him into the bargain. Such conduct is reprehensible."

"I don't even know this person," said Chiang Chu-shan, "nor have I ever borrowed money from him. I was in the process of trying to reason with him, but he wouldn't pay any attention, and started kicking and beating me. He even despoiled me of my merchandise."

Commissioner Hsia then called Lu Hua before him and asked for his side of the story.

"He originally borrowed the money from me to pay for his wife's funeral expenses," said Lu Hua. "Since then, it's been three years by now that he's postponed paying me back. The other day I heard that he had married into someone's family and had gone into business for himself in a big way. But when I asked him to settle up, he started to hurl every kind of abuse at me, even claiming that I was despoiling his merchandise. I've got the contract for the original loan right here. This Chang Sheng was the guarantor. I hope Your Honor will look into the matter."



Snake-in-the-grass Shakes Down Chiang Chu-shan

As he spoke, Lu Hua reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a contract, which he handed up to the bench. When Commissioner Hsia opened it, he found that it read as follows: The contracting party, Chiang Wen-hui, a physician of this district, finding himself without sufficient funds to defray the funeral expenses of his deceased wife, has arranged, through the good offices of the guarantor, Chang Sheng, to borrow the sum of thirty taels of silver from one Lu Hua at a rate of 3 percent interest, compounded monthly, for his personal use, and undertakes to repay the principal and interest by a year from this date. If he should default, his personal effects to the equivalent value are offered as collateral. Lest questions should arise in the future, this written contract is set down as evidence of the above transaction.³⁰

When Commissioner Hsia finished perusing this document, he struck the table in high dudgeon, saying, "It's outrageous! In the face of the guarantor and the contract, how can he continue to deny his liability? I can see this rascal is given to: Hairsplitting and logic-chopping."³¹ He has the look of a reneger about him." So saying, he called out to his minions, "Take him down and give him a good flogging with the heavy bamboo!"

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, three or four lictors turned Chiang Chu-shan over on the ground and gave him thirty hard strokes with the heavy bamboo. They beat him so severely that: The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and

Fresh blood flowed down his legs.

Two runners were then dispatched to escort Chiang Chu-shan to his place of residence, and a bench warrant was issued authorizing the requisition of thirty taels of silver with which to make restitution to Lu Hua; failing which, the prisoner was to be remanded to the yamen for further detention.

Chiang Chu-shan's legs had been beaten so severely that he was barely able to waddle. When he made his way home, weeping and wailing, and pled with Li P'ing-erh to give him the money to pay off Lu Hua, she spat in his face and cursed him, saying, "You shameless cuckold! Whose money do you think you're giving away? You've got a nerve demanding money of me. If I'd known that: Even if you lost your head, you'd leave

a stump of debts behind,"³²

I'd never have been blind enough to marry you. You turtle! You're:

Good enough to look at, but not fit to eat."

When the two runners and the plaintiffs, who were waiting outside, heard the woman berating her husband, they kept up their unrelenting pressure, calling out, "Chiang Wen-hui, if you can't raise the money, there's no point in delaying any further. Let's go back and report to the yamen."

Chiang Chu-shan had to come out to placate the runners and then go back inside to continue pleading with his wife. Getting down on his knees, so his torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post,³³ and weeping and wailing as he spoke, he said, "Just look upon it as a good deed, like a pilgrimage to: The mountains of the four directions or

the five sacred peaks;³⁴

Almsgiving, or providing vegetarian meals for monks.

If you don't give me these thirty taels of silver, and I have to go back to court, how will my lacerated buttocks ever take another flogging? It will be the death of me, that's all."

The woman had no alternative but to dole out thirty taels of "snowflake" silver to her husband. Chiang Chu-shan, in due course, turned this over to Lu Hua in the presence of the magistrate, who tore up the contract and thus brought the matter to a conclusion.

Lu Hua and Chang Sheng took the thirty taels of silver they had thus obtained and paid a visit to Hsi-men Ch'ing to report on the success of their venture. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them into the summerhouse and entertained them with wine and food while they regaled him with their exploits. He was absolutely delighted and said, "You two have enabled me to vent my spleen, which was all I wanted."

Lu Hua offered to turn over the thirty taels of silver to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he refused to accept it, saying, "You two take it and buy yourselves a jug of wine. You can regard it as an expression of my thanks. I may have further favors to ask of you in the future."

The two of them thanked him again and again as they got up to go and then set off with the silver in hand to resume their gambling. Truly: He was ever prepared to enjoy the pleasure of,

"abusing the innocent and good";

As a makeshift substitute for the delight of,

"addiction to clouds and rain."³⁵

To resume our story, when Chiang Chu-shan went home after handing over the silver in the judicial commissioner's courtroom, his wife refused to let him stay there.

"Just who do you think you are?" she demanded. "You might as well regard the whole episode as a fit of delirium on my part, and those thirty taels of silver as the fee for your treatment. The sooner you move out of here the better. If I let you stay any longer, I'm likely to discover that even the value of this house of mine will not suffice to pay off your debts."

Chiang Chu-shan realized that they had come to a parting of the ways and hobbled off on his painfully wounded legs, weeping and wailing, to look for a place to stay. He had to leave behind all the stock that had been purchased with his wife's money. She pressed him to remove the medical supplies, mortar and pestle, pharmacological sieve, and other impedimenta that he had brought with him, and the two of them severed their relationship forthwith. At their final parting, as he was on his way out the door, the woman even sent Old Mother Feng to dip up a pewter basin full of water and throw it after him, saying: "At last my enemy has been removed from my sight."

From the day that she got rid of Chiang Chu-shan, the woman could think of no one but Hsi-men Ch'ing. She heard, moreover, that the difficulties he had been in had come to nothing, and she much regretted what she had done. Every day found her: Too languid to consume tea or food,

Too lazy to paint her moth eyebrows;

Leaning against one doorjamb after another,

Wearing out her eyes with constant gazing;
longing in vain for someone to come. Truly:

His pillow words remain,
But now his love is dead;
In her room he is not seen,
In silence her soul melts.³⁶

We will say no more for the moment about how Li P'ing-erh longed for Hsi-men Ch'ing, but relate instead how, one day, Tai-an happened to pass by her house on horseback and noticed that the front door was shut tight, the pharmaceutical shop was no longer open for business, and everything looked as quiet as could be. When he arrived home he reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who said, "I imagine the beating he got was more than that stunted little cuckold could take. He's probably confined to his room while he recuperates. It'll be half a month, at best, before he can come out and resume business." He saw no need to take any further action in the matter.

One day, it was Wu Yüeh-niang's birthday, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, and a lot of female guests were being entertained in the main reception hall. Because Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang were no longer on speaking terms, he took himself off to the licensed quarter to pay a visit to Li Kuei-chieh's establishment. Once there, he said to Tai-an, "Take the horse home right away, and come back to fetch me this evening."

Later on, he sent someone to invite Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him for a game of backgammon. Li Kuei-ch'ing was also at home that day, and the two sisters kept their guests company and plied them with wine. After a while, they all went into the courtyard together and amused themselves by playing at "pitch-pot."³⁷

As the sun was setting in the west, Tai-an came back with the horse to fetch his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the toilet at the rear of the establishment, engaged in the act of defecation. When he caught sight of Tai-an, he asked, "Is everything all right at home?"

"Everything's all right at home," replied Tai-an. "The guests in the main reception hall have already left and the things have all been put away. The First Lady has asked her eldest brother's wife and Aunt Yang to come back to her own room and visit for a while."

"Mistress Hua from Lion Street sent Old Mother Feng over today to deliver some birthday presents to the First Lady, including four trays of preserved fruit, two trays of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, birthday noodles, a bolt of material, and even a pair of shoes she had made for her with her own hands. The First Lady gave Old Mother Feng a mace of silver and explained that you weren't at home, but didn't bother to invite her over."

Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that Tai-an's face was red and asked him, "Where've you been drinking?"

"Just now," said Tai-an, "Mistress Hua sent Old Mother Feng to invite me over and offered me some wine. I told her I didn't drink, but she put so much pressure on me I ended up taking two cups after all. That's why my face is red."

"Mistress Hua has now come to regret what she did. She cried like anything when she saw me. When I told you what had happened the other day, you hardly believed me. It seems that the very day Chiang Chu-shan was released from the Judicial Commissioner's Court, she sent him packing. She's really very sorry for what she did, and still has her heart set on marrying you."

"She's a lot thinner than she used to be. She begged me to ask you to go see her, no matter what, and get you to decide what you're going to do. If you indicate your assent, she wants me to go right back and let her know about it."

"That lousy worthless whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she's already found a husband for herself, that ought to be that. What does she want to continue bothering me for?"

"Well, if that's the way things stand, I haven't the time to go see her. Tell her to forget about the ritual presentations of tea and betrothal gifts. Let her pick a good day and I'll have the whore carried across my threshold, and be done with it."

"I understand," said Tai-an. "She's waiting at her place for me to go back and give her the word. I'll get P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung to come wait on you here."

"Go ahead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand."

Tai-an went out through the gate of the licensed quarter and straight to Li P'ing-erh's house, where he told her what had happened. The woman's heart was filled with delight.

"Good Little Brother," she said, "I'm very much indebted to you today for settling this matter with your master for me."

Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh took the trouble to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before going into the kitchen and personally preparing some dishes, so she could regale Tai-an with food and wine.

"I'm shorthanded here," she said. "I hope you can come over tomorrow, no matter what, to help T'ien-fu supervise the movers in carrying my stuff over to your place."

She hired five or six porters, with their carrying poles, and it took them four or five days to get everything moved. Hsi-men Ch'ing didn't even bother to tell Wu Yüeh-niang what was happening, but simply had her effects piled on the upper floor of the newly erected Flower-viewing Tower.

On the afternoon of the twentieth day of the eighth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched a large sedan chair, a length of red satin, and four lanterns, together with an escort consisting of Tai-an, P'ing-an, Hua-t'ung, and Lai-hsing, to have the woman carried across his threshold. Li P'ing-erh sent Old Mother Feng to take her two maidservants to their new home ahead of time and waited for her return before getting into the sedan chair and setting off herself. She turned her own house over to Old Mother Feng and T'ien-fu to look after.

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go out anywhere that day, but sat in the new summerhouse, wearing an informal gown and everyday hat, awaiting the woman's arrival. When her sedan chair was set down in front of his gate, a long time elapsed before anyone came out to receive her.

Meng Yü-lou went to the master suite and said to Yüeh-niang, "Sister, you are the mistress of the household. Right now she's already at the gate. If you don't go out to receive her, how can you help annoying our husband? He's just sitting in the summerhouse, and the sedan chair has already been at the gate for an age, without anyone going out to meet it. Under the circumstances, how can she be expected to come in?"

Wu Yüeh-niang was in a quandary. On the one hand, she could go out to receive her, but she was still angry about it and didn't want to give in. On the other hand, if she refused to go out, she was afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing's violent temper. Finally, after pondering the matter for a while, she: Lightly moved her lotus feet,

Gently lifted her beige skirt,
and went out to receive her.

Li P'ing-erh, holding the ritual "precious vase"³⁸ in her arms, was conducted directly to the new dwelling that had been constructed for her. Her two maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, had already had time to put everything in proper order, so she had nothing to do but await the arrival of Hsi-men Ch'ing that evening.

How could she have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing was still so angry with her that he refused to enter her chamber?

The next day she had to come out and make a formal visit to Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, where she paid her respects to the other female members of the household and was designated, in order of precedence, as the Sixth Lady. As was customary, a large feast was held on the third day, to which many female guests and relatives were invited. But her husband had yet to appear in her chamber.

The evening of her arrival he had gone to P'an Chin-lien's quarters to spend the night.

"She's your bride, after all," said Chin-lien, "and this is her first day in your home. How can you leave her in the lurch at such a time?"

"You don't know her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That whore has a little too much fire in her eyes for my taste. I'll give her the cold shoulder for a couple of days and then go in to her in my own good time."

On the third day, after the guests had departed, Hsi-men Ch'ing still refused to set foot in her chamber, but went, instead, to Meng Yü-lou's quarters in the rear compound to sleep. In the middle of the night, when Li P'ing-erh saw that her husband had avoided coming into her room for the third night in a row, she sent her two maidservants off to sleep, abandoned herself to her tears, and then, alas, stood up on her bed, threw her foot bindings over the rafter, and hanged herself. Truly: The enamored branches having failed to intertwine

beneath the mandarin duck curtain;

Her resentful soul is the first to find its way
to the realm of the Nine Springs.³⁹

The two maidservants, who had dozed off, awoke to find the lamp guttering out and were getting up to trim the wick when they suddenly saw their mistress suspended over the bed. Frightened into a state of panic, they ran next door to call Ch'un-mei, saying, "Our mistress has hanged herself."

P'an Chin-lien hurriedly got up and came over to see for herself. She found the woman, dressed completely in scarlet, hanging down, stiff and straight, over the bed. She and Ch'un-mei promptly cut the foot bindings by which she was suspended and laid her down. Only after they had administered artificial respiration for some time did she spit up a mouthful of colorless saliva and regain consciousness.

"Run back to the rear compound and ask your master to come here," Chin-lien said to Ch'un-mei.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in Meng Yü-lou's room, drinking wine, not having gone to bed yet. Before this happened, Meng Yü-lou had been remonstrating with him, saying, "How can you bring her into your household and then not darken her doorstep for three days in a row without arousing ill feelings? It makes it look as though we give this one thing priority over everything else, and insist upon our rights of seniority, begrudging her even one night of your company."

"Let her wait a full three days, then I'll go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You don't know her. That whore's got a tendency to: Wolf down the rice in her bowl,

While keeping one eye on the pot.⁴⁰

If you think about it, she has nothing to reproach me for. From the time her husband died, right up to the present, we've been on the closest of terms. What promises didn't she make to me? And then, at the last minute, she up and married that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan. As though I were no match for that scoundrel! So now, what's she running after me for?"

"You have every right to be upset," said Yü-lou. "But she also was imposed upon."

As they were talking, they heard the sound of knocking at the inner gate. Yü-lou sent Lan-hsiang to see who it was, and she reported that Ch'un-mei had come to fetch her master because the Sixth Lady had hanged herself in her room.

Meng Yü-lou lost no time in urging Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, saying, "I told you you ought to go look in on her, but you paid no attention. It's not surprising something like this has happened."

Thereupon, with lighted lanterns, they set out for the front compound to see for themselves. When Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh heard what had happened, they also got up and went to her room. They found Chin-lien holding Li P'ing-erh up in a sitting position and asked, "Sister Five, have you given her any ginger extract yet?"

"When I first got her down, I gave her some," Chin-lien replied.

Li P'ing-erh choked for some time before she was able to cry audibly. Only then did Yüeh-niang and the others feel as though: The stone on their heads had finally

fallen to the ground,

so they could tuck her back in bed and return to their own rooms to get some rest.

It was not until noon or thereabouts the next day that Li P'ing-erh was able to get down some congee and broth. Truly: Her body was like the moon at the fifth watch

as it is swallowed by the hills;

Her life was like a lamp at the third watch

as it begins to run out of oil.⁴¹

"Don't you believe that whore," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to Li Chiao-erh and the others, "she's only putting on that suicide act to scare us. I'm not going to let her get away with it. Wait and see. This evening I'm going to go into her room and get her to stage another hanging for my benefit before I believe her. And if she balks at the idea, I'll give her a good taste of the riding crop. That lousy whore! Who does she take me for, anyway?"

When his womenfolk heard these words, they all broke into a sweat on Li P'ing-erh's behalf.

That evening, sure enough, they saw Hsi-men Ch'ing conceal a riding crop in his sleeve and head for her room. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien ordered Ch'un-mei to lock the door and not let anyone in, while they took up positions by the postern gate that led into Li P'ing-erh's courtyard and eavesdropped to see what was happening inside.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the woman was lying facedown on her bed, crying, and that she made no move to get up when she saw him come in, he was more than a little annoyed. The first thing he did was to chase her two maidservants into an empty room and tell them to stay there. Then he sat down on a chair, pointed his finger at the woman, and reviled her, saying, "Whore! If you were really sorry for what you did, what need was there to come to my house to hang yourself. You should have stuck it out with that stunted little cuckold of yours. Who asked you to come here? I haven't done you any harm, so what are you pissing those tears out of your cunt for? I've never seen anyone hang themselves before. Today you can put on a command performance for my benefit."

Thereupon, he pulled out a length of cord and threw it in her face, ordering the woman to hang herself. Li P'ing-erh remembered what Chiang Chu-shan had told her, that Hsi-men Ch'ing was: The foreman of the wife-beaters,

The leader of the lotharios.

"What did I ever do in a previous incarnation to deserve such a fate?" she thought to herself. "Today, with my eyes wide open, I've plunged right into the fiery pit all over again."

The more upset she became the harder she cried.

This made Hsi-men Ch'ing even angrier. "Get down off that bed," he ordered. "Take off your clothes and get down on your knees."

The woman was dilatory about taking off her clothes, until Hsi-men Ch'ing turned her over on the surface of the bed, pulled the riding crop out of his sleeve, and gave her a few strokes with the whip. Only then did she take off all her clothes, above and below, and, trembling with fright, kneel down before him on the surface of the bed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down again and proceeded to subject the woman to a thorough interrogation, from beginning to end, saying, "I told you, clearly enough, to wait a little while, because I was tied up by something at home. So why did you ignore my request and rush into a marriage with that scoundrel, Dr. Chiang Chu-shan? If you'd married anyone else, it wouldn't have bothered me. But that stunted little cuckold! What could he do for you? You brought him across your threshold and then supplied the capital to set him up in business, opening a shop right under my nose, in order to take away my livelihood."

"I've already told you," the woman said, "how much I regret what I did, but it's too late to do anything about that now. It was only because you left me and didn't come back that I began to go crazy with longing. The garden of that distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao, which abuts on the rear of my compound, is haunted by fox spirits. At the third watch in the middle of the night they constantly: Assumed names and appropriated identities, appearing to me in your guise in order to sap my vitality, and departing only when the day dawned and the cock crowed. If you don't believe me, just ask Old Feng or the two maidservants. They'll corroborate my story.

"As time passed, my vitality was so sapped that I gradually approached the brink of death and would certainly have perished before long. It was only then that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan was engaged to see me and, like a fool, I: Fell right into the paste pot,⁴²

and allowed the scoundrel to take advantage of me. He said that you were implicated in some affair and had gone off to the Eastern Capital. It was only for lack of an alternative that I went down the road I did.

"How could I have known he was the sort of scoundrel who:

Even if he lost his head, would leave

a stump of debts behind?

Before I knew it, his creditors were banging on the gate and he was:

Haled before the judge and exposed in the courtroom.⁴³

There was nothing I could do but:

Swallow my anger and keep my own counsel.

It cost me several taels of silver to do it, but I sent him packing without delay."

"I hear you tried to get him to make out a complaint against me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "over all those things of yours I have in storage. If so, what are you doing in my house today?"

"Why you! It ought to go without saying," the woman said. "If I ever did any such thing, may my body rot completely away!"

"Even if you had," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it wouldn't scare me. They say that:

If you have the means, you can change husbands at will.

But I'm not about to let you get away with that sort of thing. I might as well tell you the truth. Those two guys who beat up the doctor: Thus and thus, and

So and so,
were acting on my instructions. I had only to:

Put in motion one of my schemes,
in order to fix that scoundrel so he had:

No place to run.
All I would have to do is:
Resort to one of my devices,
in order to put you, too, in a position to be:
Haled before the judge."

"I know it was all a trick of yours," the woman said, "but take pity on me. If I'm left all by myself in some deserted place, it will be the death of me, that's all."

As she spoke, Hsi-men Ch'ing's wrath was gradually assuaged.

"Whore!" he demanded. "Come over here. Let me ask you. How do I stack up compared to that scoundrel, Dr. Chiang Chu-shan?"

"How can he be compared to you?" the woman said.

"You're the sky;
He's a shard of brick.
You're higher than the Thirty-third Heaven;
He's lower than the Ninety-ninth Hell.

Quite aside from the fact that you are:

Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with your wealth,
Have a voice like plangent bronze and tinkling jade,⁴⁴
Command a clever and articulate tongue,⁴⁵
Dress in silks and wear brocades,⁴⁶ and Are ever attended by three or five servants;⁴⁷
thereby showing yourself to be:

A man above other men;
even the delicacies that constitute your daily fare are such things as he would never see, were he to live for hundreds of years. How can he be compared to you? You're just what the doctor ordered. Ever since I experienced love at your hands, by day and by night all I do is long for you."

This last statement had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that:

His delight knew no bounds.

Throwing aside the riding crop, he helped the woman to her feet and allowed her to get dressed, after which he took her onto his lap and said, "My child, what you say is true. What does that scoundrel know about anything? To him: A saucer may look as big as the sky."

With that, he called for Ch'un-mei and told her, "Set the table at once and then go back to the rear compound and fetch us some food and wine as quick as you can."

Truly:

To the east the sun is shining, to the west
there are clouds;
Just as you think it will never clear, it
is already clear.⁴⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 20

MENG YÜ-LOU HIGH-MINDEDLY INTERCEDES WITH WU YÜEH-NIANG; HSI-MEN CH'ING WREAKS HAVOC IN THE VERDANT SPRING BORDELLO

In this world one has a role to play
for three score years and ten;
What need is there both day and night
to overtax one's spirits?
The affairs of this world in the end
bring naught but regret;
The fleeting luxury that beguiles the eye
is wont to prove unreal.
Poverty and want, wealth and distinction,
are allocated by Heaven;
Success and failure, glory and luxury,
are but dust in a crack.
So why not let yourself go, enjoying
pleasures as they come;
Rather than waiting for the gray hairs
to invade your temples?¹

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by the few: Soft-spoken sentiments and tender words, addressed to him by Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom that:

His anger turned to joy.²

After he had helped her to her feet and allowed her to get dressed, the two of them fell to: Hugging and embracing each other,

As inseparable as they could be.

Meanwhile, he called Ch'un-mei into the room and told her to set the table and then go to the rear compound to fetch some wine.

To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou had been standing outside the postern gate eavesdropping upon the events within. The door of Li P'ing-erh's room was closed, but Ch'un-mei was waiting in attendance, all by herself, in the intervening courtyard. Chin-lien had taken Yü-lou by the hand, and the two of them were gazing through the cracks in the gate to see what they could observe. They saw that her room was lit by lamp and candle light, and could tell that the two were talking inside, but were unable to overhear what was being said.

"We're not as well off as that lousy little piece Ch'un-mei," said Chin-lien. "She can hear everything perfectly."

Ch'un-mei listened surreptitiously outside the window for a while and then strolled over toward the gate.

"What's going on inside the room," Chin-lien demanded in a whisper.

When Ch'un-mei heard the question, she came over and relayed the story to the two auditors on the other side of the gate, saying, "Father told her to take off her clothes and get down on her knees, but she wouldn't take her clothes off, so Father got angry and gave her a few strokes with the riding crop."

"Did she take them off when he whipped her?" asked Chin-lien.

"Only when she realized how angry he was," said Ch'un-mei, "was she frightened enough to take her clothes off and kneel down before him on the bed. Father's interrogating her right now."

Meng Yü-lou, who was afraid Hsi-men Ch'ing might overhear them, said, "Sister Five, let's go over to the other side," and proceeded to pull Chin-lien around to the postern gate on the west side of the courtyard. It was early in the third decade of the eighth month and the moon had just come up. Chin-lien cracked melon seeds with her teeth as the two of them stood there in the dark shadows and chatted together, while they waited for Ch'un-mei to come out with a further report.

"Our sister must have thought she was in for a tasty treat," Chin-lien said to Yü-lou. "The only thing she wanted was a chance to move in here, and now: Before being able to so much as shake her head,³ she's had to face this initiatory ordeal, and brought down these strokes of the whip on herself. As for that totally inconsiderate good-for-nothing of ours, as long as you go along with him he may be all right, but: He's just like hot taffy;

Whether you try to twist it or whether you don't,
you get stuck either way.⁴

Remember what happened to me when that slavey of a concubine tried to nail me with her talebearing? And then there was that prostitute from the quarter. No matter how circumspect I tried to be, she got him to give me a hard time. How I cried over it! As for you, Sister, how long have you been here, anyway? You still don't know what you're up against."

Not long after the two of them had begun their conversation, the postern gate was heard to open and Ch'un-mei came out on her way to the rear compound.

Unexpectedly, her mistress, who was standing in the dark shadows, demanded, "You little piece, where are you off to?"

Ch'un-mei laughed, but continued on her way.

"You crazy little piece," said Chin-lien. "Come over here. I want to ask you something. What are you in such a hurry for, anyway?"

Only then did Ch'un-mei stop and give an account, thus and so, of what had happened.

"First she cried, and then did a lot of talking," she said, "until Father so far relented that he lifted her up and embraced her. Then he had her put her clothes back on and told me to set the table. Right now, I'm on my way to the rear compound to fetch some wine for them."

When Chin-lien heard this, she turned to Yü-lou and said, "That lousy shameless good-for-nothing!

The thunder may have been loud, but

The raindrops didn't amount to anything.⁵

To hear him tell it, he was going to give her a real thrashing, raise royal hell with her; but when it came to the crunch, nothing happened at all. I can see it now. I'll bet you anything, when she brings the wine, he'll have Ch'un-mei serve it. The lousy little piece! You'd think she didn't have any maidservants of her own. If you go fetch his wine for him, when you get to the rear compound that slavey of a concubine, Hsüeh-o, is likely to start shooting off her cunt about it the way she did before. I've had enough of that, thank you."

"As long as Father sent me, what's it all to me?" said Ch'un-mei, as she went off with a giggle.

"That little piece of mine is the limit," said Chin-lien. "When I give her a regular job to do, she's so slow to get a move on, you'd think she was dead. I don't know why it is, but whenever there's some; Pussyfooting errand,⁶ to be run for anyone else, she's ready to:

Stick her head into any cranny,⁷

to get a crack at it, and takes off like a flash. You know perfectly well she's got two maidservants of her own, but you'll run your legs off in their stead. What's it to you? That little piece of mine is like: The radish peddler who tags along after the salt vendor:

forever horning in where she doesn't belong."⁸

"Why do you suppose it is?" said Yü-lou. "If I tell my own senior maidservant, Lan-hsiang, to get to work on something, she may look like she's going to, but she doesn't. While if her master puts her up to any piece of mischief, she not only obeys, but goes off like a flash too."

As they were talking, who should suddenly turn up from the rear compound but Yü-hsiao, who said, "I see the Third Lady is still here. I've come to fetch you."

"You crazy little bitch! You gave me quite a start," exclaimed Yü-lou, who then went on to ask, "Does your mistress know you're here?"

"I put my mistress to bed some time ago," said Yü-hsiao. "I was coming out to the front compound to see what was up, just now, when I ran into Ch'un-mei, on her way back to fetch some wine and appetizers."

"What happened after the master went into her room?" she then went on to ask.

"When he went into her room," Chin-lien interjected, "it was the same old story:

Like the ugly lady with the pointed head who tried to
improve matters by banging it against the privy wall:

She's got everything shipshape."

Yü-hsiao had to ask Yü-lou again for an explanation, and she told her all that had happened.

"You don't mean to say, Third Lady," exclaimed Yü-hsiao, "that he really made her take off her clothes and get down on her knees, and then gave her five strokes with the riding crop?"

"He only started whipping her when she refused to get down on her knees," said Yü-lou.

"So he whipped her over her clothes," said Yü-hsiao. "If he'd whipped her without them, how could her fair white skin ever have endured it?"

"You crazy little bitch," laughed Yü-lou. "You're really sensitive enough to:

Empathize with the sorrows of the ancients."⁹

As they were talking, who should appear but Ch'un-mei and Hsiao-yü, with the wine and appetizers. Ch'un-mei had the wine and Hsiao-yü was carrying a square box with the food. They headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's room.

"You lousy little piece!" said Chin-lien. "I don't know why it is, but whenever you get wind of a job like this, you seem to think it's: Like a rat stationed in the clouds:

The 'furry pest' Heaven has to offer."¹⁰

"Well, make your delivery and get it over with," she ordered. "And let her own maidservants look after her from now on. Don't you pay any further attention to them. I've got something for you to do."

Ch'un-mei merely giggled and went inside with Hsiao-yü. Once there, they laid the wine and food out on the table and then came outside again, leaving Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un in the room to wait on them.

When Yü-lou and Chin-lien had finished questioning them, Yü-hsiao said, "Third Lady, let's go back to the rear compound," and the two of them went off together.

Chin-lien told Ch'un-mei to lock the postern gate and then went back to her room to spend a solitary night. But no more of this. Truly: What a pity that, in its perfect fullness,

the moon of this night;

Should shed its pure radiance on other gardens,

so near and yet so far.¹¹



Eavesdroppers Discuss Li P'ing-erh's Feat of Reconciliation

We will say no more, for the moment, about P'an Chin-lien's solitary night, but turn instead to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li P'ing-erh. The two of them: Indulged their mutual affection,

Drinking wine and talking together,
until the middle of the night before they:

Spread the kingfisher-colored quilt,

Laid out the mandarin duck pillows,

Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

Indeed:

Under the flickering lamplight,
They remind one of phoenixes singing a duet
within a mirror;
Enveloped in fragrant incense,
They resemble butterflies doing a pas de deux
among the flowers.

Truly:

This evening let the silver lamp burn
brightly as it will;
They're still afraid this tryst of theirs is
nothing but a dream.¹²

There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:

Her eyebrows lightly penciled,
her comb stuck askew;
She has no heart to continue
doing her embroidery.
Deep within cloudy windows,
in misty chambers;

Her orchidaceous heart
studies to please.

Beautiful as can be,
Ever more lovely;
She is a goddess incarnate,
unknown to this world.
From now on she can abandon
that lovesick refrain;
Brocade itself is no fit simile
for such a consummation.¹³

The two of them slept until lunchtime the next day. Li P'ing-erh was just getting up to look in the mirror and comb her hair when who should appear but Ying-ch'un, who had been to the kitchen in the rear compound. She was carrying four saucers of fancy appetizers: one of squash and eggplant julienne in a sweet sauce, one of Chinese cabbage vinaigrette, one of smoked pork, and one of minced shad preserved in fermented red mash. In addition there was a bowl of boiled squab and another of junket flavored with yellow leeks. These were accompanied by two silver-mounted bowls of fresh white fragrant nonglutinous rice and two pairs of ivory chopsticks.

The woman had rinsed out her mouth and joined Hsi-men Ch'ing in drinking half a cup of wine when she turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Decant some of that Chin-hua wine¹⁴ in the silver flagon that was left over from yesterday."

Goblets were set out and she kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company as they drank two bumpers apiece before she washed her face and completed her toilet. She then proceeded to open up her trunks and display her valuables, jewelry, and clothing for Hsi-men Ch'ing's benefit. She brought out the necklace of one hundred large, Western Ocean pearls that she had originally appropriated from the household of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh and showed it to him. She also produced an onyx cap button in a gold setting, which she said had belonged to the late eunuch director. Detached from its cap and put on the scales, it turned out to weigh four mace and eight candareens. Li P'ing-erh suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that he take it to a silversmith and have it made into a pair of pendant earrings for her.

She also brought out a fret of gold filigree that weighed nine ounces and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Do the First Lady and the others have frets like this one or not?"

"Some of them do have frets of silver filigree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but none of them has anything as elaborate as this."

"I'd better not wear it, then," the woman said. "Take it to the silversmith for me, to be melted down, and then have him make me a pin for holding my chignon in place, in the shape of nine golden phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks. With whatever's left over, have him make me a tiara of jade, encased with gold, representing 'the goddess Kuan-yin in her full glory' like the one the First Lady wears in front of her coiffure."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted these commissions, combed his hair and washed his face, put on his clothes, and prepared to go out.

"There's no one to look after the other house," said Li P'ing-erh. "Whatever you do, you ought to go by there to check things out and assign someone to take care of it in T'ien-fu's place so he can come and serve here at home. Mother Feng, the old good-for-nothing, is getting so dodderly I don't feel right leaving her there all by herself."

"I'll do just as you say," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he put the fret and the cap button into his sleeve and headed for the door.

He was on his way out of the compound when he was unexpectedly accosted by P'an Chin-lien, who was standing by the postern gate on the east side of the courtyard with her hair in disarray and an unwashed face.

"Brother, where are you off to?" she demanded. "At this hour of the morning you look: Day-blind enough to catch a sparrow in the eye."

"I've got an errand to run," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You crazy good-for-nothing," said Chin-lien. "Come back here. What are you in such a hurry for, anyway? I've got something to say to you."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how importunate she was, he had no alternative but to come back and allow himself to be led into her room.

The woman sat down on a chair and, taking his two hands in hers, said, "I'll only be wasting my breath on you. Are your legs on fire, you crazy three-inch good-for-nothing? No one's going to: Stew you in a pot and eat you."¹⁵ What are you so anxious to get away with, anyway? Come over here. I want to ask you something."

"That's enough, you little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why be so importunate? I've got an errand to run. I'll tell you when I get back."

As he spoke he started outside, but the woman felt his sleeve and, detecting something heavy in it, said, "What's this? Take it out and show it to me."

"It's the wallet I carry my silver in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The woman didn't believe him and, sticking her hand into his sleeve to see for herself, pulled out the fret of gold filigree.

"This is her fret, isn't it?" she said. "Where are you taking it?"

"She asked me whether any of you had frets like this one," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I told her you didn't. So she wants me to take it to the silversmith to be melted down and made into another two pieces of jewelry for her to wear."

"What does this fret weigh," asked Chin-lien, "and what does she want it made into?"

"It weighs nine ounces," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She wants it made into a nine-phoenix pin and a tiara of jade, encased with gold, representing 'the goddess Kuan-yin in her full glory,' like the one the First Lady wears in front of her coiffure."

"A nine-phoenix pin," said Chin-lien, "would only take three ounces and five or six mace of gold, at the most. And as for that tiara of the First Lady's, I've weighed it myself, and it only comes to one ounce and six mace. Whatever you do, have him use what's left over to make another nine-phoenix pin, just like hers, for me."

"She wants the setting of that 'Kuan-yin in her full glory' to be solid and sturdy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Even if it were made solid and sturdy," said Chin-lien, "it wouldn't take more than three ounces. At the very least, barring any monkey business, he ought to be able to squeeze two or three extra ounces of gold out of it, which would be enough to make a pin for me."

"You little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself. You've got to have your finger in every pie."

"My son," said Chin-lien, "you would do well to heed your mother's words. If you don't get that pin made up for me, I'll have something further to say to you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing put the fret back in his sleeve, laughed, and started out the door.

"Brother," joked Chin-lien, "you've met your match at last."

"What do you mean I've met my match?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If you haven't met your match," said Chin-lien, "how come, last night:

The thunder may have been loud, but

The raindrops didn't amount to anything?

You were threatening to give her a real thrashing and make her hang herself. But this morning all she had to do was pull out a fret in order to: Make a ghost at the millstone out of you.¹⁶

You dog of an oily mouth! There's nothing you won't do for her."

"You little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he finally made his exit. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in her room with Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh when they suddenly heard a servant outside calling for Lai-wang, but unable to find him. Who should it turn out to be but P'ing-an, who lifted aside the portiere on the threshold.

"What do you want him for?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Father is waiting impatiently for him," said P'ing-an.

Yüeh-niang took her time in responding, before finally saying, "I've sent him on an errand."

It so happens that earlier that morning Yüeh-niang had sent him to Nun Wang's monastery to deliver a votive gift of incense, oil, and white rice.

"I'll simply tell Father you've sent him on an errand," said P'ing-an.

"You crazy slave!" Yüeh-niang retorted angrily. "Tell him whatever you like."

P'ing-an was so taken aback by her response that he went out without daring to utter another word.

Yüeh-niang turned to Yü-lou and the others and said, "If I say anything about it, he claims it's none of my business. If I don't say anything, I get so frustrated I could burst. He's brought that person into our household, bag and baggage, so why doesn't he just sell off that house of hers and be done with it? What's the point of all this rot about: Ringing bells and beating drums,¹⁷

in order to protect the place? In any case, she's already got that Old Mother Feng of hers there, so the most we need to do is send an unmarried page boy over to spend the nights. Does he think the house is going to walk away on him? After all: If you're going to be a wet nurse,

You've got to handle the shit that goes with the job.

But no one else but Lai-wang and his wife will do, despite the fact that she's suffering from: Seven ailments and eight pains.¹⁸

If she should happen to come down with something and take to her bed over there, who would look after her?"

"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "you are my senior, and I may be speaking out of turn, but you are the mistress of the household. The fact that you and our husband are not on speaking terms makes it difficult for any of the rest of us to know what to do and leaves the servants with nowhere to turn. The way our husband has been carrying on the last few days: Alienated from this one and abusive of that,

indicates that he, too, is completely at loose ends. Wouldn't you be willing to consider, for our sake, saying a few words to him and making it up somehow?"

"Third Sister Meng," said Yüeh-niang, "you'd better get those ideas out of your head. I haven't picked any quarrel with him. He's simply making a show of his temper for no reason at all. I don't care how long a face he pulls, that's not going to get me to give him another look. He's been calling me an undutiful whore behind my back. How have I been undutiful, I'd like to know? It's only now, after I've allowed him to bring six or seven bedmates into the place, that he's discovered how undutiful I am. It's always been true that: If you wish to get along, say what people want to hear;

If you try to be honest, you'll only arouse antagonism.¹⁹

"As for my husband, originally, when I did what I could to talk you out of marrying her, I was thinking only of your own best interests. Since you had already stashed away all those valuables of hers, and bought her husband's house into the bargain, if you were then revealed to have designs upon his wife, and it had come to the attention of the authorities, they would have taken a dim view of it. On top of which, her mourning period wasn't even over yet, so you really couldn't very well marry her, I said.

"How was I to know that behind my back the trap had already been sprung? Every day:

Betrothal gifts were exchanged between them,²⁰
while I was the only one kept in the dark. They might as well have:

Put a water crock over my head.²¹

One day he claimed he was 'spending the night in the quarter,' and the next day he claimed he was 'spending the night in the quarter.' How was I to know that all he wanted was to get her into his own house so he could 'spend the night in the quarter' the more conveniently?

"He's so susceptible to other people's:

Showy glamor and gaudy airs,²²

they can:

Conjure dragons and depict tigers,

as a cover for their:

Two faces and three knives,²³

and he thinks they're:

As wonderful as can be.²⁴

Meanwhile, people like myself, who try to be honest, but whose:

Good advice proves bitter to the taste,²⁵

can't even get his attention, and end up being treated like enemies. Truly:

Though the preceding carriages have overturned
by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.

"If you won't pay any attention to me, I won't demand anything of you. So long as you don't begrudge me three meals a day, I'll make do as though I no longer had a husband at all, and live the life of a widow here in my room. The rest of you had better let me do as I like. It's none of your business."

This speech of Yüeh-niang's left Yü-lou and the others at a loss for words for some time.

At this juncture, who should appear but Li P'ing-erh, who had combed her hair and made herself up in order to come to the master suite and offer Yüeh-niang and the others the customary ceremonial tea. She was wearing a silk blouse of scarlet brocade that opened down the middle, over a long trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue figured silk, and was accompanied by Ying-ch'un, bearing a silver pitcher of hot water, and Hsiu-ch'un, with a box of tea. Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to bring her a seat and had her sit down. A little later Sun Hsüeh-o also came in, and after Li P'ing-erh had served tea to each of them in turn they all sat down together.

P'an Chin-lien, who had a sharp tongue, broke the ice by saying, "Sister Li, come over here and kowtow to your elder sister. To be frank with you, our elder sister and Father have not been on speaking terms with each other for quite a while now, all on your account. We've just spent half the day interceding with her for your sake. Some day soon you really ought to prepare a feast for them and see if you can't get the old couple to make it up somehow."

"I'll do just as you say, Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.

Thereupon, she knelt down on the floor in front of Yüeh-niang and:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;

kowtowed to her four times.

"She's only pulling your leg, Sister Li," said Yüeh-niang.

Turning, then, to Chin-lien, she continued, "Fifth Sister, you can all give up your efforts to persuade me. I've already sworn an oath. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never be reconciled to him."

As a result of this, none of them dared bring it up again.

Chin-lien had picked up a small brush and was standing beside Li P'ing-erh, smoothing her coiffure with it, when she noticed that she was wearing in her hair a gold openwork pin in the shape of a cricket and an ornamental comb decorated with the motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends," in gold filigree.

"Sister Li," she said, "you really oughtn't to wear anything as intricate as this cricket pin. It's likely to get tangled in your hair. Something like that gold-enchased 'Kuan-yin in her full glory' that our elder sister wears in her coiffure would be better. It's more solid and sturdy."

Li P'ing-erh replied quite innocently, "I plan to get the silversmith to make one just like it for me."

A little later, Hsiao-yü and Yü-hsiao came up to replenish her tea and took advantage of the occasion to tease her.

Yü-hsiao began by asking, "Sixth Lady, what office in the Imperial City was that old eunuch director of yours originally attached to?"

"He started out as director of the Firewood Office in the Imperial Palace," said Li P'ing-erh, "and served in the Imperial Bodyguard. Later on he was promoted to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan."

"It comes as no surprise, then," laughed Yü-hsiao, "that yesterday you seemed to be so intimately acquainted with the stick."

"Last year the community heads and elders from all the villages outside the city walls were looking for you everywhere," chimed in Hsiao-yü. "They wanted you to go to the Eastern Capital on their behalf."

Li P'ing-erh, who was still a bit slow on the uptake, asked, "Why were they looking for me in particular?"

"They said you really knew how to abase yourself effectively in pleading for flood relief," laughed Hsiao-yü.

"Yesterday:

You were like the old biddy from the countryside on a pilgrimage to the Temple of the Thousand Buddhas," resumed Yü-hsiao.

"You kept on kowtowing as if there were no end in sight."

"The other day, it is reported," Hsiao-yü continued, "the emperor sent four border patrol agents²⁶ to ask if you would consent to go abroad in order to make a marriage alliance with the Huns. Is that really so?"

"I didn't know anything about it," said Li P'ing-erh.

"They said you had an irresistible way of saying 'Huney,' " laughed Hsiao-yü.

These sallies reduced Yü-lou and Chin-lien to helpless laughter.

"You crazy little stinkers!" Yüeh-niang finally intervened. "Go on about your business. Haven't you anything better to do than tease her?"

By this time Li P'ing-erh was so embarrassed her face had become a patchwork of red and white blotches. She was so ill at ease she didn't know whether to get up or stay put, but finally escaped to her own quarters.

Some time later, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room to tell her that Silversmith Ku had agreed to make the jewelry to her specifications.

In the course of consulting with her, he said, "Tomorrow we'll send out invitations asking the male friends of the family to come to a wedding reception on the 25th. We can scarcely avoid sending an invitation to Hua the Elder."

"His wife came to the third-day feast," said Li P'ing-erh, "and was anxious that he be invited. It doesn't matter. You might as well go ahead and invite him."

"As for the other house," she continued, "I guess Old Mother Feng can handle it, after all. If you would just send someone to take turns with T'ien-fu spending the night over there, that ought to take care of it. There's no need to make Lai-wang move in. My elder sister in the master suite says his wife is in such poor health she won't be able to go with him."

"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He proceeded forthwith to summon P'ing-an and instructed him, "You and T'ien-fu take turns, on alternate days, spending the night at the house on Lion Street." But no more of this.

To make a long story short, in no time at all it was the 25th, the day of the wedding feast for male friends and relatives in Li P'ing-erh's honor. The main reception hall was decorated with flowers, and four singing girls as well as a troupe of tumblers and acrobats were engaged for the occasion. The brothers-in-law, Hua the Elder and Wu K'ai, were seated at the head table. Wu Yüeh-niang's younger brother, Wu the Second, and her eldest sister's husband, Mr. Shen, were seated at the second table. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were seated at the third table. Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun were seated at the fourth table. Cadger Ch'ang and Heartless Wu were seated at the fifth table. Welsher Yün and Scrounger Pai were seated at the sixth table. Hsi-men Ch'ing took his place as host with his managers, Fu Ming and Scurry-about Pen, and his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, arrayed to either side.

Before the feast, shortly after noon, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Tung Yü-hsien, and Han Chin-ch'uan arrived in their sedan chairs and were entertained by Yüeh-niang in the master suite. The male guests, upon their arrival, were seated in the newly erected summerhouse and served tea. After everyone had arrived, they moved into the main reception hall where the tables were already set up, with place cards indicating who was to sit in the positions of greater and lesser honor at each table.

The appetizers consisted of wildfowl wrapped in pastry and a soup of eight ingredients. The first main course was roast goose. As the food was being served, the musicians struck up a tune and the tumblers put on a performance, which turned out to be a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen.²⁷ After they went off, the two boy actors, Li Ming and Wu Hui, came on to play and sing for the company. They were followed by an instrumental interlude, after which the four singing girls came in to ply the guests with wine.

At this juncture, from his place at the table, Ying Po-chüeh spoke up, saying, "Today is our elder brother's wedding feast. Though it may not be my place to do so, I have screwed up the courage to request that our new sister-in-law be invited out so we may pay her our respects. That would put the seal on our intimacy. What I think may not matter too much, but your esteemed kinsman Hua the Elder, your two brothers-in-law, and Mr. Shen are all here today. What else did they come for?"

"My insignificant concubine is far too unworthy to receive such an honor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Pray excuse her."

"That's no way to talk," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "You promised us beforehand. Were it not for our sister-in-law, why should we have come? Moreover, our sister-in-law's esteemed kinsman, Hua the Elder, is here."

At first only a friend,

Now he is our kinsman.

It's not as though she were being invited out to meet a stranger. What is there to worry about?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed but did not make a move.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "don't laugh. We've all brought our reception fees with us. We're not asking her to come out and meet us for nothing."

"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."

Unable to resist these repeated importunities any longer, he called over Tai-an and told him to convey the request to the rear compound.

After some time, Tai-an reappeared and reported, "The Sixth Lady begs to be excused."

"That's enough of your monkey business, you little dog-bone," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You think you can fool me by pretending to go inside and then coming up with such a tale? You may swear as much as you like, but if you stick to your story, I'll have to go back there myself."

"You don't mean to suggest I'd try to fool the likes of you, do you?" protested Tai-an. "Go ahead back, then, and see for yourself."

"You think I wouldn't dare?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, the garden is familiar territory. Suppose I go inside and drag out the whole lot of your mistresses, how would that be?"

"That big pug of ours is something fierce," said Tai-an. "I'd hate to see you lose your balls."

Ying Po-chüeh made a great show of jumping up from his place, chasing after Tai-an, and giving him a couple of kicks.

"A fine little dog-bone you are!" he laughed. "You know how to get at me all right. Now go back there again, as quick as you can, and invite her out. If you fail, it'll cost you twenty of the best with the cane."

This performance caused everyone, including the four singing girls, to burst into laughter.

Tai-an returned to the host's position at the foot of the hall and stood there watching his master, without making a move.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:

At a loss for what to do next,

had no alternative but to call Tai-an over and instruct him, "Tell the Sixth Lady to get herself ready and come out to meet the guests."

After Tai-an had been gone for some time he came out again and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing to go inside. The servants of the guests were then herded outside and the inner gate was closed. The four singing girls went back to the interior to supply a musical accompaniment for Li P'ing-erh's entrance. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien did their best to encourage her, helping to smooth her coiffure and put on her jewelry, before pronouncing her ready to go out.

Brocaded rugs and embroidered carpets were laid down in the reception hall, whereupon:

Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,

To the strains of strings and woodwinds,

conducted on her way by the four singing girls, the woman made her appearance at last.

She was wearing a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated silk over a skirt of sand-green material, sprigged with gold-stemmed and green-leaved flowers. Behold: Her waist is encircled by,

A lady's girdle inset with plaques of green jade;

Her wrists are enclosed in,

Gold bangles that double as sleeve-weights.

On her breast there lies,

An amulet suspended from a necklace;

By her skirt is heard,

The tinkling of girdle pendants.



Hsi-men Ch'ing's Cronies Make a Fuss over His New Bride

On her head,
Pearls and trinkets rise in piles;
Beside her temple,
A jeweled hairpin is half askew.
Gold rings with amethyst pendants,
Hang low beneath her ears;
Phoenix pins with dangling pearls,
Jut from either side of her chignon.

Her powdered face makes a perfect ground
on which to display beauty marks;
Her beige skirt only enhances the sight
of her tiny red mandarin duck shoes.
It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down
from her palace in the moon;
She is exactly like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain
deigning to grace the feast.

The four singing girls, playing the *p'i-p'a*, psaltery, and three-stringed banjo, clustered around her as she saluted the company with a formal kowtow: Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying.

There was not a man present who did not make haste to rise from his place and return her salute.

To resume our story, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li Chiao-erh clustered around Wu Yüeh-niang behind a hanging screen in the reception hall to see what they could hear and see of the proceedings. They heard the singing girls perform the song to the tune "Clever Improvisation" that begins with the words: How pleased we are by your success,

and then continues:

Heaven has made this perfect match;

Like male and female phoenix
are husband and wife.

They then proceeded to the next song in the suite, to the tune "Flirtatious Laughter," which begins with the words: Gayly laughing we celebrate this happy occasion,

By raising our phoenix goblets on high.
To the sound of ivory clappers, silver psaltery,
and jade flute,
Let them bring on in cups and platters,
The fruits of sea and land to grace
the auspicious feast.

The song concluded with the words:

May they live happily together as husband and wife
forever and ever.²⁸

At this point Chin-lien turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "Elder Sister, listen to what they're singing. She's only a concubine, after all. That really isn't an appropriate song suite to sing on a day like this. If they're to be like fish in the water, and 'live happily together as husband and wife for ever and ever,' where does that leave you?"

Now although Yüeh-niang was a good person by nature, when she heard these words she couldn't help being somewhat dismayed and feeling resentful in her heart. She also observed the way in which Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and the rest of the company carried on when Li P'ing-erh came out to greet them. It seemed as though they: Wished they had more mouths than nature had provided,²⁹ the better to praise her with.

"This sister-in-law of ours," rhapsodized Ying Po-chüeh, is truly something:

Seldom seen in the universe,³⁰
Without peer in this world.³¹

Quite aside from the fact that she is:

Compliant and virtuous by nature, and
Dignified and stately in demeanor;³²

she cuts such a striking figure that in all the world you could hardly hope to find the like. Who else but our elder brother deserves to enjoy such good fortune? We who have been privileged to see her today will have been the gainers though we should die tomorrow."

At the conclusion of this peroration he called out to Tai-an, "Make haste to escort your mistress back to her quarters. I fear we may be overtaxing her. It isn't worth the risk."

When Wu Yüeh-niang and the others overheard this speech they cursed him unremittingly for a rot-talking, glib-tongued jailbird.

After an appropriate time Li P'ing-erh prepared to withdraw. The four singing girls, observing that she had money at her disposal, all made up to her, saying: Ma'am this and ma'am that, as they adjusted her trinkets and straightened her clothes for her. In fact:

There was no length to which they would not go.³³

When Wu Yüeh-niang returned to the master suite she felt very much out of sorts. Who should appear in her room at this juncture but Tai-an and P'ing-an, bearing a lot of complimentary gifts of cash, bolts of material, articles of clothing, and other expressions of regard on a pair of trays.

Yüeh-niang wouldn't even look at them, but said angrily, "You lousy jailbirds! Take them up to the front compound, why don't you. What do you want to bring them in here for?"

"Father told us to bring them into your room," said Tai-an.

Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to take care of them, and she tossed them onto the bed.

Before long, her eldest brother, Wu K'ai, after finishing the second course of the banquet, came into the rear compound to pay his sister a visit. When Yüeh-niang saw her brother come into the room, she hastily proceeded to greet him with a kowtow: Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze, and then sat down with him.

"My wife imposed on your hospitality the other day," said Wu K'ai. "And I'm much obliged to your husband for sending along a sampling from the feast. When she got home she told me that my brother-in-law and you were not on speaking terms, and I had made up my mind to come say something to you about it, even before receiving your husband's invitation today.

"Sister, if you persist in this course, all the good feeling you have built up in the past will be lost. It has always been true that: Foolish men fear their wives, but

Virtuous women fear their husbands.³⁴

The 'three obediences' and 'four virtues,'

Are the norms that govern female conduct.³⁵

From now on, Sister, don't try to interfere with anything he wants to do. I dare say my brother-in-law would never do anything really wrong. Only by playing the role of a 'Mr. Yea-sayer'³⁶ can you show what a dutiful wife you are."

"No doubt if I'd been a more dutiful wife I wouldn't have aroused such antagonism in the first place!" said Yüeh-niang sarcastically. "Now that he's got this rich baby of his, a poor officer's daughter like myself might just as well be dead for all he cares. It's none of your business. Leave it to me. Let him do as he pleases. You lousy ruffian! Since when have you been so concerned about me, anyway?"

As she spoke, Yüeh-niang broke into tears.

"Sister," said Wu K'ai. "It's not right of you to carry on this way. You and I are not that sort of people. You really ought to put a stop to it immediately. If the two of you are on good terms with each other, it makes it much more propitious for relatives like myself to come visiting."

He remonstrated with her for a while, after which Hsiao-yü came in to serve tea. When they were done with the tea, Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to set the table and invited her brother to stay and have some wine with her.

"Needless to say, Sister," said Wu K'ai, "I'm already stuffed with wine and food from the feast. I just came in to pay you a visit."

Wu K'ai sat a little longer until a page boy was dispatched from the front compound to invite him to rejoin the party, whereupon he said his farewells and followed him back outside. Thereafter, the company continued to drink until after the lamps were lighted before finally breaking up. The four singing girls each received a gold lamé handkerchief and five mace of silver from Li P'ing-erh that day and went home in a happy state.

From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent several nights in a row in Li P'ing-erh's room. This might have been tolerated by the rest of his womenfolk, but P'an Chin-lien was in high dudgeon about it. She did her best to provoke ill feeling between Wu Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh by criticizing the former behind her back and alleging that she was intolerant of others. Li P'ing-erh innocently fell into Chin-lien's toils, addressing her as Elder Sister and becoming more intimate with her than ever. Truly: On first meeting one should express no more than

three-tenths of one's thoughts;

Never under any circumstances should one disclose

the whole content of one's heart.³⁷

From the time that Hsi-men Ch'ing brought Li P'ing-erh over his threshold, in the course of doing which he had picked up two or three dubious increments to his property, his affairs became more prosperous than ever. On his country estate outside the walls and in his residential compound: Everything was put on an entirely new footing.

The rice and millet overflowed his granaries,

His mules and horses became teeming herds,

His slaves and servants were arrayed in ranks.³⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing changed the name of Li P'ing-erh's page boy, T'ien-fu, or Heavenly Blessing, to the more elegant Ch'in-t'ung, or Lute Boy, which had formerly been the designation of that servant of Meng Yü-lou's who had been driven out of the house for his suspected adultery with P'an Chin-lien. He also bought two new page boys, whom he named Lai-an and Ch'i-t'ung. The four maidservants, Ch'un-mei from P'an Chin-lien's quarters, Yü-hsiao from the master suite, Ying-ch'un from Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters, were dressed in identical outfits of clothing and jewelry and sent out to an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard to be instructed in the arts of singing and performing on musical instruments by Li Chiao-erh's younger brother, the musician Li Ming. Ch'un-mei learned to play the *p'i-p'a*, Yü-hsiao the psaltery, Ying-ch'un the three-stringed banjo, and Lan-hsiang the two-stringed barbarian fiddle. Every day Li Ming was regaled with: Three teas and six repasts,³⁹ and he received five taels a month as wages.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also had a twelve-foot-wide segment of the frontage of his residence opened up, and he weighed out two thousand taels of silver to his manager, Scurry-about Pen, with which to start a pawnshop on the premises. His son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, was given charge of the keys of both shops and made responsible for collecting unpaid debts, but he did not handle the stock. Scurry-about Pen kept the accounts and weighed out the merchandise, while the manager, Fu Ming, was in overall charge of both the pharmaceutical business and the pawnshop, with responsibility for assessing the silver and buying the stock. The second floor of P'an Chin-lien's belvedere was used as a warehouse for the pharmaceuticals, and the second floor of Li P'ing-erh's dwelling was lined with shelves for the accommodation of the articles of clothing and jewelry, antiques, books, paintings, and curios pledged by customers of the pawnshop.

The outlay of silver in the pawnshop on any given day was considerable. Every day Ch'en Ching-chi got up early and went to bed late. He carried the keys and went over the receipts and expenditures with the manager. He wrote a good hand and was quick at arithmetic. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw all this, he was as pleased as could be.

One day, while they were sharing a meal in the front reception hall, he said to him, "Son-in-law, the fact that you show such aptitude for business here in my household would be a source of great comfort to your father in the Eastern Capital if he only knew about it. I, too, have found someone I can trust. As the saying goes: If you have a son, rely on your son;

If you lack a son, rely on your son-in-law.⁴⁰

In consideration of what you and my daughter are to me, if I should happen to die without a son of my own, all this property of mine might someday be yours."

"Your son has suffered the misfortune," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "of seeing his family implicated in legal trouble. Distantly separated from his father and mother, he has sought refuge here with his parents-in-law and has been fortunate enough to find favor in their sight.

My obligations to you are so great,

I can hardly repay them dead or alive.

But I am still young and ignorant. My only hope is that you will both be patient with me. How could I presume to expect anything more?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he had a way with words and was intelligent and quick-witted, he was more pleased with him than ever. From that time on, he relied on him to handle all the correspondence that came in or out of the

household, in matters great or small, in the form of letters, invitations, lists of presents, and so forth. When guests came, he was always invited to help entertain them, and whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing drank tea or ate a meal his company was felt to be indispensable.

How could he have known that this young scamp was really: A needle in a wad of cotton;

A thorn in the flesh?⁴¹

Or that he was given to:

Constantly peeping through embroidered curtains
to steal a peek at Chia Wu;

Frequently invading the innermost chambers
to purloin the perfume of Han Shou?⁴²
There is a poem that testifies to this:

A winsome son-in-law on the "eastern couch"⁴³
is much to be desired;
How much the more so if he is in his prime,
a prepossessing youth.
When guests are entertained he always finds
a place at the table;
As a matter of course he is given free run
of the postern gates.
In both front compound and rear courtyard⁴⁴
he flirts egregiously;
Under the guise of foolish frolicking
he hides his treachery.
However much you may sing his praises
for being "half a son";
In the final analysis his bones and flesh
form no link with your own.

Days and nights speed by like arrows;
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.
Before one has finished enjoying the mid-autumn moon,
The chrysanthemums are blooming on the eastern hedge.
High in the sky the desolate wild geese
wing their way south;
Before you know it, snowflakes cover the ground.

One day, during the third decade of the eleventh month, Hsi-men Ch'ing's club convened for a drink in the home of his friend Cadger Ch'ang, but the party began to break up early. Before even waiting for the lamps to be lit, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, along with Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu, and the four of them set off on horseback together. No sooner had they emerged from Cadger Ch'ang's gate than, lo and behold: Dense masses of dark clouds, appeared in the heavens and, all of a sudden:

Fluttering and swirling,
A skyful of snowflakes came drifting down.

"Brother," said Sponger Ying, "if we were to go home at such an hour as this our families would hardly be prepared to receive us. I know it's been some time since you've been into the licensed quarter to see Li Kuei-chieh. Today, just as 'Meng Hao-jan Braved the Snow to Look for Plum Blossoms,'⁴⁵ we ought to take advantage of the fact that it's snowing to go pay her a visit."

"Brother Ying the Second is right," said Sticky Chu. "Every month, whether you're kept away by wind and rain or not, you shell out twenty taels of silver to maintain her as your mistress. If you don't even bother to visit her, she's certainly having an easy time of it."

Allowing himself to be persuaded by this barrage of:

First a word from you,
Then a sentence from me,

on the part of his three companions, Hsi-men Ch'ing, there and then, redirected his horse into East Street and headed in the direction of the licensed quarter. By the time they arrived at Li Kuei-chieh's establishment it was already getting dark. They found the lamps and candles in the reception room already lit and a maidservant busy sweeping the floor. After the old lady and Li Kuei-ch'ing had come out to greet them, four folding chairs were set out and they sat down.

"I'm afraid Kuei-chieh arrived late at your house the other day," said the old procuress, "and imposed on your hospitality. Thank you also for the handkerchief and trinkets your Sixth Lady was kind enough to give her." "She fared none too well, I fear," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I didn't want to keep them too late, so as soon as the guests left, I sent them home."

As he spoke, the madam ordered tea to be served, and when they were done with the tea, a maidservant set the table and furnished it with appropriate appetizers.

"What's become of Kuei-chieh?" Hsi-men Ch'ing finally asked.

"Kuei-chieh has been at home waiting for you for days on end, Kinsman," the madam said, "but you have not seen fit to pay her a visit. Today just happens to be her fifth maternal aunt's birthday, and she sent a sedan chair for her, so she's gone out to help celebrate her aunt's birthday."

Gentle reader take note: It so happens that in this world Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, and singing girls are three professions of which it may be said: If they do not see the color of your money,

They will not open their eyes.
Despising the poor and toadying to the rich;⁴⁶
Prevarication and trickery,
Are two things they cannot do without.

The fact is that Li Kuei-chieh had not really gone out to help celebrate her fifth maternal aunt's birthday. In recent days, seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was remiss in coming to see her, she had taken up with a certain Ting the Second, whose sobriquet was Ting Shuang-ch'iao, the son of Mr. Ting, the silk merchant, from Hang-chou. Having disposed of a thousand taels worth of silk, he was staying at an inn in the vicinity and was in the habit of coming into the licensed

quarter to patronize the prostitutes without his father's knowledge. His first move had been to offer ten taels of silver and two sets of heavy Hang-chou silk clothing for Li Kuei-chieh's favors, as a consequence of which he had spent the last two nights with her. Only a moment ago, he had been drinking with Li Kuei-chieh in her room when Hsi-men Ch'ing had unexpectedly arrived. The old procuress had hurriedly bundled Kuei-chieh and her customer off to a little-used room in the third courtyard at the back of the house to get them out of the way.

At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who took the madam's story at face value, said, "Well, old lady, even if Kuei-chieh isn't here, bring on the wine and we'll await her return at our leisure."

The old procuress retired to the kitchen and did her best to expedite the proceedings, so that wine and delicacies, along with additional appetizers, were quickly forthcoming and soon covered the surface of the table. As for Li Kuei-ch'ing: The bridges on her psaltery were ranged like wild geese;

The songs that she performed were set to new melodies;
as she endeavored to entertain them. The company was soon busy:

Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.

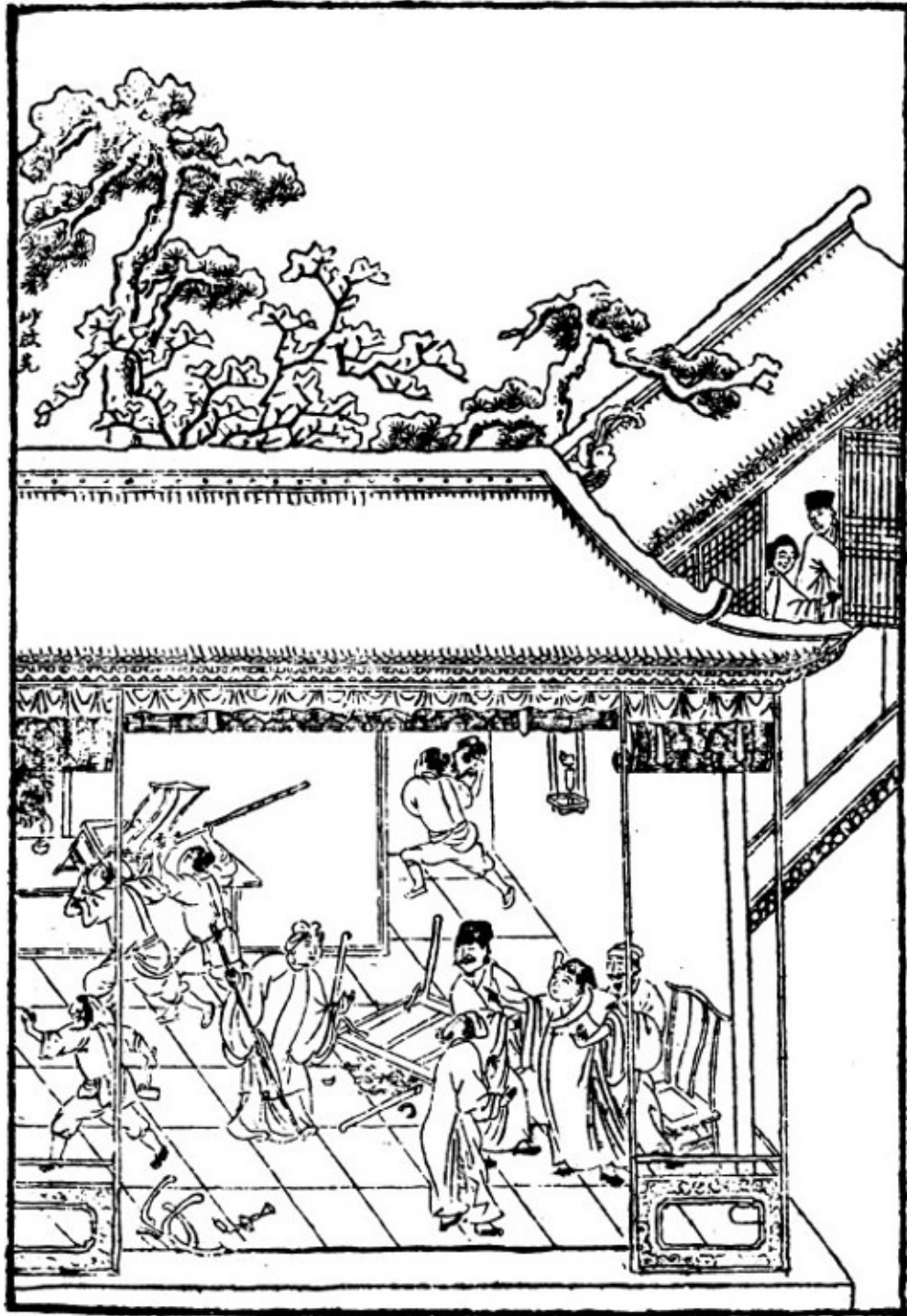
Just as they were settling down to enjoy their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to go to the back of the house to relieve himself. This was one of those occasions on which: Something was destined to happen.

Suddenly he became aware of the sound of people laughing in an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard. As soon as he had finished relieving himself he went up to the window of the room in question and stole a peek. What should he see inside but Li Kuei-chieh drinking wine in the company of a southerner who was wearing a square-cut scholar's cap. Before he knew it: A fire blazed up in his heart.⁴⁷

He strode back to the front of the house and, with a single movement of his hand, turned over the table at which his companions were drinking, smashing the saucers and cups to smithereens. He then called out the four page boys who had accompanied him to look after the horse, P'ing-an, Tai-an, Hua-t'ung, and Ch'in-t'ung, and: Without permitting any further explanation,

ordered them to smash up the doors, windows, walls, beds, and curtains of the Li family establishment.

Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu did their best to restrain him, but to no avail. Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to protest, again and again, that he was going to drag out that jailbird of a southerner and that painted face, truss them up together with a single length of rope, and lock them up in his gatehouse.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Wreaks Havoc in the Verdant Spring Bordello

Now Ting the Second was not a brave man, and when he heard the rumpus that was being kicked up outside he was so frightened he hid under the bed in the inner room and called out to Kuei-chieh to save him.

"Phooey!" said Kuei-chieh. "You can depend on my mother, whatever happens. It doesn't amount to anything. Let him blow off steam if he wants to, but no matter how he blusters, you stay where you are."

To resume our story, when the old procuress saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had made a wreck of the place: Neither hurriedly nor hastily,

she made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, and said a few inconsequential words to smooth things over. This had the effect of making Hsi-men Ch'ing even angrier and, pointing his finger at her, he began to curse. There

is a song to the tune “Courtyard Full of Fragrance” that testifies to this: Madam, you are not a good sort of person.

Welcoming the new and seeing off the old,⁴⁸
You live off beauty by prostituting it.
With specious words you would deceive me,
Faultfinding here and eulogizing there.⁴⁹
In your house alone I must have spent,
At least a thousand taels of yellow gold.
You sell dog meat advertised as mutton.⁵⁰
I'll tell you what you really are:
One of those vixens who bewitch people,
Whose every wile is absolutely false.

The madam responded in kind:

Good sir, let me tell you something.
If you stop patronizing my daughter,
I'll find a replacement for you.
My whole house looks only to her,
For its means of livelihood.
If we are to feed and clothe ourselves,
We are dependent on her for firewood and rice.
There is no excuse for your raving like thunder.⁵¹
You may object that we are lacking in good faith,
But you forget your own deficiencies;
She's not your wedded wife by aid of go-between.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard her reply, he became even angrier, and almost came to blows with the old lady. This was only prevented thanks to the strenuous efforts of Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu, who had to intervene physically in order to restrain him.

After creating this great disturbance, Hsi-men Ch'ing swore an oath never to cross the threshold of the Li family establishment again and then mounted his horse and rode home through the snow. Truly: To sleep with every casual flower, when they

number in the millions;
Is not as good a plan as going home to share
a bed with your wife.
Even though, beside your pillow, she may leave
something to be desired;
She will sleep with you until the morrow dawns
without demanding money.⁵²

Or again:

Such women do no weaving and their
menfolk do not plow;
The flaunting of their beauty is their
only stock in trade.
Though your wealth be measured by the peck
or by the cartload;
It will not suffice to fill the madam's
bottomless pit.

Or again:

Their false feelings and specious sentiments
resemble the real thing;
With deceptive phrases and clever words⁵³
they put on a good show.

How many otherwise intelligent gentlemen
have been done in by them?
Only after death will their tongues
be plucked out in Hell.⁵⁴

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 21

WU YÜEH-NIANG SWEEPS SNOW IN ORDER TO BREW TEA; YING PO-CHÜEH RUNS ERRANDS ON BEHALF OF FLOWERS

Troubled in her sorrowing heart,
she murmurs to herself,
“This good affinity has turned out
to be a bad affinity.”¹
In retrospect she rails against
that “willow” in the quarter;²
Though shamefaced to confront
the “lotus” of the Jade Well.³
Only because his spring dalliance
has been carelessly revealed,
Have the phoenix mates been forced
to go their separate ways.
Who is able to dip up the waters
of the River of Heaven,
That they may wash their former sins
completely away?⁴

THE STORY GOES that by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the quarter it was already the second watch. When the page boys had succeeded in getting someone to open the front door he dismounted and:

Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade,
made his way as far as the inner gate which led into the rear compound. He found the gate standing half open though there was:

Not a human sound to be heard,⁵
from the courtyard within.
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
“There's something strange about this.”

Thereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing stealthily took up a position behind the whitewashed spirit screen just inside the gate in order to see what was up. No sooner had he done so than he saw Hsiao-yü come out and set up a table in the courtyard beneath the loggia that ran along one side.

It so happens that Wu Yüeh-niang, ever since the falling out with her husband that had resulted in their no longer being on speaking terms with each other, had been in the habit of fasting on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh days of each month. On these occasions she would pay obeisance to the dipper and burn incense at night, praying to Heaven that it would protect her husband and grant him an early change of heart so that he could devote himself to the regulation of the household and the begetting of an heir in order to accomplish:

The plan of a lifetime.⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing was quite unaware of this. He continued to look on as Hsiao-yü finished setting out the incense table. Before long Yüeh-niang emerged from her quarters, carefully attired, and proceeded into the courtyard where she ignited a full censer of incense.

Looking up at the sky and making a deep bow she prayed, “Your humble servant, nee Wu, has been joined in wedlock with Hsi-men Ch'ing. However, because my husband is enamored of the ‘mist and flowers’; though yet in the prime of life, he remains without an heir. Wife and concubines, there are six of us in all, but none of us has borne a child, so that we lack anyone to continue the care and worship of the ancestral graves. Day and night I worry about this lest we be left with no recourse. Therefore, without my husband's knowledge, I have sworn an oath that on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh of each month, beneath the moon and stars, I shall offer up a prayer to the ‘three luminaries,’ beseeching them to protect my husband and grant him an early change of heart, that he may abandon his extravagant ways and devote himself wholeheartedly to family affairs. That one of his six consorts, no matter which, should soon bear him a son, in order to accomplish:

The plan of a lifetime,
is my sincerest wish.”

Truly:

As she slips out of her chamber
the night air is cool;
Fragrant mist fills the courtyard,
the moon glimmers bright.
Bowing to Heaven, she spills out
all her heartfelt desires;
Quite unaware that anyone might be
listening beyond the wall.

Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not overheard this, but having heard Yüeh-niang's prayer:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,

"It turns out I've been mistaken in my resentment toward her all this time. Everything she said was inspired by concern for my welfare. She and I really are husband and wife after all."

Suiting action to words, he strode out from behind the whitewashed spirit screen and embraced Yüeh-niang. His wife, who had just finished with the incense burning and never expected him to show up on such a snowy night, was so startled that her first impulse was to flee back to her room. But Hsi-men Ch'ing prevented this by embracing her with both arms.

"Darling," he said, "I had absolutely no idea that you've really been inspired by concern for me. I've been wrong about you all this time I've been giving you the cold shoulder. By now, I'm afraid, it's rather late to repent."

"You must have lost your way in the snow," said Yüeh-niang. "I dare say these really aren't the quarters you're looking for, anyway. You're barking up the wrong tree. I'm that 'undutiful whore,' remember. Since there's nothing between us, where do you get that stuff about concern for you? What reason should you have to pay any further attention to me? If we were never to see each other again:

For a thousand years or all eternity,
it would be all right with me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing took Yüeh-niang by the hand and pulled her into the room where he proceeded to look her over by lamplight. She was wearing her usual attire: a scarlet jacket of Lu-chou silk that opened down the middle, and a skirt of a soft yellow material. On her head she wore a sable toque over her chignon and, in front of her coiffure, a tiara of gold representing "Kuan-yin in her full glory," setting off to perfection:

Her silver salver face, modeled in plaster,
carved of jade;
The clouds over Ch'u peaks, her cicada chignon
and raven tresses.

How could Hsi-men Ch'ing have been anything but captivated?

Without further ado, he made a deep bow before Yüeh-niang, saying, "I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, have been so deluded for a time that I have failed to heed your sound advice and flouted your good intentions. Truly:

Though I have eyes I have failed to identify
the 'Jade of the Ch'u Mountains';
And have treated it as though it were
no more than an ordinary stone.⁷

It is after the event that one recognizes a gentleman;⁸
Then and only then does the good man become known.

All I can do is hope that you'll forgive me."

"I'm not the one you've set your heart on," said Yüeh-niang. "No matter what I do, I don't seem to be able to suit your fancy. Since when did I ever offer you any sound advice? Just leave me alone in my room here to:

Fend for myself.⁹

There's no need for you to pay any attention to me. There isn't room for you in here, anyway. You'd better get out of here before I have the maids throw you out."

"I've had:

A bellyful of anger,¹⁰

out of the blue today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and came home through the snow just to tell you about it."

"Whether you get angry or not is no concern of mine," said Yüeh-niang. "Far be it from me to try to control your conduct. Why don't you go tell it to someone who does?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Yüeh-niang refused to give him so much as a look, he bent his knees, adopted the posture of a dwarf, and knelt down on the ground before her.

Sticking out his neck like a chicken
on the chopping block,¹¹

he began to plead with her, saying, "Darling this," and, "Darling that."

Yüeh-niang could abide it no longer and said, "If you're really going to carry on that shamelessly, I'll call the maid." As good as her word, she called out for Hsiao-yü.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Hsiao-yü coming in, he promptly leapt to his feet and, casting about for an excuse to get her out of the room, said, "The snow outside must have covered the incense table by now. Why don't you go bring it inside?"

"I've already brought it in," said Hsiao-yü.

Yüeh-niang couldn't help laughing. "What a shameless character," she said. "Even the maids have to put up with your barefaced effrontery."

Hsiao-yü went out and Hsi-men Ch'ing once again got down on his knees to plead with his wife.

"If I didn't care for the opinion of the world,"¹² said Yüeh-niang, "it would serve you right if I paid you no heed for another hundred years."

Only after this speech did Yüeh-niang consent to sit down with her husband and order Yü-hsiao to serve him some tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon told her the whole story, how that day, after the meeting of the club at Ch'ang Shih-chieh's place had broken up, he had allowed himself to be persuaded by Ying Po-chüeh and the others to pay a visit to the Li family establishment, and how, thus and so, they had gotten into an altercation.

"I had the page boys tear the Li place apart," he said. "If the others hadn't intervened, I would have done worse. I've sworn an oath never to cross the threshold of the quarter again."

"Whether you go there or not is no concern of mine," said Yüeh-niang. "I wouldn't presume to tell such a simpleton what to do. But as long as you're shelling out the hard cash to maintain her as your mistress, if you don't even bother to visit her, you can be sure she'll manage to take on someone else. Where people in that profession are concerned:

You can tie up their bodies, but

You can't tie up their hearts.

Do you really think you can put your seal on her and make it stick?"

"What you say is true enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he started to undress, sent the maids out of the room, and proposed to go to bed with Yüeh-niang and seek his pleasure with her.

"If I let you into the kitchen,

You'll only make a pig of yourself,"

said Yüeh-niang. "It's concession enough if I allow you into my bed tonight. If you've got anything else in mind, forget it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by exposing his organ to Yüeh-niang.

"It's all your doing," he joked. "You've made him so angry he's having a dumbstruck fit."

"What do you mean 'he's having a dumbstruck fit'?" demanded Yüeh-niang.

"If he's not having a dumbstruck fit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come his eye is bulging so wide, but he can't get a word out?"

"You must be delirious," responded Yüeh-niang. "What makes you think I've got even half an eye for the likes of you?"

At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Without permitting any further explanation,

lifted Yüeh-niang's two fresh white legs onto his shoulders, inserted his organ into her vagina,¹³ and gave free rein to:

The oriole's abandon and the butterfly's pursuit.

Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,

They are not yet willing to call a halt.¹⁴

Truly, it is a case of:

Among the crab apple boughs, orioles

dart quickly to and fro;

Between the halcyon hued rafters, swallows

parley incessantly.¹⁵

Before they knew it they arrived at that stage in which:

The transfusing touch of the magic rhinoceros horn

Produces a pleasure that cannot be exceeded.

Her musky tongue is partially protruded,

The fragrance of her rouge pervades his lips.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing's excitement was at its height he softly besought Yüeh-niang to call him "Daddy." Yüeh-niang accordingly:

Beneath lowered curtains, on their shared pillow,¹⁶

Responded as voluptuously as anyone could ask,¹⁷

calling him "Darling" without cease.

That night the two of them indulged:

The passions evoked by clouds and rain,

Joining their heads and twining their necks,

within the bed curtains. Truly:

When feelings converge, one is apt to forget

what happens to a brocade girdle;

When overcome by excitement, who cares about

the dropping of a golden hairpin?
There is a poem that testifies to this:

Coiffure in disarray, hairpins askew,¹⁸
she is deeply stirred;
Her passions in full sway, she dreads
the interminable night.
At evening, all alone, she stands
before her dressing mirror;
Not bothering to paint her eyebrows
into pale spring peaks.¹⁹

That evening husband and wife enjoyed themselves together. But no more of this.

To resume our story, the next day, bright and early in the morning, Meng Yü-lou paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. Before going in she called out, "Is that slavey, Number Six, up yet?"

"Mother's just gotten up. She's doing her hair," said Ch'un-mei. "Won't you come in and sit down, Third Lady?"

Meng Yü-lou went inside and found Chin-lien sitting in front of her dressing mirror combing her fragrant clouds of hair.

"I've come to tell you about something that's happened," she said. "Do you know about it yet?"

"In an out-of-the-way corner like this," said Chin-lien, "how would I ever hear about anything? Really, what's up?"

"When Father got home last night during the second watch," said Yü-lou, "he went into the master suite and made it up with Mistress Wu. He spent the night in her room."

"We tried so hard to persuade her," said Chin-lien, "and she kept repeating that she'd never make it up with him in a hundred or two hundred years. Now she's wantonly taken the initiative by foisting herself upon him without any further urging."

"I only found out about it this morning," said Yü-lou. "My senior maid, Lan-hsiang, overheard the page boys talking about it in the kitchen. It seems that yesterday Father and Ying the Second were having a drink at Li Kuei-chieh's house in the quarter when they caught the whore out at something and smashed the place to pieces. He came home through the snow in high dudgeon and when he reached the inner gate found the First Lady burning night incense. He must have overheard something that brought about a reconciliation between them."

"According to her maid, the two of them talked away the night together. She said Father got down on his knees to the First Lady, calling her 'Mother,' and that the First Lady herself put on such a show it was enough to give you the creeps. I guess if she chooses to carry on that way there's nothing more to be said about it. But if it had been anyone else, you can be sure she would have been ticked off for her wantonness."

"It's lucky for her she's a principal wife," said Chin-lien, picking up where Yü-lou had left off. "Who knows what she's capable of?"

She's such a practiced old hand.

If you're going to burn night incense you ought to do your praying silently. Whoever heard of making a performance out of it only in order to attract your husband's attention? The very idea! Without any urging, to go and make it up with your husband on the sly. It would have been more becoming of her to tough it out with him. She's forever hypocritically protesting her own virtue."

"It's not just a case of hypocritically protesting her own virtue," said Yü-lou. "She really wanted to make it up with him, but couldn't bring herself to admit it. She may have claimed to be:

A crazy wife who will never give in,

but that was only because she was afraid that if she allowed us to intercede we might:

Engage in idle tittle-tattle,²⁰

at her expense after the fact, saying that, 'when the two of you had that altercation it was only thanks to our intervention that you were reconciled.' Instead of which, the one of them happened to come home in high dudgeon from the quarter just when the other was burning night incense. A perfect coincidence! Truly:

In seeking a match they dispensed with
both go-between and witness;

Secretly tying their love-knot together
all by themselves.

"Right now you and I must contrive some way to prevent her from hogging all the credit. As soon as you've done with your hair, go tell Li P'ing-erh about it. If the two of us each come up with five mace of silver, we ought to be able to get Li P'ing-erh to contribute a tael, since she was the occasion of the whole to-do in the first place. Then we can throw a party today. On the one hand, it will give us a chance to offer a toast to the couple, and on the other hand, it will provide a fitting occasion for the master and mistress of the household to appreciate the snow and enjoy themselves for a day. Why not?"

"You're right," responded Chin-lien. "I wonder if Father has any prior commitments today."

"During a heavy snow like this, what commitments could he have?" said Yü-lou. "When I came over here the two of them hadn't even stirred. The door to the master suite had just been opened and Hsiao-yü was taking in the water."

Chin-lien hastily finished doing her hair and accompanied Yü-lou over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. They found her still in bed.

"The Third Lady and the Fifth Lady have come to see you," Ying-ch'un reported.

Yü-lou and Chin-lien went inside, saying, "Sister Li, you've really got it made. Still abed at such an hour.

The lazy dragon is just beginning to uncoil itself."

Chin-lien stuck her hand in under the quilt and discovered an incense burner for fumigating the bedclothes in the shape of a silver globe.²¹

"Sister Li has laid an egg," she said, pulling aside the covers as she spoke and revealing the white flesh of the body that lay within.

Li P'ing-erh made haste to get into her clothes.

"That's enough of your tricks, Fifth Sister," said Yü-lou. "Sister Li, it's time you got up. There's something we've come to tell you about. Yesterday, thus and so, Father and our elder sister were reconciled. Each of us is going to put up five mace of silver. You ought to give a little more since you were the occasion of the trouble between them in the first place. It's snowing heavily today and we really ought to do something to appreciate the snow. So we thought we'd throw a party and invite Father and our elder sister, to spend some time with us. What do you say?"

"I'll be happy to contribute whatever you suggest," said Li P'ing-erh.

"A tael ought to be sufficient," said Chin-lien. "Weigh it out so we can go back to the rear compound and see what we can get from Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o."

Li P'ing-erh put on her clothes and bound her feet, telling Ying-ch'un, in the meantime, to open the trunk and get out the silver. She came up with a piece which Chin-lien put in the scale and found to weigh one tael, two mace, and five candareens.

Yü-lou suggested that Chin-lien stay and keep Li P'ing-erh company while she did her hair. "I'll go back to the rear compound myself and see what I can get from Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o," she said.

Chin-lien looked on as Li P'ing-erh washed her face and worked on her hair. Nearly two hours elapsed before Yü-lou returned from the rear compound.

"If I'd only known, I never would have undertaken this business," she complained. "It's something that concerns us all, and yet you'd think I was trying to get something for nothing out of her. The little whore said, 'I'm so out of favor our husband doesn't bother to come into my room anymore. Where would I get any silver from?' When I insisted, she wouldn't come up with so much as a mace. I pled with her for half the day before she produced this silver hairpin. Put it in the scale and see how much it weighs."

Chin-lien did as she was told and it was found to weigh only three mace and seven candareens.

"What about Li Chiao-erh?" she asked.

"At first she said, 'I don't have anything of my own,' " reported Yü-lou. " 'Although the money for household expenses may pass through my hands every day, everything has to be accounted for. I only receive enough to defray actual costs. There isn't anything left over.' I had to argue with her half the day before I got anywhere. 'How can you say you don't have any money to spare when you're in charge of the household expenses,' I demanded. 'It's not as though the rest of us are any better off. Are you claiming that:

The summer sun just happened to skip your door?

It's something that concerns us all, but you're just not going to cooperate. So much for that!' I had to stalk off in a huff before she was embarrassed enough to send the maid after me and come up with something at last. All this trouble for no reason at all!"

Chin-lien took Li Chiao-erh's contribution and put it in the scale. It came to just four mace and eight candareens.

"That simulating whore!" she cursed. "No matter what happens, even without any other funny business, she simply will not give full value, but is always just a little short."

"She's quick enough to get out the big scale with its yellow yard and weigh out the money²² when it's for herself," said Yü-lou, "but if you want to get anything out of *her*, it's like trying to extract it from her bones. Nobody has a good word to say for her."

When they had toted up the money, which came to three taels and one mace in all, including the contributions of Yü-lou and Chin-lien, they sent Hsiu-ch'un to fetch Tai-an.

Before anything else, Chin-lien asked him, "When you were out with Father yesterday, what was the altercation at the Li place all about?"

Tai-an told them the whole story. "They had a meeting of their club at Ch'ang Shih-chieh's house, but it broke up early, and Father ended up accompanying Messrs. Ying and Hsieh to Li Kuei-chieh's place. The madam reported that she was not at home, having gone to her fifth maternal aunt's house to celebrate her birthday. Who would have thought that, some time later, when Father went to the back of the establishment to relieve himself, he found the painted face and a Southerner drinking wine together and realized she had been giving him the slip. He was so enraged that:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he ordered us to tear the whore's place apart and would have had the Southerner and the painted face locked up together in the gatehouse had Ying the Second and the others not intervened. Father then got on his horse and came home in a huff, swearing along the way that he would take steps to settle the whore's hash."

"That lousy whore!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "I'll bet she thought she had:

A permanent grip on the honey jar,
but now, somehow or other:

It's ended up smashed to pieces."²³

"Did Father really say that?" she asked Tai-an.

"Would I have the nerve to deceive you?" he replied.

"You lousy jailbird," said Chin-lien. "Even if he does neglect her, she is your master's mistress, after all. Since when are you entitled to curse her? I remember how it was at the outset, whenever I asked you to do anything you used to claim you were too busy. 'Father has sent me to deliver some money to Auntie Kuei's place,' you used to say, giving such a sweet inflection to the words 'Auntie Kuei.' Now that she's fallen out of favor and your master's angry with her, even you start calling her a whore. Just wait and see if I don't tell your father about it the next chance I get."

"Ai-ya, Fifth Lady," exclaimed Tai-an.

"The sun must have risen in the West today,"²⁴

that you should be taking her part for a change. If Father hadn't called her a whore on the way home, do you think I would have dared do so?"

"If your father cursed her, that's his business," said Chin-lien. "Does that entitle you to do so?"

"If I'd known you were going to give me such a hard time about it, Fifth Lady," said Tai-an, "I never would have mentioned it to you."

"That's enough out of you, you little jailbird," said Yü-lou. "Here are three taels and one mace of silver, with which we want you and Lai-hsing to go buy some things for us, thus and so. We're planning to give a party today and invite your father and the First Lady to join us, so we can enjoy the snow and have a drink together. If you can manage to give us a break on the squeeze, I'll get the Fifth Lady not to tell your father what you said."

"If you send me on an errand," said Tai-an, "would I have the nerve to take any squeeze?"

Thereupon, together with Lai-hsing, he went off to buy the provisions.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had just gotten up and was performing his ablutions in the master suite when he saw Lai-hsing coming through the snow on his way to the kitchen with a chicken, a goose, and other comestibles, while Tai-an came in carrying a jug of Chin-hua wine.

"Who's that stuff for, that the servants are bringing in?" he asked Hsiao-yü.

"The ladies of the house are giving a party today," said Hsiao-yü. "They're going to invite you and the First Lady to join them in order to enjoy the snow."

"Where does that Chin-hua wine come from," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The Third Lady gave me the money to buy it," said Tai-an.

"Ai-ya," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We've got plenty of wine in the house already. What need is there to go out and buy any more?"

"Take the key to the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard," he instructed Tai-an, "and bring back two jugs of the high-quality jasmine wine you'll find there. We can mix some of this wine in with it."

Thereupon, in the living room of the master suite that opened onto the rear courtyard:

Standing screens and brocaded windbreaks like Shih

Ch'ung's²⁵ were set up;

Warming drapes of oiled paper sprigged with plum
blossoms were suspended.

Braziers were filled with animal-shaped briquettes;

All the appurtenances of a feast were duly arrayed.

It was not long before the necessary preparations in the kitchen were completed and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh came to invite Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang to join them.

Thereupon, Li Chiao-erh served the drinks, Meng Yü-lou held the flagon, P'an Chin-lien proffered the side dishes, and Li P'ing-erh also got down on her knees beside them. The first drink was offered to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Taking the cup in his hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, with a laugh, "My children, you've gone to a lot of trouble just to please the old man. A bow will suffice."

P'an Chin-lien, who was always quick on the uptake, interjected, "That's enough of your airs, my son. Do you think anyone here is going to kowtow to you while you remain on your feet? You're just like:

The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall;

The longer it stays there the hotter it gets."²⁶

If you don't get down on your knees you'll:

Forfeit a myriad years worth of fodder."²⁷

If it weren't for our elder sister, who do you think would be kowtowing to you today?"

Thereupon, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had been offered the first drink, the cup was refilled to the brim and Yüeh-niang was asked to assume the place of honor so that a drink could be offered to her in turn.

"None of you spoke a word about it," said Yüeh-niang. "Who would have thought you would go to so much trouble on my account?"

"It doesn't amount to anything," laughed Yü-lou. "We just thought we'd offer a cup of watery wine to our patriarch and matriarch after this heavy snow, to help them dispel their gloom. Sister, please be seated and accept our salutations."

Yüeh-niang refused to permit this and insisted on kowtowing to them in return.
“Unless you agree to be seated,” said Yü-lou, “the rest of us will refuse to get up from our knees.”
They bickered back and forth about it for some time before Yüeh-niang agreed to accept half a kowtow from them.
“Elder Sister,” said Chin-lien, in jest, “it’s only right that you should be forewarned. You may consent to forgive him this once, out of consideration for us, but if he should do anything of the kind to offend you again, we’ll wash our hands of the whole affair.”

Then, turning to Hsi-men Ch’ing, she continued, “What do you think you’re doing, remaining in your seat up there:
Playing the fool and putting on airs?
Why aren’t you down on your knees, offering Sister a cup of wine, and apologizing for your misconduct?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing merely laughed but did not move from his seat.
After Yüeh-niang was finally induced to accept the proffered drink, she got up from her place, ordered Yü-hsiao to hold the flagon, and poured a drink in return for each of her sisters. Only Sun Hsüeh-o received the wine on her knees. The others all accepted theirs with the ceremony appropriate to sisters of equal standing.

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch’ing and Yüeh-niang occupied the seats of honor at the head of the table, while Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P’an Chin-lien, Li P’ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh ranged themselves on either side.

“Sister Li,” said Chin-lien, “you really ought to offer our elder sister a cup of wine yourself, since you were the occasion of the whole to-do in the first place.

You hardly have to be as stiff as wood, like Old Lin.”²⁸

Li P’ing-erh actually rose from her seat and was going to follow Chin-lien’s suggestion, but Hsi-men Ch’ing stopped her, saying, “Don’t pay any attention to that little whore, she’s only fooling. We’ve already been presented with a round of drinks. There’s no need for any more.”

Only then did Li P’ing-erh desist.

Thereupon, Ch’un-mei, Ying-ch’un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, struck up a tune on their instruments, the *p’i-p’a*, psaltery, three-stringed banjo, and mandola. They sang the southern-style song suite that begins with the tune “Pomegranate Blossoms” and opens with the words:

It was the night of their assignation,²⁹

etc., etc.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing heard this, he asked, “Whose idea was it to sing this particular suite?”

“The Fifth Lady told us to sing it,” said Yü-hsiao.

Hsi-men Ch’ing gave P’an Chin-lien a look, saying, “You little whore! You can’t resist the temptation to:

Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves,³⁰
can you?”

“Who am I to tell them what to sing?” said Chin-lien. “You’re just picking on me again.”

“Why don’t we ask our son-in-law to join us for a bit?” said Yüeh-niang, and, suiting her action to her words, she dispatched a page boy to the front compound to convey the invitation.

Before long Ch’en Ching-chi showed up and bowed to each member of the party before taking a seat next to Hsi-men Ta-chieh. Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to provide him with a place setting. Now that the whole family was assembled:

Animal-shaped briquettes replenished golden braziers;

The finest wine of Yang-kao vintage was decanted.³¹

As they enjoyed the wine, Hsi-men Ch’ing glanced outside the rolled-up bamboo blinds and saw that the snow was falling heavily. It looked just like:

Shredded cotton wadding,³² or

Wildly dancing pear blossoms.³³

Truly, it was a magnificent snow. Behold:

Initially resembling willow catkins,

Gradually it turns into goose down.

Scarcely audible, it reminds one of crabs

moving across the sand;³⁴

In rich profusion, it is like shattered alabaster

piled on the pavement.³⁵

With every move one makes,

One’s clothes catch six-pointed stars;

At every other moment,

One must brush away the bee’s whiskers.³⁶

Now it flurries, now it stops;

The Dragon Lord is yet rehearsing

the steps of his dance.

The power of spring remains weak;

The Jade Maiden is still entranced

producing her whirlwind.
Enhancing jasper terraces,
Jade dragon's-scales appear to
pervade the firmament.³⁷
Brushing powdered foreheads,
White crane's-feathers seem to
settle gently to earth.³⁸

Truly:

Congeaing upon "towers of jade,"
its cold raises goose bumps;
Wavering before "silver seas,"
its dazzle creates a blur.³⁹

When Wu Yüeh-niang saw how much snow had accumulated on the T'ai-hu rockery⁴⁰ in front of the spirit screen, she got up from her place, told Hsiao-yü to fetch the tea jar, and proceeded in person to sweep up enough snow to brew some Phoenix Tablet Sparrow Tongue tea from Chiang-nan for the company.⁴¹ Truly:

Foaming whitecaps of brick tea,
break in white jade cups;
The pure bouquet of vintage wine,
bursts from the golden flagon.⁴²

As they were enjoying the tea, who should come in but Tai-an, who reported, "Li Ming has come. He's waiting in the front compound."

"Tell him to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long, Li Ming appeared. After performing a kowtow to the assembled company, he made a leg as well, and then stood deferentially to one side.

"You've arrived in the nick of time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Where've you been?"

"Nowhere in particular," said Li Ming. "I've been teaching a couple of youngsters at Eunuch Director Liu's house near Wine Vinegar Gate in the Northern Quarter. I thought I'd look in on them today, but then remembered that the young ladies at your place haven't got some of their songs quite right yet, so I came over here to see what I could do."

Hsi-men Ch'ing handed him what was left of the cup of tea, flavored with osmanthus and kumquats, that he had been drinking from, saying, "When you've finished with that, stick around and perform a song suite for us."

"Whatever you say," said Li Ming, retiring an appropriate distance to drink his tea.

When he had finished, he came forward, tuned the strings of his psaltery, and:

Commencing to sing in full voice;
Facing forward with his feet together,

launched into the song suite on winter that begins with the tune "Spring in the Metropolis" and opens with the words:

A cold wind has overspread the land,⁴³

etc., etc.



Wu Yüeh-niang Sweeps Snow in Order to Brew Tea

When Li Ming had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing called him over in order to reward him with a drink of wine. He told Hsiao-yü, who was holding a round-handled chicken-crop flagon with a curved spout, to pour a full measure into a peach-shaped cup of silver-mounted cloisonné. Li Ming knelt on the ground and drank off three full cups. Hsi-men Ch'ing also selected from the delicacies on the table a saucerful of bulging white steamed buns, a bowl of clam broth flavored with leeks and marinated bamboo shoots, a platter of large slices of fat jellied goose, as well as saucersful of savory cured coney, steamed dried shad, and squab baked in junket, and handed them to Li Ming on a tray.

Li Ming retired an appropriate distance and gobbled it all down in:

Three mouthfuls and two swallows.⁴⁴

When he had licked the platter clean and wiped his lips with a napkin, he came back and stood at attention beside the

latticework partition.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him all about what had happened at Li Kuei-chieh's place the day before.

"I didn't hear a word about it," said Li Ming. "I haven't been over there very often recently. If you stop to think about it though, it's not really Kuei-chieh's fault. It's all the doing of our old madam, Li the Third. You mustn't be too upset about it. I'll give her a real telling off the next time I see her."

That day, the party continued until the first watch, and the wife and concubines of the household had a good time together. Ch'en Ching-chi and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were the first to leave, going straight back to their quarters in the front compound. After that, when the wine was about to run out, Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded Li Ming with another drink and sent him on his way.

"If you go over there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing in parting, "don't say anything about having been here today."

"I understand," replied Li Ming.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered a servant to see him to the door and the front gate was closed for the night. Wife and concubines then went their separate ways, but Hsi-men Ch'ing spent another night with Yüeh-niang in the master suite. There is a poem that testifies to this:

A marriage affinity bound with red cord⁴⁵
is not to be doubted;
Having had to burn their door-bars for fuel,
they are of one mind.⁴⁶
Like fish and water, perfectly suited,⁴⁷
from this time forth;
Their mutual feelings will surely sustain
a lifetime of bliss.⁴⁸

To resume our story, by the next day the snow had cleared. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta had been induced by the offer of a roast goose and a jug of wine to act as emissaries for the Li family establishment, which was worried that Hsi-men Ch'ing might be moved by anger to attempt the ruination of their house. They therefore showed up in order to respectfully invite Hsi-men Ch'ing to accompany them into the quarter and accept the proffered rites of propitiation.

Yüeh-niang had finished her morning toilet and was eating a breakfast snack with Hsi-men Ch'ing when who should come in but the page boy, Tai-an, with the report that Master Ying and Master Hsieh had come to visit and were waiting in the reception room out front.

Hsi-men Ch'ing put down the piece of pastry in his hand and was halfway out the door when Yüeh-niang stopped him, saying, "Who knows what those two ghost-snatching demons have come for? You might just as well finish your breakfast before rushing off to meet them. Let them cool their heels outside a while. What are you in such a fearful hurry to get out of here for, anyway? There's no telling where they'll drag you off to in the snow."

"Tell the page boy to bring the pastry out front," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll share it with the two of them."

So saying, he got up and started out of the room.

"When you're through eating," Yüeh-niang instructed him, "don't allow yourself to be inveigled into going off somewhere with those two. After a heavy snow like this, you really ought to stay home and relax for a change. Tonight we're going to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday."

"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he went out to meet Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, who greeted him with a bow, saying, "Brother, after you went home in a huff the other night, we really gave them a hard time. 'All this while,' we said, 'our brother's been:

Spending his money and wasting his goods,
here in your house. Even if he hasn't been around much lately, that's no reason for you to change your tune. After all, if you let your painted-face take up with some Southerner on the sly:

Enemies are apt to meet in narrow straits.⁴⁹

If he catches them red-handed, how could he be anything but angry? And, quite aside from our brother's anger, we can hardly be expected to countenance such goings on ourselves.'

"Mother and daughters alike, we really told them a thing or two. They're all thoroughly embarrassed about the whole thing. Early this morning they invited us over to their place and got down on their knees to us with a good deal of weeping and wailing. They're so worried about what you might do in your anger that they've prepared a cup of watery wine and want you to come back so they can make it up to you."

"I'm no longer angry," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'm not going back into the quarter anymore."

"It's only right that you should be annoyed," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you stop to think about it though, it's not really Kuei-chieh's fault. That Ting the Second was actually a patron of her elder sister, Li Kuei-ch'ing, and never made any overtures to Kuei-chieh. It all originated out of the fact that his father's boatload of goods was moored next to the boat of a National University student, named Ch'en, who is a fellow townsman of his. This Ch'en, whose sobriquet is Liang-huai, only arrived two days ago. He's the son of Administration Vice Commissioner Ch'en who formerly served in the Palace Library.

"This Ting the Second had engaged to pay ten taels of silver for a party at the Li place in order to entertain his fellow townsman Mr. Ch'en. He had just stopped by to deliver the money when we showed up, and Kuei-chieh, unable to think

of any other means of avoiding an awkward situation, concealed the presence of the Southerner by hiding him in the rear part of the compound, where you happened to catch sight of him.

"The truth of the matter is that he has never laid a hand on Kuei-chieh. Today, mother and daughters alike:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,

Kowtowing and performing obeisances,

begged the two of us to do whatever we could to induce you to pay them a visit so they could explain this misunderstanding to you yourselves and perhaps alleviate some of your anger."

"I've already made a vow to my wife that I would never set foot in the place again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's not that I'm still angry or anything like that. You can tell them that they have no cause for further concern. I've got some matters to attend to at home today, so I really can't go."

This reply threw his two visitors into such consternation that they fell to their knees and spoke with one voice, saying, "Brother, how can you say such a thing? It may not matter for you not to go, but since they have asked us to intercede on their behalf, it would look as though we had so little influence with you that we couldn't even get you to accede to an invitation. All you have to do is show up and sit for a while and then come home if you like."

By the time the two of them finished with their pitch:

As though their lives depended on it,
they had talked Hsi-men Ch'ing into giving his assent.

Before long, a table was set up and their host invited them to share the remainder of his breakfast pastry with him. When they had finished eating, soon thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to fetch his outdoor clothes.

Yüeh-niang, who was sitting with Meng Yü-lou when he came in, asked Tai-an, "Where's your father off to?"

"I have no idea," said Tai-an. "He only told me to come fetch his clothes."

"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang railed at him. "You think you can keep me in the dark, do you? If your father gets home late today, I'll hold you personally accountable. We're celebrating the eve of the Third Lady's birthday tonight, so you'd better get him home in plenty of time. If you wait until:

The sky is black and the earth is dark,
I'll see that you get a good beating, you lousy jailbird, if I have to do it myself."

"Why should you beat me, Mother?" said Tai-an. "What have I got to do with it?"

"I don't know why it is," said Yüeh-niang, "but as soon as he heard those two gaffers had come, he took off as though his life depended on it. We were eating breakfast at the time, but he dropped his bowl and headed out the door on the spot. Who knows where they may drag him off to:

Parading the campground and disturbing the dead,
or when he'll ever get home."

It was the twenty-sixth day of the eleventh month, the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and a family party had been prepared for the occasion. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the invitation of his two friends to accompany them into the licensed quarter. The Li family establishment had already prepared a regular feast in their main reception room and engaged two singing girls to help with the entertainment. Li Kuei-chieh and Li Kuei-ch'ing, all dressed up for the occasion, met their guests at the door. The old procuress came out and knelt down to offer her apologies for the misunderstanding. The two sisters served the wine and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta stood to either side, keeping up a steady stream of jokes and wisecracks.

"I wore away half the skin on my lips in getting your lover to come see you," said Ying Po-chüeh to Kuei-chieh. "And now you've no further use for me and don't even offer me a cup of wine. You've only got eyes for your lover, I can see. If he'd kicked up a fuss and refused to come, just now, not only would you have cried yourself blind and been reduced to making your living as an itinerant singer, but nobody would have cared a straw about you anymore. It's only my skills as a mouthpiece that have saved you from such a fate."

"You crazy beggar!" Kuei-chieh railed at him. "You're delirious. I'd only be wasting my breath on you. So you think I'd be reduced to being an itinerant singer, do you?"

"Just look at the way the lousy little whore carries on," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"After the sutra has been recited,

She takes the stick to the monk.⁵⁰

At this rate, she won't acknowledge anyone in the future. When he wouldn't come, you were all aflutter; but now that he's here:

Your wing feathers are dry enough for flight.⁵¹
Come over here and give me a kiss to fend off the cold."



Ying Po-chüeh Runs Errands on Behalf of Flowers

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,
he embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss.

"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" laughed Kuei-chieh. "Don't knock the wine all over Father."

"Little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I can see through your tricks. Right now you're so concerned about your lover, 'Don't knock the wine all over Father,' you say, giving such a sweet inflection to the word 'Father.' Am I nothing but a stepchild, that you haven't a word for me?"

"If I called you anything," said Kuei-chieh, "it would be 'my child.' "

"Come over here," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got a joke to tell you. A crab and a frog once swore brotherhood together and made a wager that whichever of them could jump over a ditch should be the elder brother. The frog made it to the other side in a hop or two. Just as the crab was about to jump, two girls came along to draw water and trussed him up with a piece of string to take home with them when they were through. They forgot about him when they were ready to leave, however, and neglected to take him. When the frog saw that his companion had not followed him he came back to see what had happened and asked, 'What's been keeping you?' 'I would have made it across,' said the crab, 'if I hadn't been tied up in knots by those two little whores.' "

Thereupon, the two sisters both took out after Ying Po-chüeh while Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed himself silly. They continued to enjoy themselves:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,

Laughing and joking at each other's expense.

But no more of this.

To resume our story, back at home Wu Yüeh-niang had prepared a feast, partly in return for the one to which she had been treated the day before, and partly in order to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, Aunt Yang, and two Buddhist nuns had been invited for the occasion and were seated in the master suite. As they waited the sun eventually set, but still there was no sign of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Yüeh-niang was becoming extremely agitated.

At this point, P'an Chin-lien, tugging Li P'ing-erh by the hand, said to Yüeh-niang with a giggle, "Elder Sister, since he still hasn't shown up, why don't the two of us go out to the front gate and look out for him?"

"Who's got the patience to look out for him?" said Yüeh-niang.

Chin-lien also took Meng Yü-lou by the hand, saying, "Let the three of us go out to look for him together."

"I want to hear the joke the abbess is about to tell," said Yü-lou. "Let's wait till she's done before we go."

Only then was Chin-lien induced to stay.

As they sat in a circle around the two nuns to hear what jokes they would tell, she said, "We only go for meaty fare. Don't give us any of that vegetarian stuff."

"Let them tell us whatever they want," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't be so demanding."

"Elder Sister," said Chin-lien, "you may not realize it but the abbess here can really tell a joke if she wants to. The last time she was here in the rear compound we refused to let her off and she came up with a whole string of good ones."

Then, turning to the abbess, she said, "If you've got any, let's have them."

At this point,

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,

Nun Wang, who was sitting on the k'ang, said, "A certain man was walking down the road when he encountered a tiger who wanted to eat him. 'Spare my life,' said the man, 'for the sake of my eighty-year-old mother who has no one else to look after her. Or else come home with me. I've got a pig there I could let you eat.' The tiger accordingly spared him and accompanied the man back to his home, where he told his mother about it. His mother, who was making bean curd at the time, couldn't bear to relinquish the pig, so she said to her son, 'Why don't you give him a few pieces of bean curd to eat?' 'You don't understand, Mother,' the son replied. 'He's not accustomed to vegetarian fare.' "

"That's no good," said Chin-lien. "We don't want to listen to any more of that vegetarian stuff. Let's have some meatier fare."

Nun Wang then told them another one. "A certain family with three daughters-in-law was celebrating the birthday of the head of the household. First it was the turn of the senior daughter-in-law to offer her father-in-law a cup of wine. 'Sir,' she said, 'you're just like a magistrate.' 'How am I like a magistrate?' the father-in-law asked. 'When you sit up there like that,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'everyone in the whole household is afraid of you. How can you say you're not like a magistrate?' Next it was the turn of the second daughter-in-law to offer a cup of wine. 'Sir,' she said, 'you're just like a yamen lictor of tigerlike ferocity.' 'How am I like a yamen lictor of tigerlike ferocity?' the father-in-law asked. 'When you shout a command,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'everyone in the whole household trembles. How can you say you're not like a yamen lictor?' You're really giving me a hard time,' the father-in-law said. Finally it was the turn of the third daughter-in-law to offer a cup of wine. She stepped forward and said, 'Sir, you're not really like a magistrate or like a lictor.' 'Then what am I like?' the father-in-law demanded to know. 'Sir,' said the daughter-in-law, 'you're just like a head yamen clerk.' 'How am I like a head yamen clerk?' the father-in-law asked. 'If you're not like a head yamen clerk,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'how is it that you have the run of all six chambers?' "⁵²

Everyone laughed at this joke.

"You bald-pated rascal!" said Chin-lien. "You've managed to get us all into it. What sort of a yamen clerk would have the nerve to venture into every chamber? The bald-pated dog would be lucky to escape with his nether regions in one piece."

After this exchange, Chin-lien, Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh went off to the front gate together to look for Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"What's Father doing away from home on such a snowy day?" asked Yü-lou. "I wonder where he's gone."

"If you ask me," said Chin-lien, "he's sure to be at that whore Li Kuei-chieh's house in the quarter."

"But he smashed the place up he was so upset with her," said Yü-lou. "He swore an oath never to set foot in it again. Why should he go back there? Let's make a bet on it. I'm sure he's not at her place."

"Sister Li can be our witness," said Chin-lien. "Are you willing to shake on it? I say he's gone to her house today. It was day before yesterday that he trashed the whore's place. Yesterday that cuckold Li Ming came here to size up the situation. Today Ying the Second and that Hsieh fellow showed up at the crack of dawn, like ghost-snatching demons, and dragged him off with them. My guess is that the old procuress and that whore have:

Laid plans and hatched a scheme,⁵³

in order to get him back there again. If they're able to work their wiles on him, somehow or other, and succeed in propitiating him, they'll have a chance to:

Relight the furnace and restore the account.

Who knows how long he'll be tied up, or what the probabilities are as to whether he'll come home or not; but our elder sister just keeps waiting for him."

"Even if he doesn't come home," said Yü-lou, "he ought to send a page boy back to let us know about it."

As they were talking, who should come by but a vendor of melon seeds, so the two of them, standing in the gateway, bought some melon seeds and stood there cracking them in their teeth. All of a sudden, they caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing coming toward them from the east, and the three ladies beat a hasty retreat.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was on horseback, sent Tai-an ahead of him on foot, saying, "See who it is standing there in the gateway."

Tai-an ran forward a step or two and reported, "It's the Third Lady, the Fifth Lady, and the Sixth Lady, buying melon seeds at the gate."

In due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, dismounted, and walked back through the inner gate that led to the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh had gone ahead to the master suite to tell Yüeh-niang of his arrival, but Chin-lien lay in wait for him, concealing herself in the black shadow behind the whitewashed spirit screen.

When he encountered her, Hsi-men Ch'ing was startled and said, "You crazy little whore! Coming upon you so suddenly gave me quite a start. What were you all doing out at the front gate?"

"You have a nerve to ask," said Chin-lien. "Where have you been all this time, that you should only be coming home now, leaving your mothers with nothing to do but wait for you at the door?"

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite. Yüeh-niang had prepared a feast for the occasion which was laid out on the table with everything:

Straight and proper.⁵⁴

She told Yü-hsiao to hold the flagon and Hsi-men Ta-chieh to serve the wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing was served first, after which, when all of the sisters had been served in turn, they sat down at their places. Ch'un-mei and Ying-ch'un played and sang for them in the lower part of the room.

After they had eaten for a while, the first course was cleared away and the sweetmeats in honor of Meng Yü-lou's birthday were served, consisting of forty saucersful of delicacies of every kind.

The finest vintage poured from the flagon,⁵⁵

Iridescent liquid overflowed the cups.

Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, was induced to occupy the seat of honor but retired to her room during the first watch because she did not like to drink too much wine. Wu Yüeh-niang and the sorority of concubines, however, continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company, throwing dice:

Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.

When it was Yüeh-niang's turn to call the game, she said, "If you want me to set the rules for this round, the scoring will be based on domino combinations. Each player in turn must come up with the name of a song tune, the names of two domino combinations, and a line from the *Hsi-hsiang chi* (The romance of the western chamber),⁵⁶ strung together so as to make some semblance of sense. He or she must then throw the dice and drink a cup of wine as a forfeit if any of the numbers thrown correspond to those in the domino combinations he or she has named."

Yüeh-niang went first, saying, " 'The Sixth Lady,' like a 'Drunken Yang Kuei-fei,'⁵⁷ drops her 'Eight-pearled Bracelet.'⁵⁸ 'Gossamer strands catch on the rose-leaved raspberry trellis.'⁵⁹

When she threw the dice, none of the numbers corresponded to those in either of the domino combinations she had named.

Next it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn. He said, " 'The Beautiful Lady Yü,' observing 'Ch'u and Han Contend for Supremacy,'⁶⁰ feels threatened by 'The Regular Cavalry.'⁶¹ 'Beside my ears gongs and drums resound to the skies.'⁶²

Sure enough, when he threw the dice he got the combination called "The Regular Cavalry" and had to drink a cup of wine as a penalty.

Li Chiao-erh came next. She said, " 'The Water Nymphs,' because 'Two Gentlemen Intrude upon Peach Blossom Spring,'⁶³ are startled out of their idyll in which 'Flowers Blossom and Butterflies Fill the Branches,'⁶⁴ As a result, 'Fallen red petals cover the ground, their rouge now cold.'⁶⁵

When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.

Then came Chin-lien, who said, " 'The Old Crone' 'Ventures among the Flowers in Her Dotage,'⁶⁶ thereby flouting 'The Three Bonds and Five Constants,'⁶⁷ 'If not arrested for seduction, it will be for robbery.'⁶⁸

Sure enough, when she threw the dice she got the combination called "The Three Bonds and Five Constants" and had to drink a cup of wine as a penalty.

Next it was Li P'ing-erh's turn. She said, " 'Decorous and Pretty,' she 'Mounts a Ladder to Gaze at the Moon,'⁶⁹ waiting

until 'The Spring Equinox, when Day and Night are Equal in Length.'⁷⁰ At that time, 'Separated from him by the intervening wall, she might have turned to stone awaiting her husband.'⁷¹

When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.

Then came Sun Hsieh-o, who said, " 'The Pockmarked Young Man,' on seeing 'The Flock of Crows Attack the Phoenix,'⁷² only succeeds in tripping up 'The Wild Goose with the Broken Leg.'⁷³ 'I'll be damned if I do and damned if I don't.'⁷⁴

When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.

Finally, it was the turn of Yü-lou to finish the round. She said, " 'Nien-nu Is Charming.' Propping up the drunken 'Red Doublet Four,'⁷⁵ she trails 'The Hem of Her Brocaded Skirt.'⁷⁶ How often will she enjoy 'Spring breezes and moonlit nights amid gold lame bed curtains.'⁷⁷

Sure enough, when she threw the dice she got the combination called "Red Doublet Four."

Yüeh-niang completed her round as mistress of ceremonies by saying to Hsiao-yü, "Pour some wine for the Third Lady."

Turning to the latter, she continued, "You'd better drink three large cups. This evening it's your turn to spend the night with the bridegroom."

Addressing herself then to Chin-lien, Li Chiao-erh, and the rest, she said, "As soon as she's finished her wine, we must all see the two of them to their bridal chamber."

"If that is Elder Sister's decree," said Chin-lien, "how could we dare not to comply?"

This badinage reduced Yü-lou to a state of utter confusion.

Not long thereafter, the wine was finished and Yüeh-niang and the others escorted Hsi-men Ch'ing as far as the door of Yü-lou's chamber before going their separate ways. Yü-lou invited them to come in and visit for a while, but none of them would stay.

"My child," teased Chin-lien, "see that the two of you get a good night's rest. Your mother will come back to see you in the morning. Don't be naughty now."

Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, she continued in the same vein, "Kinswoman, my child is still a youngster. For my sake, if anything comes up, give her the benefit of the doubt."

"Slavey Six," said Yü-lou:

"The best vinegar takes time to ferment.

I'll have something to say to you tomorrow."

"As for me," said Chin-lien, "I'm like:

The go-between who has to climb the stairs:

Quite inured to such alarms."

"My child," said Yü-lou. "Won't you stay a little longer?"

"We're only outsiders, after all," said Chin-lien, "from the other side of the wall."

Thereupon, along with Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh she set out to return to the front compound. Just as they reached the inner gate, Li P'ing-erh lost her footing on a slippery patch of ground and fell down.

Chin-lien made a big to-do about it, calling out, "Sister Li, you might as well be blind. With every move you make you come a cropper. When I tried to catch you, one of my own feet slipped into the snow and now my shoe is all muddy."

Yüeh-niang overheard this, and said, "It must be that pile of snow by the inner gate. I've told the page boys to take care of it more than once, but the lousy slaves simply won't cart it away. It's no wonder someone has taken a spill."

Then, turning to Hsiao-yü, she said, "Take a lantern and escort the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady back to the front compound."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in Yü-lou's room, said to her, "Just take a gander at that lousy little whore. She steps in the mud, trips someone up, and then has the nerve to suggest that the other party has gotten mud on her shoe. She invariably picks on someone who's unlikely to give her any lip in return. It's just like her, little whore that she is. I'm sure it was she, yesterday, that put the maidservants up to singing:

It was the night of their assignation."

"What was the point of that particular song suite?" asked Yü-lou.

"What she meant to suggest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is that my wife's encounter with me was not really just a coincidence, but something done by design; as though she was burning incense at night in the expectation that I would discover her in the act."

"Sister Six seems to know every song in the repertory," said Yü-lou. "The rest of us don't understand such things."

"You don't know what that whore is capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she ever does is engage in backbiting at other people's expense."

We will say no more, for the moment, about how Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in Yü-lou's room, but turn instead to P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh.

The two of them chatted as they walked along, Chin-lien addressing her companion sometimes as Sister Li and sometimes as Sister Hua. They accompanied Hsi-men Ta-chieh as far as the inner gate that led into the front courtyard, where she returned to her quarters. Hsiao-yü, holding a lantern, then escorted the two of them into the garden.

Chin-lien was already half drunk. Taking Li P'ing-erh by the hand, she said, "Sister Hua, I'm a little tipsy today. Be good enough, whatever happens, to accompany me into my room."

"You're not drunk, Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.

Before long, they arrived at Chin-lien's quarters, and Hsiao-yü was sent back to the rear compound. Chin-lien invited Li P'ing-erh to sit down and have some tea.

"You were talking just now," said Chin-lien, "about that time when you were unable to enter the household. Who do you suppose you have to thank for the present situation? Who would ever have thought that today we'd be sisters:

Walking along the same gangplank?⁷⁸

I don't know how much unpleasantness I had to put up with on your account, or all the things that were said about me behind my back. As for my good intentions, they are known only to Heaven. That's all there is to it."

"I know how much trouble you went to," said Li P'ing-erh.

"Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

"As long as you're aware of it," said Chin-lien, "we can be on talking terms with each other."

In a little while, Ch'un-mei served the tea and, after finishing it, Li P'ing-erh took her leave and went back to her own quarters, while Chin-lien went to sleep by herself. But no more of this. Truly:

Just as it seems that, first to last,

there is nothing to regret;

No sooner are the branches formed than

they begin to proliferate.⁷⁹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 22

HSI-MEN CH'ING SECRETLY SEDUCES LAI-WANG'S WIFE; CH'UN-MEI SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY DENOUNCES LI MING

If you're clever, you'll be considered labored,
if you're awkward, idle;¹
If you're good, you'll be disdained as weak,
if you're bad, callous.
If you're rich, you'll meet with envy,
if you're poor, disgrace;²
If you're diligent, you'll be thought grasping,
if you're economical, stingy.
If you deal with things consistently,
you'll be scorned as simple;
If you adapt yourself to circumstances,³
you'll be suspected of deceit.
If you think about it, it is hardly possible
to satisfy anyone;⁴
The role of human being is an arduous one,
to be a man is hard.⁵

THE STORY GOES that the next day Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and other female guests had all assembled to celebrate Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Yüeh-niang presided over the party, which took place in the reception room in the rear compound. This would all have been well enough had it not given rise to a certain incident.

Because Lai-wang's wife had finally died of consumption, Yüeh-niang had recently found a new wife for him. Her maiden name was Sung and she was the daughter of the coffin seller, Sung Jen. She had originally been a maidservant in the household of Assistant Prefect Ts'ai but had lost her position there because of a scandal, and then married a cook named Chiang Ts'ung, or Sauce and Scallions. This Chiang Ts'ung was often hired for temporary duty in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and Lai-wang, who was sent to his home to fetch him, early and late, thus became acquainted with his wife. The two of them sometimes drank wine together and bandied words, with the result that Lai-wang succeeded in seducing her.

One day, unexpectedly, Chiang Ts'ung got into a quarrel with his fellow kitchen workers over the division of their pay. This turned into a drunken brawl in the course of which knives were drawn and Chiang Ts'ung was stabbed to death. His assailant succeeded in scaling the wall and making good his escape. His widow begged Lai-wang to intercede with Hsi-men Ch'ing, who sent a note to the vice magistrate of the district, with the result that the offender was apprehended, convicted of a capital crime, and executed in atonement for the death of Chiang Ts'ung.

Later on, Lai-wang deceived Yüeh-niang into believing that the widow had been the wife of a small householder and was good at needlework, and he persuaded her to lay out five taels of silver, two suits of clothes, four bolts of blue and of red fabric, and a few hairpins, bracelets, and the like, in order to acquire her as a new wife for him. Because her given name was Chin-lien, Yüeh-niang thought it would be awkward to have two people of the same name in the household and had her change her name to Hui-lien.

This woman was born in the year of the horse and was two years younger than Chin-lien, which made her twenty-five years old that year.⁶ She possessed:

A clear off-white complexion.
Her figure was neither plump nor thin;
Her stature was neither short nor tall.

Her bound feet were even smaller than Chin-lien's. She was:

Clever by nature,
Highly adaptable,
Adept at adorning herself,
As able at making waves as a dragon or tiger;

In fact:

A champion among seductresses,
A leader of the homebreakers.

If one were to summarize her accomplishments, she was able to:

Stand leaning idly against the doorjamb,⁷
Following each passerby with her eyes;
Lean cheek on hand or bite her nails,
Adjusting her attire for no good reason;
Sitting or standing, swing her legs,
Singing to herself in a husky voice;
Open windows and thrust apart shutters,
With needle poised, losing herself in thought;⁸
Smile expectantly before speaking,
Betraying the fact she is having an affair.⁹

When she first arrived, she took her part in the kitchen work along with the other servants' wives and made no effort to doll herself up, or even think about doing so. Later on, after she had been there a month or more, she began to notice the way in which Yü-lou, Chin-lien, and the others were tricked out, and responded accordingly. She built up the chignon under her fret until it became higher and higher, affected a bouffant hairdo, and adorned her temples with two long spit curls. As a result, when she:

Served tea or served water,¹⁰
to her employers, she began to catch Hsi-men Ch'ing's eye.

One day he formulated a plan according to which he would send Lai-wang to Hang-chou with five hundred taels of silver in order to arrange the manufacture of brocaded python robes for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on the occasion of his birthday, as well as the purchase of clothing for all four seasons to supply the future needs of his own household. The round trip ought to take as much as half a year. His departure was arranged for around the middle of the eleventh month, and he accordingly set out at that time to travel by cart on the overland route. Hsi-men Ch'ing was determined that sooner or later he would have a chance to make a play for his wife.

It was now the day of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and Yüeh-niang was entertaining the female guests in the reception room in the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to be at home, not having any outside engagements that day.

"Set up a separate table for him in the master suite," Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "and see that he is served a full complement of wine and food, including soup, rice, and savories."

Through the hanging blind Hsi-men Ching observed Sung Hui-lien serving wine to the guests at the party, wearing a red crepe jacket that opened down the middle over a skirt of violet silk.

Feigning ignorance, he asked Yü-hsiao, "Who is that in the red jacket?"

"It's Lai-wang's new wife, Hui-lien," replied Yü-hsiao.

"Why on earth is she wearing a violet skirt with a red jacket?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's most unbecoming. Tell your mistress in the future to find her a skirt of some other color that will match better."¹¹

"That violet skirt is one she borrowed from me," said Yü-hsiao.

This reply put a stop to the matter for the time being and, before long, Meng Yü-lou's birthday was over.

One day, Yüeh-niang paid a visit to the home of Ch'iao Hung, a well-to-do commoner who lived across the street from them, in order to celebrate a birthday. That afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to come home somewhat tipsy. He arrived at the inner gate just as Hui-lien was on her way out, and the two of them ran smack into each other.

Hsi-men Ch'ing impulsively reached out with one hand, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss, murmuring as he did so, "My child, if you'll allow me to have my way with you, you can have anything in the way of jewelry or clothing that you wish."

The woman said not a word, pushed aside Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand, and continued on her way to the front compound.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite he told Yü-hsiao to deliver a bolt of blue silk to Hui-lien's room and, thus and so, to say to her, "The other day Father saw you serving wine at the party wearing a violet skirt along with a red jacket, a combination that was most unbecoming and really didn't do you justice. I told him that the violet skirt was one you had borrowed from me. He opened up the clothes cabinet, just now, and took out this bolt of silk which he sent me to give you in order to make into a skirt."

Hui-lien opened it up and saw that it was a bolt of turquoise blue silk, figured with roundels of flowers from each of the four seasons and pairs of magpies face-to-face, a rebus for the words "happy reunion."

"If I make this up," said Hui-lien, "Mother is bound to notice it and ask where it came from. What then?"

"Father will tell Mother what he's done," said Yü-hsiao. "You have nothing to worry about. Father also said that if you go along with him in this matter he'll buy you whatever you want. He'd like to have a tryst with you today while Mother's not at home. What do you think?"

On hearing this proposition the woman smiled slightly but did not immediately say anything.

"When does Father plan to come?" she finally asked. "Shall I wait for him here?"

"Father says it would be awkward if he were seen going into your room by the page boys," said Yü-hsiao. "He wants you to slip secretly into the grotto under the artificial hill in the garden. There's never anybody there so it's a suitable place for a tryst."

"I fear the Fifth Lady or the Sixth Lady might get wind of it," the woman said. "That would be embarrassing."

"The Third Lady and the Fifth Lady are playing a board game in the Sixth Lady's quarters right now," said Yü-hsiao. "You can go ahead. The coast is clear."

Now that the arrangements were complete, Yü-hsiao went back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing. The two principals then proceeded to the grotto where they consummated their affair while Yü-hsiao stood at the garden gate to act as a lookout.

It so happened that Chin-lien and Yü-lou were playing a board game in Li P'ing-erh's quarters when who should appear but Hsiao-luan, who had come to fetch Yü-lou, saying, "Father has come home."

The party then broke up and Yü-lou returned to the rear compound. Chin-lien went to her own quarters and made up her face, after which she also set out for the rear compound. As she came through the inner gate, she encountered Hsiao-yü standing outside the door of the master suite.

"Is your father inside?" she asked.

Hsiao-yü made a negative gesture with her hand and pointed toward the front compound. Chin-lien understood at once and made her way back toward the postern gate that led into the garden where the artificial hill was located. There she found Yü-hsiao barring her way. Suspecting that it was she who had been dallying there with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she tried to force her way through, which reduced Yü-hsiao to panic.

"Fifth Lady, you can't go in there," she said. "Father's in there and he's busy."

"You crazy little bitch!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "As if I were afraid of your father!"

Whereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, she marched into the garden and proceeded to search it from one end to the other. When she reached the grotto under the artificial hill, which had been given the name Hidden Spring Grotto,¹² the couple within had just brought their transaction to a conclusion. The woman, hearing someone coming, had just managed to refasten her skirt and start outside when she ran into Chin-lien and turned crimson with embarrassment.

"You lousy little stinker! What do you think you're doing here?" Chin-lien demanded.

"I came to look for Hua-t'ung," the woman replied and then, under her interlocutor's gaze, disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Chin-lien went inside where she found Hsi-men Ch'ing in the act of fastening up his trousers.

"You lousy shameless good-for-nothing!" she railed at him. "You've been up to your tricks in here with that slave of a whore in broad daylight. I should've boxed that whore's ears for her, but she managed to get away. So you're the Hua-t'ung she was looking for, are you. Tell me the truth. How many times have you made out with that whore? If you don't level with me, just wait till Elder Sister gets home in a little while and see if I don't tell her all about it. If I don't beat that slave of a whore's face till she looks like a bloated pig, I might as well quit. Here we all are, bored enough to scream as it is, and she comes along and wants to horn in on the action. Well I'm not the one to let her get away with it."

"You crazy little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Keep your voice down. Do you want everyone to know about it? I'll tell you the truth. Thus and so, today included, I've only made out with her once."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Secretly Seduces Lai-wang's Wife

"Once? Twice? I don't believe you," said Chin-lien. "But if you think you can continue to carry on your tricks with that slave of a whore while:

Deceiving spirits and stupefying demons,¹³
you've got another think coming. If I ever find out about it, then forgive you me, but I'll have something to say to the two of you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and made his exit.

When Chin-lien returned to the rear compound she overheard the gossiping maidservants saying, "When Father came home today he sent Yü-hsiao to the front of the compound with a bolt of blue silk wrapped up in a kerchief, but we don't

know whom it was intended for.”

Chin-lien realized that it had been a present for Lai-wang’s wife, but she kept the information to herself, not even mentioning it to Meng Yü-lou.

Hui-lien, for her part, endeavored every day to get on the right side of Chin-lien by cooking special treats for her, offering to help with her needlework, or playing up to her in disingenuous ways while she was engaged in board games with Li P’ing-erh. Chin-lien, too, when there was no one else about, would facilitate Hui-lien’s liaisons with Hsi-men Ch’ing as a means of further ingratiating herself with her husband.

From the commencement of Hui-lien’s affair with Hsi-men Ch’ing, quite aside from the clothing, handkerchiefs, jewelry, breath-sweetening lozenges, and the like, with which he kept her supplied on the sly, she was observed to have ready money by the tael at her disposal, with which she bought ornamental trinkets and cosmetics at the front gate of the compound. Gradually it became apparent that she was no longer dressing the way she used to do. Hsi-men Ch’ing also spoke to Yüeh-niang about her, suggesting that since she made such good soup she ought to be relieved of her duties in the main kitchen and assigned to share the responsibility with Yü-hsiao for looking after the small stove behind the master suite, boiling tea water and supplying snacks for Yüeh-niang’s consumption, and helping her with her needlework, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Gentle reader take note: The head of a household ought never to engage in compromising intimacies with the wives of his slaves or servants. Sooner or later such conduct:

Confuses the distinction between high and low,
Opens the door to surreptitious abuses, and
Poses a threat to public morality,

until the situation gets out of hand. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Since Hsi-men Ch’ing, in his lust, ignores
distinctions of status;
It is inevitable that his concubines
will compete for his favor.
How can he bear to treat Yüeh-niang as though
she does not exist;
While disrupting the bonds of society by
seducing his servant’s wife?

One day, on the eighth day of the twelfth month, Hsi-men Ch’ing got up earlier than usual, having prearranged with Ying Po-chüeh to go together to attend the funeral procession of the wife of Prefectural Judge Shang, who lived on Main Street. He told the page boys to prepare two horses and was waiting for Ying Po-chüeh, who had not yet arrived, when Li Ming appeared in order to give another lesson to Ch’un-mei and the other three household musicians. Hsi-men Ch’ing was sitting by the stove in the main reception room at the time, and he ordered that Ch’un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ying-ch’un, all four of them, should get dressed up and come out front so he could look on as Li Ming gave them their lesson. His son-in-law, Ch’en Ching-chi, was also there to keep him company.

They embarked on the song suite the first number of which, to the tune “Powdery Butterflies,” begins with the words:

“Three Variations on the Plum Blossom,”¹⁴

and had not yet finished it when Ying Po-chüeh came in the door, accompanied by his eldest son, Ying Pao, carrying his father’s felt bag.

Ch’un-mei and her three companions started to return to the rear compound, but Hsi-men Ch’ing called them to a halt, saying, “After all, it’s only old Ying the Second. Come pay him your respects, why don’t you. There’s no need to hide.”

He and Po-chüeh saluted each other with a bow and were about to sit down when he ordered the four of them, “Come over here and kowtow to old Ying the Second.”

Ch’un-mei and the others turned to face the guest and kowtowed to him before withdrawing a few steps.

Ying Po-chüeh hurriedly bowed to each of them in turn and complimented his host, saying, “You have all the luck, Brother. What fine young ladies the four of them have all turned out to be.

Like bulrushes, each one is prettier than the last.

I’m afraid I’m somewhat at a loss, though, having come out today empty-handed. I found myself so:

Pushed and pressured,
this morning that I neglected to bring anything along with me. I’ll have to give them a little something for rouge and powder on another day.”

Shortly thereafter, Ch’un-mei and the others, having paid their respects, went inside, and Ch’en Ching-chi bowed to the visitor and sat down.

“What kept you so long today?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“I don’t even like to talk about it,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “My eldest daughter has been sick for some time and has only recently begun to get better. My wife is concerned about her and has invited her to come home and relax for a few days. I’ve been tied up until now arranging with Ying Pao to engage a sedan chair for her and buying a few things for her visit. I’m a bit late I’m afraid.”

"I've been waiting for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's have some congee and be on our way."

"Go fetch some congee from the rear compound for us to eat," he then instructed a page boy.

When Li Ming saw Ying Po-chüeh he came up and greeted him by falling to one knee.

"I haven't seen you for some time, Li Ming," said Po-chüeh.

"Well, here I am," said Li Ming. "I've been working at Eunuch Director Hsü's place in the Northern Quarter the last couple of days and only just came over here."

As they spoke, two page boys set up a table and fetched the congee for them to eat. There were four salty main courses and ten side dishes. The main courses had been slow boiled and consisted of a bowl of ham hocks, a bowl of squab, a bowl of steamed junket flavored with potherb mustard greens, and a bowl of chicken wonton. These served to accompany three silver-mounted bowls of congee made from nonglutinous rice, which had been cooked with hazelnuts, pine seeds, chestnuts, fruit kernels, rose hips, and crystallized sugar.

Hsi-men Ch'ing joined Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'en Ching-chi in consuming this repast and then called for small silver cups and filled them with Chin-hua wine. When they had each had three cups there was still more than half a flagon of wine left over and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Hua-t'ung to take it, along with the table that contained the remainder of their breakfast, into an antechamber and offer it to Li Ming.

He then put on his outdoor clothes and set off with Ying Po-chüeh to join the funeral procession for the wife of Prefectural Judge Shang, leaving Li Ming to consume the leftovers in the anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard.

No sooner had Yüeh-niang's maidservant, Yü-hsiao, together with Lan-hsiang and the others, seen Hsi-men Ch'ing out the door than they began:

Horsing around till they were all in a heap,
in the side chamber in which they were awaiting their lesson. After a while they trooped across to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard and continued their horseplay there. Ch'un-mei alone remained where she was, and Li Ming proceeded to give her a lesson on the *p'i-p'a*.

Li Ming had had something to drink. Ch'un-mei's sleeve opening was wide and her hand became caught in it. When Li Ming reached over to help extricate her hand he pressed it more heavily than necessary. Ch'un-mei was immediately incensed and began to tell him off in no uncertain terms.

"You lousy cuckold!" she railed at him. "What do you think you're doing squeezing my hand and making a pass at me? You lousy dead duck of a cuckold! You don't know who it is you're messing around with. Here you are being plied with:

The best wine and the finest meat,¹⁵
and it only brings out more clearly the fact that you have the soul of a cuckold. Squeeze my hand, will you? You lousy cuckold!

You've stuck your spade in the wrong place,
this time. Ask around and you'll soon find out if I'm the sort of person to play your tricks on. Just wait till he gets home and I tell him about it. You lousy cuckold! You'll be:

Driven away from this door for good,¹⁶
with the aid of a stick. I suppose you think that without your cuckold's services we couldn't learn how to sing. As though there weren't another cuckold to be had in the licensed quarter! Well the muck's on you, you cuckold!"

Calling him a cuckold a thousand times, if not ten thousand times, Ch'un-mei railed at him until Li Ming picked up his things and fled, as though:

Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for him to hide.¹⁷

Truly:

With two hands he tore open the road
between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through
the gate to perdition.¹⁸

Li Ming fled in consternation, and Ch'un-mei headed back toward the interior of the compound in a rage, cursing as she went. Chin-lien was in her room playing a board game with Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and Sung Hui-lien when she heard Ch'un-mei come in, uttering imprecations as she came.

"Who are you railing at, you lousy little piece?" asked Chin-lien. "Who's been bothering you?"

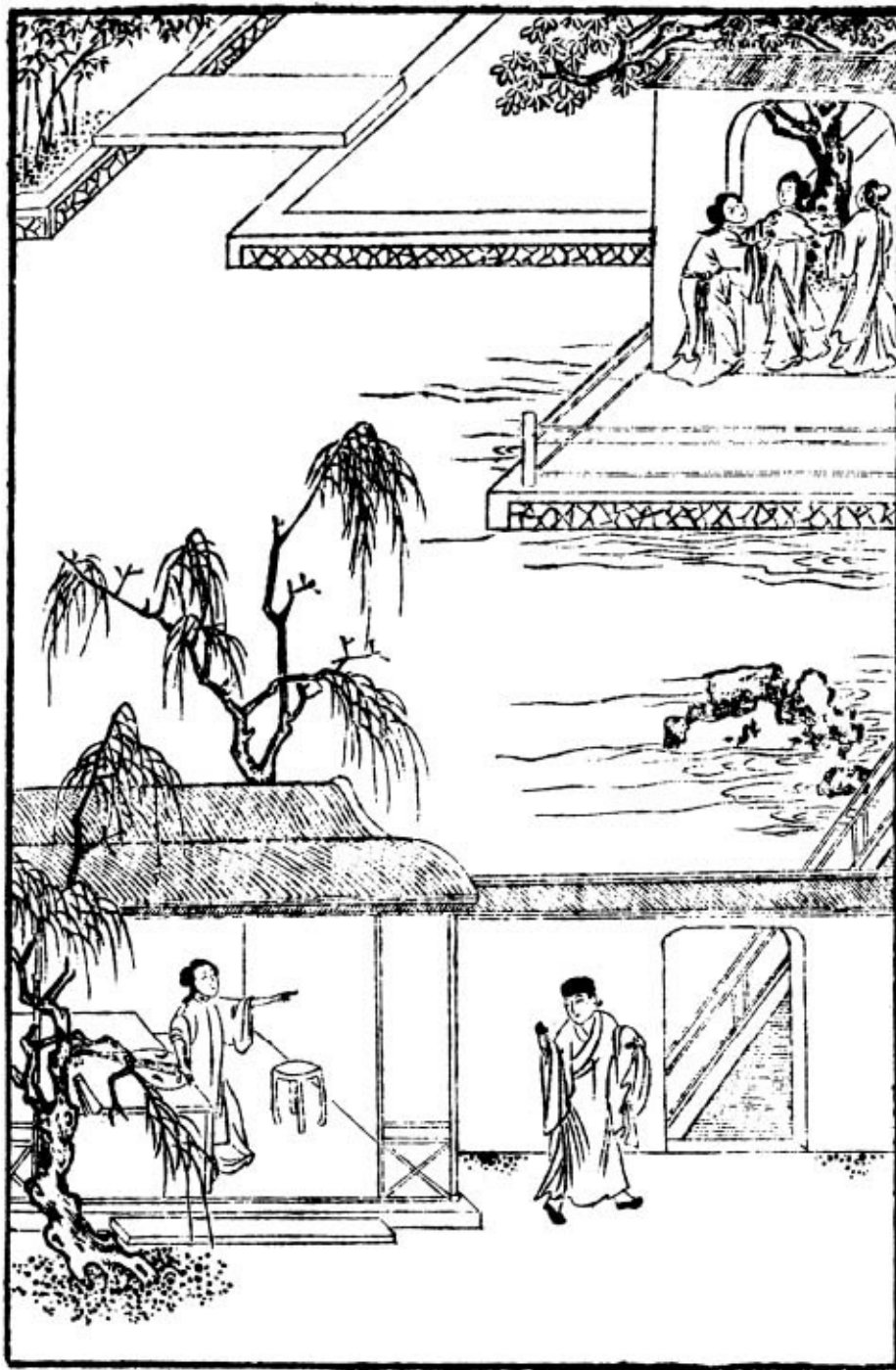
"You know perfectly well who it is," Ch'un-mei said angrily. "It's not to be borne. When Father was about to leave he told a page boy, out of the kindness of his heart, to take what was left of the dishes on the breakfast table and the remainder of the congee and offer them to that cuckold Li Ming. Yü-hsiao and the others were also there:

Horsing around till they were all in a heap.
It was a case of:

You push me,
I push you,

and:

Showing their teeth and making faces,¹⁹



Ch'un-mei Self-righteously Denounces Li Ming

at that cuckold as though they'd lost all sense of decorum. After clowning around for a bit, they all trooped off to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard.

"No sooner did that cuckold see there was nobody about than he gave my hand a squeeze, as hard as he could, gazing at me with a drunken simper. As though I'd let him get away with something like that! When he saw me raise a hue and cry and start to give him what for, he snatched up his things and ran for it. I should've boxed that cuckold's ears for him. The lousy cuckold! You'd better learn to:

Suit your conduct to the person you're dealing with.

I'm not the sort of wanton baggage who is:

Neither fish nor fowl,²⁰

that would be likely to put up with the tricks of a cuckold like you. I'll beat your cuckold's face until it's black and blue."

"You crazy little piece," said Chin-lien. "What does it matter whether you continue your lessons or not? You've gotten so angry your face is all sallow. Just wait till your father comes home and tell him about it. He'll give the lousy cuckold his walking papers and that will be the end of it. Who does he think he is, anyway? He's only a paid entertainer, after all. Does that give the cuckold the right to make a pass at my maid? I know all about that lousy cuckold."

His crock of bad karma is already full."²¹

"It's just his bad luck," said Ch'un-mei. "No doubt he's relying on the fact that he's the Second Lady's brother. But who's afraid of the Second Lady? I suppose he thinks if she has it in for me she can just order me five strokes with the cane, or something like that."

"If you stop to think about it," chimed in Sung Hui-lien, "he's only a musician who's been hired to come here and teach his stock in trade. What business does he have making a pass at a girl of good family?"

For every coin you receive from your patron,

You should be as grateful as to your parents.

Not to mention the fact that every day you're regaled with:

Three teas and six repasts."

"And on top of all that," said Chin-lien, "he demands his wages before he leaves. He's being paid at the rate of five taels of silver per month. You lousy cuckold!"

You're sacrificing at the wrong grave."²²

Just ask around among the page boys in the household and see if any of them have the nerve to show their teeth and grin at Ch'un-mei, or give her any lip. If they caught her in a good mood, they might get off with a curse or two. But if they caught her in a bad mood, she'd have them dragged in front of the master and given a beating for their pains. In fact, if it comes to that, she's quite capable of brazening it out with the master himself. You really picked the wrong person this time. You lousy cuckold! You've run out of luck. You may have gotten her ginger up, but you don't even know how hot she can make it for you yet."

"And what were you up to?" she continued, turning to Ch'un-mei. "When Father left, you could have come inside and nothing would have happened. What on earth did you stay in that side room with him for, and give that cuckold the opportunity to make a pass at you?"

"It was all because Yü-hsiao and the others were only interested in horsing around:

Falling into a heap with laughter,

and didn't want to come in," said Ch'un-mei.

"You mean to say the three of them are still in the side chamber out there?" asked Yü-lou.

"They've all gone over to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard," said Ch'un-mei.

"I'll go see what's going on," said Yü-lou, getting up and suiting her action to her words.

Sometime later, Li P'ing-erh also returned to her quarters and sent Hsiu-ch'un out to summon Ying-ch'un.

That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, Chin-lien gave him a word for word account of the incident, with the result that he ordered Lai-hsing not to let Li Ming into the house in the future. Now that access was denied him, he didn't dare come around any more. As far as Li Ming was concerned, truly:

Though his deeds were done in the past,

The chickens would come home to roost.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

By hiring a tutor to teach his maids to sing,

he flaunted his munificence;

Every day, in the deserted courtyard,

they fiddled with their sound boxes.

Who would have thought that Li Ming

would be driven from his post;

Thereby raising Ch'un-mei's reputation

as high as the skies?

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 23

YÜ-HSIAO ACTS AS LOOKOUT BY YÜEH-NIANG'S CHAMBER; CHIN-LIEN EAVESDROPS OUTSIDE HIDDEN SPRING GROTTO

THESE IS a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that goes:

In conduct, heedless of Heaven's principles;
His actions disregard established norms.
Doing just as he pleases, he is ever ready to deceive;
Relying on clout, he scorns others and reveres himself.

He goes out in embroidered robes on a fine steed;
He returns to enjoy the damsels of Wu and Yüeh.
But gold and jade do not furnish a secure foundation;
Even they are not immune to the vicissitudes of fortune.

The story goes that:

The twelfth month ended and spring began,
It was the festival of the New Year.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was out paying courtesy calls and Wu Yüeh-niang was away on a visit to the home of her elder brother, Wu K'ai. That noon Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were in Li P'ing-erh's rooms playing a board game with her.

"What should we bet on the outcome today?" asked Yü-lou.

"Let's play three games," said Chin-lien, "and make the loser fork out five mace of silver and stand us all a treat. We can spend three mace on Chin-hua wine, the other two on a pig's head, and get Lai-wang's wife to braise it for us. They say she really knows how to braise a pig's head and can do it to a turn with a single stick of firewood."

"Our elder sister is not at home," Yü-lou pointed out. "What should we do about that?"

"We can always save a portion for her," said Chin-lien, "and have it sent to her room. It's all the same thing."

When they had finished talking about it the trio set out their pieces and proceeded to play three games. Li P'ing-erh was the loser and forfeited five mace of silver. Chin-lien sent Li P'ing-erh's maid, Hsiu-ch'un, to summon Lai-hsing and turned the money over to him, telling him to buy a jug of Chin-hua wine and a pig's head along with four trotters.

"Take them to the kitchen in the rear compound," Chin-lien instructed him, "and get Lai-wang's wife, Hui-lien, to braise them immediately. Then have her deliver them to the Third Lady's room and wait for us there. We'll be over in a jiffy."

"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "it would be better to have her put them in a box when she's done and bring them back here for us to eat. If we move to the rear compound Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o will see what's going on and we'll have to worry about whether or not to invite them to partake."

Chin-lien acceded to Yü-lou's suggestion.

It wasn't long before Lai-hsing came back to deliver the wine and pig's head he had purchased to the kitchen. Hui-lien was in the rear compound just then, sitting with Yü-hsiao on the stone stylobate outside the master suite, playing jacks.

"Sister Hui-lien," Lai-hsing said to her, "the Fifth Lady and the Third Lady have a request to make of you. They sent me out to buy some wine and a pig's head, along with the trotters, all of which are now sitting in the kitchen. They'd like you to braise them till they're properly done and then deliver them to the Sixth Lady's quarters in the front compound."

"I don't have the time," replied Hui-lien. "I'm busy stitching shoe soles for the mistress. Anyone can do the braising for you. Why insist on singling me out for the job?"

"Braise them or not, whichever you please," said Lai-hsing. "It's up to you now. I've got something else to do." Saying which, he walked nonchalantly out without more ado.

"You'd better leave off and do that braising as requested," said Yü-hsiao. "You know what sort of a mouth the Fifth Lady has. The next thing you know we'll have another ruckus on our hands."

"How on earth does the Fifth Lady know I can braise pig's head?" laughed Hui-lien. "Why should she insist on singling me out to do the job for her?"

Thereupon she got up, went into the kitchen, dipped out a wokful of water, trimmed the pig's head and trotters carefully, shoved a single long stick of firewood into the stove, mixed a large bowlful of oil, soy sauce, and star anise in just the right proportions to add to the brew, and then fitted the lid of the pewter braising pan tightly in place. In less

than two hours the pig's head was braised to the point that:

The skin was separated and the flesh falling apart.

Redolently fragrant:

All five flavors were fully represented.¹

Arranging her handiwork on a large platter with accompanying saucers of chopped ginger and garlic, Hui-lien got a page boy to put it in a square box and deliver it to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound while she opened the jug of Chin-hua wine and prepared it for serving.



Li P'ing-erh Loses a Board Game and Stands a Treat

Meng Yü-lou set aside a generous plateful of the finest meat and a flagon of Chin-hua wine for Yüeh-niang's benefit and ordered a maidservant to take them to the master suite. The three women then sat down around the table and proceeded to pour themselves some wine. Just as they were enjoying their repast, who should walk into their presence with an ingratiating giggle but Hui-lien.

"My mistresses," she said, "try a little of this pig's head. Did I manage to braise it to your satisfaction today?"

"The Third Lady has just been praising your skill," said Chin-lien. "This pig's head is as tender as can be," she said.

"Is it really true," Li P'ing-erh asked, "that you only used a single stick of firewood?"

"To tell you the truth," Hui-lien replied, "it doesn't even take a whole stick of firewood. If I'd used the whole stick the meat would have fallen away from the bones."

"Fetch a large winecup," Yü-lou said to Hsiu-ch'un, "and pour out a cupful of wine for your sister to drink."

Li P'ing-erh promptly ordered Hsiu-ch'un to do as she was bidden while she herself filled a saucer with meat from the pig's head and handed it to Hui-lien, saying, "You made it yourself. Have a taste and see what you think."

"I know you don't like things to be overly salty," said Hui-lien, "but I'm afraid I went a little too easy on the soy sauce. It's all right, I guess, but the next time I braise anything for you I'll be able to do it better."

Thereupon:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she kowtowed to them three times and only then took up a position standing beside the table and joined them in their drinking.

That evening, when Yüeh-niang returned home and the womenfolk of the household came to greet her, Hsiao-yü brought out the portion of pig's head they had sent over and showed it to her mistress.

"We were playing a board game for stakes in Sister Li's place today," said Yü-lou, "and won a pig's head from her. We set aside part of it for you."

"That seems just a bit unfair," said Yüeh-niang. "Everyone wants to be a winner. It's hardly right that a single loser should have to bear the brunt. Why don't we plan to do it this way instead? It's only appropriate that during the holiday season each of us sisters ought to take her turn playing hostess to the rest. We can engage Big Sister Yü to entertain us during the evenings. What is there to prevent it? Wouldn't that be better than insisting on having winners and losers and making one person pay the piper? What do you think of my suggestion?"

"Elder Sister's suggestion is a good one," they all said with one voice.

"Tomorrow is the fifth day of the first month," said Yüeh-niang. "Let me start things off. I'll send a page boy to engage the services of Big Sister Yü."

Thereupon Li Chiao-erh opted for the sixth, Meng Yü-lou took the seventh, and P'an Chin-lien took the eighth.

"I'm getting off easy," said Chin-lien. "That's the eve of my birthday so I'd have to throw a party anyway. This way I can:

Kill two birds with one stone."²

When they asked Sun Hsüeh-o she made no reply for quite a while.

"Let her be," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't try to pressure her into anything. Let Sister Li take the next day."

"The ninth is Sister Six's birthday," said Yü-lou. "I'm afraid Old Mrs. P'an and your elder brother's wife will be here."

"Since we won't be free on the ninth," said Yüeh-niang, "we'll get Sister Li to do her stint on the tenth, that's all."

With that they all felt that everything had been decided.

To make a long story short, Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home on the fifth, having gone to a social engagement at a neighbor's house. Wu Yüeh-niang hosted a feast in the master suite, at which Big Sister Yü provided the musical entertainment, and all the womenfolk drank merrily and made a day of it before the party broke up.

The next day it was Li Chiao-erh's turn, after which came Yü-lou's and then Chin-lien's, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

In no time at all it was Chin-lien's birthday and Old Mrs. P'an and Yüeh-niang's elder brother's wife came to participate in the celebration.

Finally the tenth came and it was Li P'ing-erh's turn to play the role of hostess. She sent Hsiu-ch'un to the rear compound to invite Sun Hsüeh-o to join the party twice. Each time Hsüeh-o said that she was coming but failed to show up.

"Just as I said, I didn't think she would come," remarked Yü-lou, "but Sister Li keeps insisting on inviting her. She actually said to someone, 'You people with the money can take turns standing each other treat for ten days if you like. But don't expect the likes of me to:

Chase barefoot after the donkey's hooves.'

The way she put it, leaving aside the insult to the rest of us, would seem to imply that she takes our elder sister to be a donkey's hoof."

"As long as that worthless baggage knows enough to stick to her place," said Yüeh-niang, "there's no need for us to pay any attention to her. Don't bother to keep on inviting her."

Thereupon the wine was served and everyone assembled in Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound for the feast. Big Sister Yü was there to provide the musical entertainment. Yüeh-niang's elder brother's wife and Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, were also present, making altogether a party of eight.

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, having gone out to a social engagement.

"If your father comes home and wants a drink," Yüeh-niang said to Yü-hsiao, "you might as well serve it to him in the master suite."

Yü-hsiao nodded her assent.

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrive home early that afternoon. Yü-hsiao came forward and helped him off with his outer clothes.

"Where has Yüeh-niang gotten to?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They're all at the Sixth Lady's place in the front compound," Yü-hsiao replied, "drinking wine with Wu K'ai's wife and Old Mrs. P'an."

"What kind of wine are they drinking?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's Chin-hua wine," replied Yü-hsiao.

"We've still got that crock of jasmine blossom wine that Ying Po-chüeh sent over as a New Year's present," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well open it up and give it a try."

Accordingly he instructed Yü-hsiao to broach the jasmine blossom wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing tasted it, remarking as he did so, "It's just the thing for your mistresses to drink," and told Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü to lug it to Li P'ing-erh's place in the front compound.

When Hui-lien, who was standing beside Yüeh-niang just then in order to pour for her, caught sight of Yü-hsiao delivering the wine, she adroitly hastened over to take the jug from her. Yü-hsiao took the opportunity to tip her a wink and give her a pinch on the hand, the significance of which was not lost on the woman.

"Who sent you to deliver the wine?" Yüeh-niang asked Yü-hsiao.

"Father sent me," Yü-hsiao replied.

"How long has your father been home?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"He only just arrived," said Yü-hsiao. "He asked what kind of wine you were drinking and when I said it was Chin-hua wine he told me to take this crock of jasmine blossom wine that Master Ying the Second gave us and bring it out for you to drink."

"If your father wants anything himself," Yüeh-niang said, "set up a table for him in the master suite. There are some ready-made dishes on hand that you can serve him."

Yü-hsiao nodded her assent and returned to the rear compound.

Hui-lien continued standing in attendance at the party for a while and then said disingenuously, "Let me go back to the rear compound and fetch some tea for you to drink."

"Tell your sister," Yüeh-niang instructed her, "that there's some Liu-an tea³ in the cabinet in the master suite. You can steep a pot of that and bring it back for us to drink."

That woman took off for the rear compound so fast that her feet:

Beat out a festive paradiddle as she went.⁴

She found Yü-hsiao standing in the doorway of the master suite. After fetching the tea for her she made a meaningful moue, at which the woman lifted aside the portiere and walked right into Yüeh-niang's parlor.

What should she see there but Hsi-men Ch'ing, sitting in a chair and drinking wine. Without more ado she went up to him and proceeded to park her posterior in his lap, whereupon the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues. While, down below, the woman grasped his organ in her hand, up above, she took a sip of wine and transferred it into the mouth of her companion.

"Father," the woman said to him, "if you've got any breath-sweetening lozenges give me a few more. The ones you gave me the other day are all gone."

"I also owe several mace to Auntie Hsüeh for trinkets," she went on to say. "If you've got any money handy give me a little so I can pay her."

"There ought to be a tael or two left in my wallet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go ahead and take it."

As he spoke Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to unfasten her trousers.

"It won't do," the woman said. "I'm afraid someone might come along and see us."

"Don't go out front today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Stay in the rear compound and we can have some real fun together tonight."

The woman shook her head, saying, "The rear compound reminds me of what happens when:

The wagons from the Firewood Office block the road:

There are too many sticks about.

We'd better make it the Fifth Lady's place again. That would be:

Two under full four words."⁵

Thereupon Yü-hsiao resumed her place outside the door of the master suite to act as lookout and permitted the two of them to dally with each other as they pleased.

As the saying goes:

Even if you only talk along the road,

There may be someone lurking in the grass.

All their precautions did not prevent Sun Hsüeh-o from happening along from the back of the compound and overhearing the sound of laughing voices from inside the master suite. At first she thought it was Yü-hsiao engaged in badinage with

Hsi-men Ch'ing, but who could have anticipated that Yü-hsiao turned out to be sitting on the veranda. On seeing this she came to a halt.

Yü-hsiao was afraid that she might go into the room, so she immediately endeavored to divert her by saying, "The Sixth Lady from the front compound is expecting you. Why don't you go along and have something to drink?"

"I'm totally out of favor," Hsüeh-o snorted sardonically.

"Plant a mulberry in a marshland, and

Nobody will climb it.

Mount a person on a racehorse, and

Nobody will overtake him.

Where would I get the wherewithal to take my turn with the rest of them in standing each other treat for ten days?

I'm such a menial underling,

I can't afford my underthings."

Her monologue was brought to a halt by an audible cough from Hsi-men Ch'ing inside the room which induced Hsüeh-o to take herself off to the kitchen.

Yü-hsiao lifted aside the portiere and the woman, once she saw the coast was clear, nimbly stepped out and headed toward the rear of the compound to take care of the tea.

In no time at all Hsiao-yü came in from outside and called out, "Sister Hui-lien, the mistress wants to know how come you went to get the tea and never came back with it."

"The tea's ready," the woman said. "I'm just waiting for the fruit kernels to flavor it with."

Before long, with Hsiao-yü carrying the cups and raised saucers and Hui-lien lugging the teapot, they went straight back to the front compound.

"How come it took you so long to get the tea?" demanded Yüeh-niang.

"Father was drinking wine in the parlor," said Hui-lien, "so I didn't dare go in myself. I had to wait while Sister fetched the tea leaves and the fruit kernels were peeled."

Thereupon everyone was served with tea, after which Hsiao-yü collected the cups and raised saucers and returned to the rear compound.

Hui-lien stood there, leaning against the table, and looked on as Yüeh-niang and the others threw dice.

"Mistress," she said, deliberately raising her voice, "your double ones and double sixes make the combination 'Heaven and Earth Separated,' so you've beaten the Fifth Lady."

"Sixth Lady," she said next, "your double sixes and double fours make the combination 'Brocade Screen' and add up to twenty spots, whereas the Third Lady's one, three, and double fives only add up to fourteen spots, so she loses."⁶

This irritated Yü-lou so much that she said, "For a servant's wife like you to:

Stick your beak in and wag your tongue,⁷

while we're playing dice together is completely out of place."

These few words put the woman in a situation where she could neither:

Stand her ground, nor

Rise up to go,

without embarrassment. The blood flew to her cheeks and she was compelled to beat a hasty retreat. Truly:

Even if one could draw off all the water

of the West River,

It would hardly suffice to wash away

this day's shame.⁸

The womenfolk continued their drinking until lamplighting time, when whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing lifting aside the portiere and coming into the room.

"You're certainly making a day of it," he said with a laugh.

Wu K'ai's wife jumped up, saying, "Brother-in-law has arrived," and hastily offered him her seat.

"Why don't you continue to do your drinking in the rear compound?" said Yüeh-niang. "We're all women here and you're a man. What's the idea of barging in on us this way?"

"If that's the way you want it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll go elsewhere."

Thereupon, suiting his action to his words, he went over to Chin-lien's quarters. Chin-lien made haste to follow him there and saw that he was half drunk.

Taking hold of Chin-lien, he said, "Little oily mouth, I've got a favor to ask of you. I'd really like to keep Hui-lien overnight in the rear compound, but there's no convenient place there. Do you think you could make room for us to spend the night at your place? How about it?"

"I'd only be wasting my breath on you," retorted Chin-lien. "That's enough of your delirious nonsense. You can screw around with her wherever you like, her and her simpering ways, without having to do it at my place. I don't have any place to put her. And even if I were willing to go along with you, Ch'un-mei, that lousy little piece, would never consent to have her here. If you don't believe me, I'll call that little piece, Ch'un-mei, in here and you can ask her yourself. If she agrees, I'll go along with you, even if it means her staying in my own bedroom."

"If neither of you will agree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that's that. I'll go spend the night with her in the grotto underneath the hill in the garden. Order one of your maidservants to take a set of bedding there and light a brazier or

we'll never be able to stand the cold."

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," Chin-lien couldn't help laughing. "That lousy slave of a whore! You'd think she was the mother that bore you. You're another Wang Hsiang, braving the frigid cold of the twelfth month and lying on the icy surface of that stone bench to prove your filiality."⁹

"You crazy little oily mouth!" Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at her. "Stop making fun of me. Enough is enough. Whatever happens, get a maidservant to light a brazier for us."

"You go ahead," said Chin-lien. "I know what to do."

That evening, when the party for the women of the household broke up, Chin-lien actually did order Ch'iu-chü to bundle up some bedding and carry live coals out to make the necessary preparations in Hidden Spring Grotto, as the whitewashed "snow cave" under the artificial hill was called.

Hui-lien accompanied Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Yü-lou as far as the inner gate that separated the front and rear compounds.

"Mistress," she said disingenuously at this point, "I won't accompany you any further, but go back up front."

"That's all right," said Yüeh-niang. "Go back up front and get some sleep."

After seeing Yüeh-niang and the others safely inside, the woman remained standing for a while outside the inner gate. As soon as she was sure there was no one about she disappeared under the artificial hill in a puff of smoke. Truly:

There is no need for King Hsiang to wear out
his longing eyes;
The Goddess of Witch's Mountain delivers
the clouds and rain herself.¹⁰

When Sung Hui-lien passed through the garden gate, thinking that Hsi-men Ch'ing might not be inside yet, she did not put on the latch and thus left the door standing closed but unlocked. When she arrived in Hidden Spring Grotto, however, whom should she see but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had preceded her and was already:

Sitting there with candle in hand.¹¹

Once inside the woman became aware that:

A cold wind assailed her,¹² and
The couch was thick with dust.

Thereupon she drew two sticks of incense out of her sleeve, lit them from the candle in the lantern, and stuck them in the ground. Even though there was a brazier of burning charcoal on the floor it was cold enough to make her shiver. The woman first unrolled the bedding on the bench and then laid a sable robe, cut like a Ch'an monk's cassock, on top of it. Then the two of them:

Closed tight the double-leaved door,
Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his outer garments and sat on the bench in his white satin tunic, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest. Removing the woman's trousers, he took her onto his lap with her two legs splayed to either side and abruptly inserted his organ into her vagina. The two of them embraced each other and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the task at hand.

They remained quite oblivious of P'an Chin-lien who, as soon as she ascertained that the two of them were:

Safely in the harbor,
took off her headdress in her room:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,
and crept stealthily toward the garden to see if she could overhear what the two of them said to each other in private. When she reached the postern gate she gave it a shove and, finding it open, proceeded to enter with:

Slow and surreptitious step.

Not fearing lest:

The dank green moss should chill her
"wave-tripping" stockings; or
The thorns on the flowers do an injury
to her skirt or jacket,

she proceeded with:

Skulking step and furtive stance,
to take up an eavesdropping position beneath the moon window of Hidden Spring Grotto.

She saw that the lanterns and candles were still alight and overheard the woman saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, "You're just the sort of benefactor who'd:

Donate ice to a homeless shelter in the dead of winter.

Is there no limit to the discomfort you'll put up with, you old beggar? Do you mean to say you can't come up with a better place for a tryst than this Cold Ice Hell?¹³ I'd better:

Put a rope in my mouth so if I freeze to death,
You'll have something to haul me out with."

"It's frigid in here!" she continued. "Let's go to sleep. What are you so intent on examining my feet for anyway? You'd think you'd never seen anyone with small feet before. The only thing is I don't have any shoe uppers. Couldn't you

contrive to buy me a pair somehow? I see other people making shoes all the time, but I can't make any for myself."

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that's no problem. Tomorrow I'll buy you several mace worth of different patterned uppers. Who would have thought your feet are even smaller than the Fifth Lady's?"

"There's no comparison," the woman said. "The other day I tried on one of her shoes and found that I could wear it over my own. But it's not size that matters so much as the stylishness of the shoe."

When Chin-lien heard this from her vantage point outside the room she muttered to herself, "That slave of a whore! I'd better listen a little longer and see what else she has to say."

Thereupon she continued to eavesdrop for some time and overheard the woman asking Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How long is it since you married that fifth 'object of Ch'iu Hu's roving eye'¹⁴ of yours? Was she a virgin when you married her, or had she been married before?"

"She'd been married before," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"No wonder:

She's such a practiced old hand,"



Chin-lien Eavesdrops outside Hidden Spring Grotto

the woman said. "So, once she'd caught your eye, it was a case of:

Cohabitation amid the dewdrops."

Nothing might have happened if Chin-lien had not overheard this, but having heard it, she got so angry where she stood outside the room that her two arms went soft on her and it was some time before she could stir from the spot.

"If that slave of a whore is allowed to carry on this way," she said to herself, "it won't be long before she pushes the rest of us aside."

She would have raised a rumpus then and there but was afraid of arousing Hsi-men Ch'ing's nasty temper, the end result of which might be only to enhance the whore's status. On the other hand, if she allowed her to get away with it, she feared that the woman could not be called to account in the future.

"The thing to do," she thought to herself finally, "is to leave her a clue so she'll realize that she's been overheard and then settle accounts with her tomorrow."

Thereupon she went out by the postern gate, pulled a silver hairpin from her head and stuck it through the hasp so that the door was locked from the outside, and then returned to her room in high dudgeon and went to bed for the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.¹⁵

Bright and early the next morning, Hui-lien was the first to get up, hurried into her clothes, and went out without doing her hair. She noticed that the postern gate was unlatched and felt a sudden pang of consternation. When she tried the door, however, she shook it for half a day but could not get it to open. She ran back to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing, who called to Ying-ch'un in the adjacent courtyard to open it for her. When she saw that the gate had been locked with a hairpin she recognized it as one of Chin-lien's and realized that she must have been eavesdropping on her the night before.

Feeling as though she were:

Carrying a spectral fetus,¹⁶

the woman hurried out to the front of the compound and was just opening the door to her living quarters when whom should she encounter but P'ing-an, who emerged from the privy and greeted her with a knowing grin.

"You crazy jailbird!" Hui-lien said to him. "Who do you think you're showing your teeth to with such a grin?"

"Sister," said P'ing-an, "it seems that even a smile is enough to drive you mad."

"At the crack of dawn," retorted Hui-lien, "what is there to laugh about for no good reason?"

"I'm laughing at you, Sister," said P'ing-an, "because it seems that:

Not having had a bite for three days,

You've got flowers before your eyes.¹⁷

My guess would be you didn't manage to make it home at all last night."

On hearing these words, the woman's face turned red and she started to curse, saying, "You lousy, scurrilous jailbird! You've been seeing things. Just what night was it that I didn't sleep in my own room or show up at home?"

If you throw a tile into the air,

It's got to come down to earth."

"I noticed that your door was locked on the outside only a minute ago," said P'ing-an. "You can scarcely weasel out of that."

"I got up early this morning," Hui-lien asserted, "and went to the Fifth Lady's place. It was only just now I was able to come back out. Where've you been all this time, you jailbird?"

"I hear the Fifth Lady has asked you to pickle crabs for her," said P'ing-an, "because of your reputation as a leg-splitter. No wonder she sent you out to the front gate to watch the winnowers at work. They say you've mastered the art of rotating your tongue the way they rotate their winnowing sieves."

This sally really got under the woman's skin. Snatching up a door-bar, she chased P'ing-an around the courtyard, cursing as she went.

"You lousy, delirious jailbird! Just wait and see whether I tell about this or not. You'll get something to remember me by, never fear. Have you lost all sense of decorum, or what?"

"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "Take it easy, will you! Just who are you going to tell about it? Of course, I know you've flown to a higher branch than the rest of us."

Hui-lien was so aggravated all she could do was continue to chase after him with the door-bar.

Who could have anticipated that at just this juncture Tai-an should stride out through the portiere of the pawnshop and seize the door-bar in his hand, saying, "Sister, what are you trying to beat him for?"

"Why don't you ask that grinning devil of a jailbird?" replied Hui-lien. "He's got me so angry with his:

Ridiculous blatherskite,

that my arms have gone soft on me."

P'ing-an seized the opportunity to make himself scarce.

Pushing the woman before him, Tai-an said to her, "Sister, don't:

Let your temper get the better of you.

You'd better go home and do your hair."

The woman then reached into the gourd purse at her waist, took out three or four candareens of silver, and gave them to Tai-an, saying, "Could I trouble you to pick up a large bowl of broth and two kinds of prepared ingredients for a pot-au-feu? You can put the broth right into my saucepan."

"That's no problem," said Tai-an. "I'll go take care of it."

Accepting the money with one hand, he hurriedly washed his face and then saw to the preparation of the pot-au-feu. The woman gave a bowlful to Tai-an and ate a bowlful herself. Only then did she comb her hair, lock the door, and go report for duty at Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound.

This done, she made her way to Chin-lien's place where she found her sitting at the mirror in the process of performing her morning toilet. Hui-lien played up to her punctiliously by standing deferentially to one side, offering to hold the mirror for her as she brushed her hair, and fetching the water for her to wash her hands with. Chin-lien did not so much as look at her or pay her the slightest attention.

"I've rolled up your sleeping shoes and foot bindings," said Hui-lien. "Shall I put them away for you?"

"Let them be," said Chin-lien. "Leave them where they are. I'll have the maidservant come in and put them away."
"Ch'iu-chü!" she then called out. "The lousy slave. Where could she have gotten to?"
"Ch'iu-chü's sweeping the courtyard," said Hui-lien, "though Sister Ch'un-mei is over there doing her hair."
"Don't worry about it," said Chin-lien. "Let them be. You'd better leave them for the maidservants to put away. After all, they've been in contact with these:

Crooked-hooved clodhopping feet,
of mine. I wouldn't want you to soil your hands with them. You'd do better to save your attentions for your father. You seem to be the only sort of person capable of pleasing him. The rest of us are all guilty of:

Cohabitation amid the dewdrops.
We're all 'remarried goods.' You're the only one, Sister, to have entered the household in a real bridal palanquin, to be his legitimate wife, the true 'object of Ch'iu Hu's roving eye.' "

These words had the effect of striking the woman's sore spot from the night before. Thereupon, falling to her knees, she said, "Mother, you're one of my mistresses, after all. If you don't see fit to:

Lift high your gracious hand,¹⁸
I would have no place to stand for even an instant. From the very outset, without your generous consent, I would never have presumed to accede to Father's demands. Even the First Lady in the rear compound is really no more than a figurehead. It's you who have done the most for me. You don't suppose I'd dare take liberties with you, do you? You can investigate as much as you like. If I have ever taken any liberties with you by so much as a word, may I come to a bad end. May I develop a boil in every hair follicle."

"That's not the point," said Chin-lien. "I'm:
Not the sort of person to let dust
be thrown in her eyes.
So long as my husband wants you, you don't suppose I'd stoop to competing for him, do you? But I'm not going to let you get away with any of your mischief or:

Idle words and idle chatter,
in front of him. If you think you can trample the rest of us underfoot, leaving you with a free field in which to kick up your heels, Sister, let me tell you, you'd better get any such thoughts out of your head."

"Look into it further, Mother," protested Hui-lien. "I've never dared take any liberties with you. I fear you must have misheard me last night."

"My foolish sister," said Chin-lien. "Do you think I'd have the patience to eavesdrop on you? Let me tell you something. Not even ten wives could hope to satisfy a man's every desire. Even though your father has these several wives of his at home, every time he chooses to entertain a powdered face outside, when he comes back he conceals nothing from me, but gives me a word for word account of everything that happened. Ask around a bit. You'll find that even back when he and the Sixth Lady were so close that they seemed to:

Breath through the same nostrils,¹⁹
there was nothing he didn't tell me about their doings when he got home. And you're not even in the same league with her."

This speech had the effect of reducing the woman to silence. She stood around the room for a while and then went out. As she was going through the enclosed passageway beside the inner gate she ran into Hsi-men Ch'ing and accosted him, saying, "A fine fellow you are! You're about as much good at keeping things to yourself as a greased chute! You've gone and spilled every word I said to you yesterday, and today I've had to stand the gaff. Whatever I say to you in the future, keep it to yourself, even if you have to keep it till it rots. What can you have been thinking of to tell such things to anyone else? That mouth of yours is:

Nothing but a leaky trough.²⁰
Even if I have something to say, I'll never tell you anything again."
"What are you talking about?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know anything about it."
The woman merely gave him a look and stalked off toward the front of the compound.

In the past this woman had always possessed a glib tongue. She was in the habit of hanging around at the front gate: Buying this and buying that.²¹

She addressed the manager, Fu Ming, familiarly as Brother Fu; Ch'en Ching-chi as Brother-in-law; and Pen the Fourth as Old Four. Since commencing her affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing she had become even bolder in public than before. In fact:

Engaging in badinage and repartee,
She was completely without restraint.²²

For example, she might say, "Brother Fu, allow me to salute you. Would you be so kind as to keep your eye out for any peddler of cosmetics that might come by the front gate."

Manager Fu was a decent sort and would actually keep on the lookout for her around the front gate and, if he saw a peddler come by, stop him and call her out to make her purchases.

Tai-an made a point of teasing her about this by saying, "Sister, the cosmetics man went by early this morning. If you had only been out early enough with the steelyard you might have weighed out as much as you liked."

"You lousy monkey!" the woman railed at him. "It's the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady from inside who commissioned me to buy face powder for them. What do you mean by your talk of weighing it out with the steelyard, as if I were

buying three catties of rouge or two catties of powder? Those whores would really have to lay it on thick to get through quantities like that. Just wait and see whether I tell you or not when I go back inside."

"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed Tai-an. "Whatever I do, you try to overawe me with the Fifth Lady."

Before long she came out again, saying, "Pen, Old Four, would you be so kind as to keep your eye out for any peddler of costume jewelry that might come by the front gate. I'd like to buy a pair of plum blossom and a pair of chrysanthemum hair ornaments."

Pen the Fourth, neglecting his business, made a special point of keeping a lookout for her and, when a peddler of costume jewelry did come by, stopped him and called her out to make her purchases. The woman stood inside the inner gate, opened up the peddler's box, and picked out two pairs of large artificial flower ornaments to wear in the hair over her temples, as well as two purple, shot satin, gold lame handkerchiefs, costing in all a total of seven mace and five candareens of silver.

The woman reached into her pocket, groped out a fragment consisting of about half a silver ingot, and asked Pen the Fourth to cut it for her and weigh out the seven mace and five candareens that she owed the vendor. Pen the Fourth was engaged at that moment in writing up the accounts, but he dropped what he was doing, came over to where she was standing, squatted down on the ground, and began to chisel away at the silver for her.

Who should come up just then but Tai-an, who said, "Let me chisel it for you, Sister."

He took the silver in one hand, but instead of chiseling it, subjected it to a close examination.

"You're not chiseling it, you lousy monkey!" said the woman. "What do you expect to find by examining it so closely? You mean to say you didn't hear the dog biting an intruder in the middle of the night? It's stolen silver."

"I wouldn't say it was stolen," said Tai-an. "But it does have a familiar look about it. In fact, I'd say it came out of Father's wallet. It looks to me like this silver is the half ingot left over when Father had a piece cut to pay off that Southerner who sells square-cut scholar's caps in the Lantern Market the other day. My memory is:

As certain as certain can be."²³

"You lousy jailbird!" the woman protested. "There are look-alikes aplenty even among the people of this world. How could Father's silver have ended up in my hands anyway?"

"How should I know what transactions were involved?" laughed Tai-an.

At this, the woman ran after him and gave him what for with her fists. In the end, the page boy chiseled off seven mace and five candareens worth of silver and gave it to the vendor of the costume jewelry but kept the remaining silver in his hand and refused to return it.

"You lousy jailbird!" exclaimed the woman. "If you dare walk off with my money, I'll call you a brave man."

"I wouldn't take anything of yours," said Tai-an. "Why don't you give me a little of what's left over and I'll buy us something to eat?"

"You lousy monkey!" the woman said. "Hand it over and I'll give you something."

When she had thus tricked Tai-an into surrendering his spoils, she merely tossed him a fragment weighing four or five candareens, stuffed the remainder into her pocket, and went straight back inside the compound.

From this time on, she was constantly to be seen at the front gate, buying fabric samples, costume jewelry, handkerchiefs, and the like, by the tael; or even going so far as to purchase four or five pints of melon seeds at a time and distribute them among the maids of the various apartments to share with their mistresses. Her coiffure was adorned with a pearl headband and gold lantern earrings, of glittering aureate hue. Beneath her upper garments, she wore red trousers of Lu-chou silk with drawnwork kneepads. In her wide sleeves she carried breath-sweetening lozenges flavored with osmanthus, while three or four sachets of pomander were suspended at her waist. Her expenditures of this kind averaged two or three mace of silver a day, all of which had been given to her by Hsi-men Ch'ing on the sly. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

From the time Chin-lien revealed the fact that she had seen through her devices, this woman started to haunt Chin-lien's room on a daily basis, playing up to her with every trick at her disposal. She prepared tea and boiled water for her, stitched shoes and did needlework:

Fetching things, whether they were wanted or not; and

Doing things, whether they were called for or not.

With regard to her real job in Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, all she did each day was to put in a pro forma appearance and then come out to Chin-lien's place in the front compound. Every day she made a threesome with Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh to play board games or dominoes. If Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to show up while the woman was present, Chin-lien saw to it that she stood at his side to pour the wine and then sat down beside him as one of the company. As a result she was able to regale herself every day with:

Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.

Chin-lien did all this solely in order to ingratiate herself with her husband while Hui-lien, for her part, became completely dependent on her patronage. Truly:

The wanton willow catkins dance wherever

the wind carries them;

The fickle peach blossoms float wherever

the water takes them.²⁴

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Chin-lien, desirous of favor, deploys
a devious stratagem;
Hui-lien, temporarily reprieved, invades
her master's bed.
The crowing hen fails to anticipate
imminent disaster;
Once the catastrophe has occurred
there is no going back.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 24

CHING-CHI FLIRTS WITH A BEAUTY ON THE LANTERN FESTIVAL; HUI-HSIANG ANGRILY HURLS ABUSE AT LAI-WANG'S WIFE

Candles in silver sconces burn high,¹
as inebriation reigns;
The party has become convivial,
laughter is frequent.
Lissome waists dance superbly
like the "willow" in the quarter;²
Sandalwood lips sing lightly
of "Spring in the Imperial Park."
Wafts of perfume invade his clothes,
as though intentionally;
Flowerlike ornaments fall to the ground,
to be noiselessly retrieved.
Were it not for this telltale detail
of breeze-borne romance;
How would Han Shou ever have awakened
from his drunken trance?³

THE STORY GOES that:

The first full moon of the new year in Heaven,
Is the evening of the Lantern Festival on earth.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had the reception hall in his home prepared for the occasion by:
Suspending decorated lanterns, and
Spreading out silken tablecloths.
It was the sixteenth day of the first month and a feast was laid on for the:
Jollification of the entire family.
In front they were protected by:
Standing screens and brocaded windbreaks like Shih Ch'ung's.
The scene was illuminated by:
Three hanging lanterns suspended on ropes of pearls.
To either side there were arrayed:
Many standing lanterns of exquisite workmanship.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang occupied the places of honor, while the other members of the household, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, arranged themselves on the two sides. All of them were dressed in brocaded clothing with white satin jackets and blue skirts, except for Wu Yüeh-niang, who wore a full-sleeved robe of scarlet brocade and a sable cloak over a flower-sprigged skirt, while on her head:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;
A phoenix hairpin was half askew.

Ch'un-mei, Yu-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, stood in attendance playing the psaltery and sounding the clappers as they performed Lantern Festival songs. A separate table was set up on the eastern side of the room for Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi.

The usual:
Three soups and five courses,
were served.

Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits were provided just in season.⁴

Hsiao-yü, Yüan-hsiao, Hsiao-luan, and Hsiu-ch'un came and went to pour the wine.

Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, was unable to participate in the party, but sat on a chair beneath the loggia, cracking melon seeds with her teeth. She waited until someone at the feast ordered more wine and then, raising her voice, called out, "Lai-an! Hua-fung! The mistress needs more heated wine for the party. Fetch it, and be quick about it. The lousy jailbirds! Not a single one of them is available to wait on them. I don't know where they could have gotten to."

Who should appear at this juncture but Hua-t'ung, who came in carrying the heated wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing took him to task, saying, "You lousy slave! Not a single one of you is available to wait on us. Where could you have gotten to? You lousy slave! You're lucky to escape a beating."

The page boy came out and complained to Hui-lien, "Sister, just who had gone off anywhere, that you should tell tales to the master, make such a fuss about it, and provoke him to curse me?"

"When they called for wine up there," said Hui-lien, "who told you not to be here to wait on them? What's it got to do with me? If he doesn't curse you, who should he curse?"

"The ground around here was nice and clean," said Hua-t'ung, "but now the whole area is covered with your melon seeds. If the master sees it, I'll get cursed all over again."

"You lousy jailbird!" said Hui-lien.

"Like a loan taken out in the sixth month,

You'll get paid back soon enough.⁵

What's the big deal? If you had to:

Carve the eyes of a Buddhist idol,⁶

or something difficult like that, your complaint might be justified. If you don't want to sweep them up, leave them where they are. I'll have another page boy do the sweeping. And if Father should ask me about it, I'll just tell him what happened."

"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed Hua-t'ung. "Take it easy, will you! What do you want to quarrel with me for, anyway?"

Thereupon he fetched a broom and swept up the melon seeds for her. Sung Hui-lien continued to sit outside, cracking melon seeds with her teeth, as before. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, from his vantage point at the head of the feast, noticed that his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, was out of wine and called this to P'an Chin-lien's attention. The latter hastily came down from her place, poured out a full cup of wine, and offered it to Ching-chi with a giggle, saying, "Son-in-law, your father has commanded it. Whatever you do, drain this cup of wine for me."

While accepting the wine, on the one hand, Ching-chi took the opportunity to give her a prolonged sidelong glance, on the other, saying, "Fifth Lady, please make yourself easy. Let me drink it at my leisure."

Contriving to cast Ching-chi into the shadow by interposing her body between him and the lamplight, the woman held the wine in her left hand until Ching-chi reached for it and then proceeded to give the back of his hand a pinch with her right hand. Ching-chi continued, for his part, to direct his gaze at the rest of the company while, at the same time, giving Chin-lien's little foot a playful kick under the table.

The woman smiled and said in a low voice, "You crazy oily mouth! If your father-in-law were to see what you're up to, what would you do?"

Gentle reader take note: The two of them had no thought for anything but their own surreptitious fun and games and remained quite oblivious to the presence of the woman, Sung Hui-lien, who observed their every move so clearly through the latticework in the window that she might well have exclaimed:

"Is it not delightful?"

Truly:



Ching-chi Flirts with a Beauty on the Lantern Festival

Those actually involved are befuddled;⁷
It is the bystander who sees clearly.⁸

Although the people at the feast had not noticed anything, Hui-lien was enabled by the apertures in the window lattice and the light of the lamp to see every detail.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,

“Ordinarily, around the likes of us, she’s always careful to protest her own virtue. Who would have thought that on the sly she’s been carrying on an affair with that young scamp all the time. Now that I’ve caught her out at something, if she ever gives me a hard time in the future, I’ll have something to say to her.”

Truly:

From a white rose blooming
in someone's garden,
She has secretly purloined
two or three sprigs.
Hidden within her silken sleeves
they cannot be seen;
Their fragrance is first detected
by the butterflies.

After the wine drinking had continued for some time, a servant from Ying Po-chüeh's place unexpectedly arrived with an invitation that Hsi-men Ch'ing come over to enjoy the lanterns and have a drink.

"You all:

Enjoy yourselves to your heart's content,"

Hsi-men Ch'ing enjoined Yüeh-niang. "I'm going over to Brother Ying the Second's place for a drink."

The two page boys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, accompanied him when he left.

Yüeh-niang and her sisterhood of wives continued to enjoy the pleasures of the feast for a while when, behold:

The silver river is clear and shallow;
The pearly dipper sparkles and glitters.⁹
The perfect orb of a resplendent moon rises in the east,
Illuminating the courtyard till it is as bright as day.

Among the women there were some who:

Returning to their rooms, changed their clothes.

Some who:

Underneath the moon, adjusted their coiffures.

And some who:

By glow of lantern light, stuck flowers in their hair.

The trio composed of Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, who were also joined by Hui-lien, went out in front of the reception hall to watch Ch'en Ching-chi set off the fireworks, while Li Chiao-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh followed Yüeh-niang's lead in returning to the rear compound.

"Father's not at home today," Chin-lien remarked to her two companions. "Why don't we ask our elder sister if we can go out for an excursion in the streets?"

Hui-lien, who was standing by their side, interjected, "If you do go, take me along with you."

"If you want to come too," said Chin-lien, "go back to the rear compound and ask the First Lady about it. Ask the Second Lady too and see if she wants to go. We'll wait for you here."

Hui-lien hastened off to the rear compound.

"She's not up to the job," said Yü-lou. "I'd better go along and make the request myself."

"I'm going back to my room to put on something more to wear," said Li P'ing-erh. "It'll be cold by the time we get back. It's likely to be late at night."

"Sister Li," said Chin-lien. "If you've got an extra cloak handy, bring one out for me to wear. It will save me a trip back to my room."

Li P'ing-erh nodded her assent and went off on her errand. This left Chin-lien all by herself to watch Ching-chi set off the fireworks. When she saw that no one else was about, she stepped right up and gave him a pinch, saying with a smile, "Son-in-law, if that thin clothing is really all you've got on, you must be cold aren't you?"

But she had failed to notice that the head servant, Lai-chao's, boy, Little Iron Rod, was giggling and dancing about right in front of them, tugging at Ching-chi's clothing and begging, "Master Son-in-law, give me some firecrackers to set off."

Ching-chi was afraid the boy would interrupt the proceedings, so he could hardly wait to give him a couple of "Lantern Festival crackers"¹⁰ and thus induce him to go outside and play.

Thereupon:

Engaging in badinage and repartee,

he proceeded to flirt with Chin-lien, saying, "If you've noticed what thin clothing I've got on, what are you going to do about it? How about giving me something of your own to wear?"

"You lousy short-life!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You've gotten away with enough as it is. You were playing footsie with me just now, and I didn't say anything about it. And now you've got the colossal nerve to ask me for something of mine to wear. I'm not the one you're after. Why should I give you something of mine to wear?"

"If you refuse, that's all there is to it," said Ching-chi. "What's the idea of trying to scare me with such trumped up charges?"

"You lousy short-life!" responded Chin-lien. "You're just like:

The sparrow on the city battlements:

A creature quite inured to such alarms."

As they were speaking, Yü-lou came out again, along with Hui-lien, and reported to Chin-lien, "The First Lady is

feeling poorly in her present condition and Hsi-men Ta-chieh is not in the mood, so they won't come. The rest of us are to go ahead as long as we try to be back by a reasonable hour. Li Chiao-erh's legs are bothering her, so she won't come. When Sun Hsüeh-o saw that our elder sister wasn't coming, she was afraid Father would be annoyed with her if he happened to come home and also refused to go out."

"So none of them want to come," said Chin-lien. "You and I and Sister Li might as well go by ourselves then. If Father comes home while we're out, let him curse anyone he wants to. Better yet, let's get that little piece Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao from the master suite, Lan-hsiang from your place, and Ying-ch'un from Sister Li's place, and take them all along with us. Then if Father comes home and wants to know what's going on, she'll have even more explaining to do."

Hsiao-yü came up, at this juncture, and said, "Since my mistress isn't going, let me go along with the rest of you."

"Tell your mistress you're coming," said Yü-lou. "We'll wait for you up front."

After some time, Hsiao-yü came back out after asking Yüeh-niang's permission with a happy giggle on her face.

Thereupon the three women were ready to set out with their crowd of male and female retainers in tow. The two page boys, Lai-an and Hua-t'ung, accompanied them with hanging, gauze-covered lanterns. The son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, stood on the mounting platform setting off fireworks and igniting firecrackers to amuse the ladies.

"Master Son-in-law," Sung Hui-lien said to him, "whatever happens, wait a minute for me, will you? The ladies are taking me with them on their ramble. I'm going to my room to do up my hair. I'll be right back."

"But we're ready to start right now," Ching-chi protested.

"If you don't wait for me," said Hui-lien, "I'll be annoyed with you for the rest of my life."

Thereupon she went to her room where she changed into an outfit consisting of a jacket of green silk material, shot with red, that opened down the middle, over a white drawnwork skirt. She also did up her hair in a red, gold lame kerchief, pasted three gold-flecked turquoise beauty patches on her fore-head, and put on a pair of gold lantern earrings.

Thus attired, she came out to join the rest of the party in the traditional Lantern Festival custom of "walking off the hundred ailments."¹¹

By the light of the moonbeams,

They appeared to be goddesses.

The three ladies were all wearing white satin jackets and brocaded vests. On their heads:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;

setting off their:

Powdered faces and ruby lips.

Ch'en Ching-chi and Lai-hsing, one on the left and the other on the right, set off:

"Slow-blooming lotus blossoms,"

"Golden thread chrysanthemums,"

"Ten-foot high orchids," and

"Brighter than moonlights,"¹²

as they proceeded on their way.

When they emerged into the marketplace on the main street, behold:

The fragrant dust never settles,

The revelers swarm like ants,¹³

Firecrackers thunder,

Lantern lights shimmer,

The din of flutes and drums resounds,

The merrymaking is at its height.

The bystanders to left and right were treated to the spectacle of a contingent of gauze-covered lanterns lighting the way for a bevy of men and women, all of whom were:

Sporting red and trailing green.¹⁴

Assuming that they came from the household of some noble family, they:

Scarcely dared to gaze upon them,¹⁵ and

Endeavored to keep out of their way.

One moment Sung Hui-lien was saying, "Master Son-in-law, set off a rocket¹⁶ for me, will you?"

The next moment she was saying, "Master Son-in-law, set off some 'Lantern Festival crackers' for me, will you?"

One moment she was dropping some item of her costume jewelry and then picking it up again.

The next moment she was losing her shoe and then leaning against a certain party while she fiddled with it.

Trying first this and then that,

her sole concern was to carry on a flirtation with Ch'en Ching-chi.

Meng Yü-lou could abide it no longer and took her to task, demanding, "How come you're the only one who keeps losing her shoe?"

"She's afraid it's muddy underfoot," said Yü-hsiao, "so she's wearing a pair of the Fifth Lady's shoes over her own."

"Tell her to come here and let me see," said Yü-lou. "Can she really be wearing the Fifth Lady's shoes?"

"She did borrow a pair of my shoes the other day," said Chin-lien. "Who would have thought the preternatural bitch would put them on over her own?"

Hui-lien thereupon hitched up her skirt for Yü-lou's benefit and revealed that she was, indeed, wearing two pairs of red

shoes on her feet, underneath ankle leggings the ends of which were tied in place with lengths of sand-green cord. Yü-lou did not say another word on the subject.

Before long they had traversed the main street and arrived in the Lantern Market.

"As long as we're here," Chin-lien said to Yü-lou, "why don't we go pay a visit to Sister Li's house on Lion Street?"

Thereupon, they instructed Hua-t'ung and Lai-an to go in front with their lanterns and then proceeded to wend their way along Lion Street. The page boys went ahead and knocked on the gate.

Old Mother Feng had already gone to bed for the night. There were two young girls that were being offered for sale as indentured servants sleeping on the same k'ang with her. Old Mother Feng bestirred herself to open the door and usher in the crowd of lady visitors. After which she poked up the fire in the brazier, put on the teakettle, picked up a jug, and started out into the street to fetch wine for the company.

"Wait a minute, Old Feng," said Meng Yü-lou. "There's no need to go out after wine. We've had more than enough to eat and drink at home. If you've got any tea handy, just pour us a cup or two, that's all."

"If you're going to serve people wine," said Chin-lien, "the least you could do is order up a feast to go with it."

"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "a mere bottle or two will be;

Hardly enough to discolor the water.¹⁷

That will never suffice. You'll have to lay in a full jug or two."

"She's only kidding," said Yü-lou. "There's no need to go out for anything. Just serve us some tea."

Only then did the old woman come to a standstill.

"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "why don't you come over to my place for a visit once in a while? I really have no idea what you do with yourself all day over here."

"Mistress," the old woman said, "you can see for yourself. I've got these two karmic encumbrances on my hands with nobody else to look after them."

Yü-lou then asked, "Who is putting the two serving girls up for sale?"

"One of them," the old woman replied, "was a chambermaid in a household in the Northern Quarter. She's twelve years old, and they only want five taels of silver for her. The other was the wife of a retainer in the household of Usher Wang of the Court of State Ceremonial. Her husband ran away so her master has impounded the fret indicating her status as a married woman and had her taken away to be put up for sale. He wants ten taels of silver for her."

"Let me tell you something, Old Mother," said Yü-lou. "I know someone who's in the market for such wares, and you ought to be able to turn a tidy profit for yourself."

"Third Lady," said the old woman, "who have you got in mind? Tell me who it is."

"At the present time," said Yü-lou, "the Second Lady has only Yüan-hsiao to wait upon her, so she's shorthanded. She's looking for a more mature serving girl to work for her. You might as well offer to sell her the older of these two."

"How old is this girl?" she went on to ask.

"She was born in the year of the ox," the old woman replied, "so this year she should be sixteen."

As they spoke, the tea was brought in and everyone had some to drink. Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, and Hui-lien took the opportunity to make a complete tour of the premises, from front to back. They also went up to the second-story room that overlooked the street, pushed open the windows, and surveyed the scene.

Ch'en Ching-chi pressed them, saying, "It's already late. As soon as you've had your look, we'd better start on our way home."

"You crazy short-life!" protested Chin-lien. "You're pushing us so hard:

Our arms and legs never stop moving.

What's the rush?"

Thereupon, it was not until Ch'un-mei and the others had been called downstairs that they were ready to start. Old Mother Feng accompanied them out the door.

At this juncture Li P'ing-erh bethought herself to ask, "Where has P'ing-an gotten to?"

"He hasn't shown up yet today," the old woman replied. "Though it's:

The third watch in the middle of the night,
he'll keep me waiting up to:

Open the gates and close the doors,¹⁸
for him."

"Today," pointed out Lai-an, "P'ing-an accompanied Father to Second Master Ying's place."

"Old Mother," Li P'ing-erh enjoined her, "just lock up and go to bed. Most likely he won't even show up and you won't have to lose any sleep. Come over to the house and report to me first thing in the morning. You're as bad as:

The abbot of the Stone Buddha Monastery.¹⁹

Every time you're asked to officiate you make excuses."²⁰

"Don't I know who my mistress is?" the old woman exclaimed. "I'd never presume to make excuses to you."

"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "There's no need for you to:

Bandy words about it."²¹

Just see that you deliver that serving girl to the Second Lady first thing in the morning."

At the conclusion of this exchange they watched as the old woman closed the outer gate. Only then did the flock of

men and women set out for home.

As they approached their own gateway they became aware of the voice of Auntie Han, the wife of Mohammedan Han, who rented a room on the street front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property. Her husband was on night duty with the staff of the eunuch in charge of the local Imperial Stables. While at home alone she had joined some neighbors in "walking off the hundred ailments" and returned to her dwelling in a drunken state, only to learn that late that night someone had cut his way through her front door and stolen her dog. Some other things were missing too. She was sitting right in the street engaged in a drunken tirade.

The flock of women had no sooner come to a halt than Chin-lien directed Lai-an, "You go call Auntie Han over here so we can find out what's going on."

Before long she was haled before them and asked, "What's all this about?"

Auntie Han:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,

Stepping forward and saluting them with folded hands,

bowed twice and said, "If you three ladies will be so good as to listen, I'll tell you all about it from the beginning. There is a song to the tune 'Playful Children' that testifies to this:

It was an auspicious occasion in an era of great peace,
the night of the Lantern Festival,"

etc., etc.

When Yü-lou and the others had heard her out, they all reached into their sleeves and came up with some small change and holiday delicacies to give her. They then summoned Lai-an and instructed him, "Tell Master Ch'en to see that she gets home all right."

Ch'en Ching-chi's sole concern at the moment was to carry on a flirtation with Hui-lien, so he refused to help her on her way.

Chin-lien then directed Lai-an to see that she got home safely and instructed him, "Tell her to come to the house first thing in the morning to do the laundry. I'll speak to your father about it and get him to take appropriate measures on her behalf."

At this, Auntie Han returned home with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.

Yü-lou and the others had barely passed beyond Auntie Han's door when who should they see but the wife of Pen the Fourth, wearing a red jacket, a jet silk vest, and a jade-colored skirt, with her hair done up in a gold lame kerchief.

She stepped forward with a giggle and said, "Many felicitations. Where have you three ladies been on your excursion? If you see fit to do so, deign to enter my humble abode and permit me to offer you some tea."

"We only stopped just now because of that youngster's bawling," said Yü-lou. "We felt obliged to ask her what was going on. Thank you for your hospitality, but it's already late and we'd better not come in."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pen the Fourth's wife. "You three ladies are:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door.²²

No doubt you find it laughable enough that such mean folk as ourselves can come up with a cup of tea."

She dragged them into the house as though her life depended upon it. It so happened that there were representations of the Goddess Kuan-yin delivering sentient beings from the eight disasters,²³ and of His Holiness Kuan Yü, the God of War,²⁴ on ritual display outside the dwelling. A lantern in the shape of a snowflake was suspended over the front door. When they lifted aside the portiere they found her thirteen-year-old daughter, Chang-chieh, inside. There were two gauze-covered lanterns standing on a dining table on which a complete complement of seasonal delicacies were arrayed.

Having offered the three ladies a seat, she hastily called Chang-chieh over to kowtow to the visitors and serve them tea. Yü-lou and Chin-lien gave her a pair of artificial flowers apiece and Li P'ing-erh pulled a handkerchief out of her sleeve and also presented her with a mace of silver to buy melon seeds with. This pleased Pen the Fourth's wife so much that she kowtowed in gratitude again and again. But she was unable to detain them any longer.

Yü-lou and the others got up and made their departure. When they arrived at the main gate of their residence the page boy, Lai-hsing, was there to greet them.

"Has your father come home or not?" Chin-lien asked him.

"Father hasn't come home yet," Lai-hsing responded.

The three ladies lingered at the gateway to watch as Ch'en Ching-chi set off three "ten-foot high chrysanthemums," a single "great smoky orchid," and a single "gold lamp on a silver stand."²⁵ Only then did they return to their quarters inside the compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not arrive home until the fourth watch. Truly:

Once drunk, one does not even know
that night has fallen;

Let the bright moon set, if it will,
behind the western chamber.²⁶

To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi had seized the opportunity provided by "walking off the hundred ailments" to

flirt with Chin-lien and the other women all along the way. Moreover, from the manner in which he and Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, were:

Talking back and forth,
it was obvious that by now both of them had the same idea in mind.

The next morning, when Ching-chi had finished his ablutions, he did not report to the shop but headed straight for Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound. Whom should he find there but Li Chiao-erh and Chin-lien, who were seated around the bed table on the k'ang, keeping Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, company. Tea had just been served. Yüeh-niang had withdrawn into her Buddhist chapel to burn incense. The young scamp stepped forward, saluted the company with a bow, and sat down.

"Son-in-law, a fine person you are!" Chin-lien said to him. "Yesterday, when you were asked to take Auntie Han home, you refused to budge, and we had to send the page boy to do the job instead. Moreover, you were constantly:

Engaging in badinage and repartee,
with that servant's wife. Who knows what you were up to? When your mother-in-law is through burning her incense, just wait and see whether I tell her about it or not."

"How can you say such things?" rejoined Ching-chi. "Yesterday your son very nearly:

Came down with a crick in the back.²⁷

I accompanied you the whole way on your excursion and then we went to the house on Lion Street. How many li is it there and back do you suppose? I was already worn out with all the walking, and then you wanted me to take on Mohammedan Han's wife as well. So what if you did have to get the page boy to see her home? I'd barely gotten to sleep before it was daylight again. It was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."

As they were speaking, Yüeh-niang came back from her incense burning and Ching-chi made her a bow.

"What was Auntie Han doing yesterday," Yüeh-niang demanded, "indulging in such a drunken tirade?"

"She had been out walking off the hundred ailments," Ching-chi explained, "when someone cut his way through her front door and took her dog. So she sat down right in the street, weeping and wailing and cursing away. This morning when her husband came home he gave her a good drubbing, as a result of which she isn't up even yet."

"It's lucky we came along when we did and persuaded her to go inside," said Chin-lien. "Otherwise, if Father had come home and run into her, what sort of impression would that have made?"

When they had finished speaking, Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all went into Yüeh-niang's room to have some tea. Ching-chi also took tea with them.

Afterwards, when they went back to their quarters, Hsi-men Ta-chieh had a few things to say to Ching-chi.

"You death-defying jailbird!" she railed at him. "What were you doing:

'Engaging in badinage and repartee,'

with Lai-wang's wife? If word of any such thing were to come to Father's attention, even if that whore escaped unscathed, you'd be lucky to find a place to die in!"

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing had spent the night in Li P'ing-erh's room and was late getting up. Who should appear at this juncture but Battalion Commander Ching Chung, who had just been promoted to a concurrent position as military director-in-chief of another jurisdiction and had come to pay a courtesy call. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had just arisen from bed, hastily combed his hair, put on his hairnet, straightened his clothes, and came out to entertain his guest in the main reception room, simultaneously dispatching P'ing-an to the rear compound to fetch some tea.

Sung Hui-lien was in the courtyard outside the master suite just then, engaged in a game of jacks with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü for the privilege of spanking the loser.²⁸ They had been:

Horsing around till they were all in a heap.

Hsiao-yü was riding astride Yü-hsiao, who was face down on the ground, and laughing as she cursed her, saying, "You lousy whore! You've forfeited a spanking and now you won't let yourself be spanked."

She then called out to Hui-lien, "Come over here and hold on to one of the whore's legs. If she doesn't want a spanking I'll give her a poke."

Just as they were in the midst of their fun, who should appear but P'ing-an, who called out, "Sister Yü-hsiao, Old Man Ching is in the front compound and I've been sent to fetch the tea."

Yü-hsiao didn't pay any attention to him but continued her playful tussle with Hsiao-yü as though nothing had happened.

P'ing-an pressed his case, saying, "He's been sitting out there all this time already."

"You crazy jailbird!" interjected Sung Hui-lien. "If Father wants tea, go ask whomever's on duty in the kitchen for it. Why hang around here bothering us? We're only responsible back here for preparing the tea for the master suite. It's not our job to take care of the front compound."

P'ing-an accordingly went to the kitchen where the person on duty that day was Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang.

"You crazy jailbird!" Hui-hsiang protested. "I've got my hands full with the cooking in here. Just go ask for two cups of tea back at the master suite. Why insist on getting your tea from me?"

"I've already been back there," said P'ing-an, "but they wouldn't give me any tea. Sister Hui-lien said, 'That's the responsibility of whoever's on duty in the kitchen. Go ask her for it.' She wouldn't do anything about it."

"That lousy slattern!" Hui-hsiang cursed. "I suppose she's made up her mind that she's to be on the staff of the master suite while I'm preordained to slave in the kitchen. I'm in the midst of preparing the food for the whole household, and I

also have to stir-fry some vegetarian fare for the First Lady. How many hands do you think I've got to spare? If you think about it, all she has to do is pour out the tea, but she insists on singling me out for the job. As though I were at her beck and call! If the tea never gets served, so be it. I'm certainly not going to take care of it."

"Old Man Ching has been sitting out there all this time already," protested P'ing-an. "Sister, hurry up and give me some tea to take out to him. If you delay any further you'll bring Father's curses down on your head."

Thereupon, while:

This place tried to foist the job on that;

That place tried to foist the job on this,

until nothing got done for half a day. By the time P'ing-an had waited for Yü-hsiao to supply condiments and teaspoons and was finally able to bring the tea out, Director Ching had been sitting in the reception room for a long time. He tried to make his departure more than once, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not let him go. Then the tea turned out to be so cold it was not fit to drink. Hsi-men Ch'ing roundly cursed P'ing-an and had to order him to replace the original tea before Director Ching finally drank it and went his way.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside he demanded to know, "Who was it who made the tea today?"

"It was made by the person on duty in the kitchen," said P'ing-an.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the master suite and complained to her, "What sort of tea was that to serve to a guest today? Go to the kitchen, find out what servant's wife is on duty, and then bring her out here for interrogation and give her a few strokes with the bamboo."

"It should be Hui-hsiang on duty today," said Hsiao-yü.

"That splay-legged whore is asking for it!" Yüeh-niang said in some consternation. "How can she continue to turn out that sort of tea?"

At the same time she sent Hsiao-yü to fetch Hui-hsiang, made her kneel down in the courtyard, and asked how many strokes she should be given.

"It was only because I was busy cooking," Hui-hsiang protested, "and had to stir-fry your vegetarian fare into the bargain, that I had my hands full and the tea got a little cold."

Yüeh-niang berated her for a while and then permitted her to get up.

"From now on," she commanded, "whenever your father has guests to entertain in the front compound, let Yü-hsiao and Hui-lien make the tea back here. Whoever is on duty in the kitchen should only be responsible for preparing the food and tea for the household as a whole."

When Hui-hsiang returned to the kitchen she was:

Unable to contain her chagrin.²⁹

She only waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing had left the premises before coming back in a rage to seek out Hui-lien. Pointing her finger at her, she launched into a tirade of abuse.

"You lousy whore! I hope you're satisfied, that's all. I suppose you're preordained to be in favor and serve on the staff of the master suite while I'm just to be a woman who slaves in the kitchen. You insisted on the page boy's singling me out to make the tea. As though I were at your beck and call! As for you and me:

The rice is already cooked.³⁰

You know it and I know it.³¹

The cricket won't eat the flesh of a warty toad,

Because both inhabit the same spadeful of earth.³²

In any case, if you're not Father's concubine, that's all there is to it; and even if you are his concubine, I'm not afraid of you."

"You're completely off the mark," retorted Hui-lien. "If you didn't make the tea right and Father took exception to it, what's that got to do with me? How dare you come here and vent your spleen on me?"

When Hui-hsiang heard these words she became more enraged than ever and railed at her, "You lousy whore! How is it that when you did your best to get me a caning just now I wasn't ordered to be beaten after all? When you were working for the Ts'ai family, the lovers you took couldn't be counted, and now that you're here, you're still up to your old tricks."

"If I've taken a lover, you've never seen it," replied Hui-lien. "Don't talk such stinking rot. And as for you, Sister, you're not exactly:

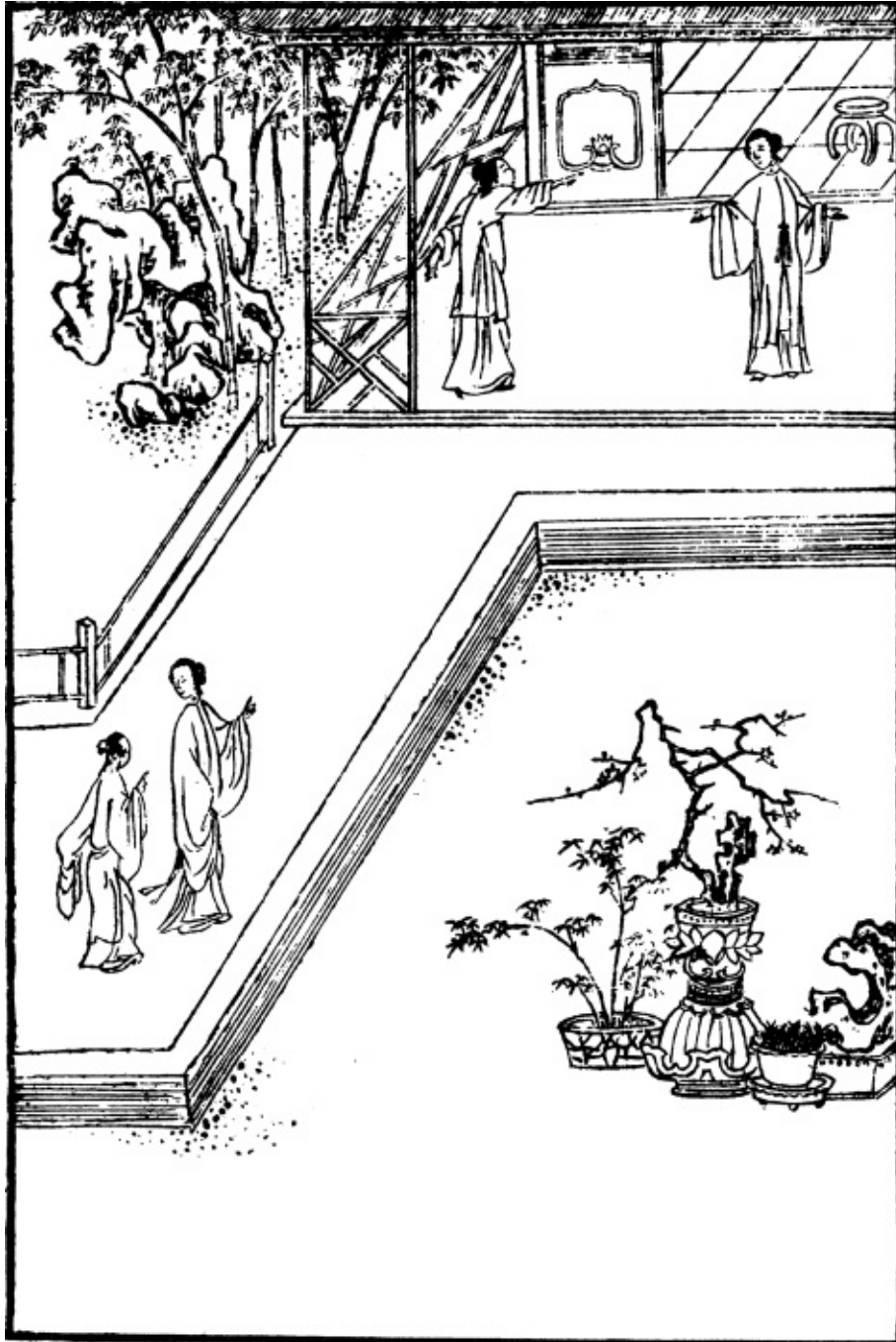
An immaculate nun,³³
yourself."

"Who says I'm not an immaculate nun?" retorted Hui-hsiang. "And if I chose to put my legs in the air, I'd do a better job of it than any whore like you, I can tell you. I didn't choose to start this tale-telling, but where men are concerned:

If you've had one, you've had a bushelful.³⁴

There isn't a man out at the front of the compound you haven't been after. You may think nobody knows what you're up to behind their backs. The way you talk when you think you're safe, even the ladies of the house mean nothing to you, let alone their inferiors."

"What have I said behind anyone's back?" demanded Hui-lien. "And who means nothing to me? You can give me as hard a time as you like. I'm not afraid of you."



Hui-hsiang Angrily Hurls Abuse at Lai-wang's Wife

"You've got someone to stand up for you," replied Hui-hsiang. "That's why you're not afraid."

The two of them were still mixing it up when Hsiao-yü fetched Yüeh-niang, who ordered them apart. "You lousy little stinkers! Why don't you go about your business? What are you mixing it up over, anyway? If your master gets wind of it there'll be another ruckus for sure. The last time there was no caning administered, but if you carry on any longer there will be."

"If I get a single stroke," said Hui-lien, "I'll hook that whore's guts out right through her mouth before I'm ready to call it quits! I'll put my life up against yours any day; what's it to me, even if we both have to leave the house?"

So saying, she marched off to the front compound.

After this, Sung Hui-lien's conduct became more outrageous than ever. Relying on her clandestine affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she:

Took no further account,³⁵

of anyone in the household, high or low. Every day she could be found hobnobbing with Yü-lou, Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Ch'un-mei in their daily pastimes.

That same day Old Mother Feng brought over the twelve-year-old serving girl, as she had promised. She took her to Li P'ing-erh's quarters first, to be looked over, and then escorted her to Li Chiao-erh's place. Li Chiao-erh bought her for five taels of silver in order to serve in her apartment. But no more of this.

Truly:

The plum blossom licentiously displays its
springtide feelings;
Undaunted by the threat of Aunt Feng's³⁶
stern commands.³⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Outside the palace a craze for hunting,
inside a craze for sex;³⁸
If one dabbles a bit in such things,
what's the harm in it?
In the morning he rides forth
upon an embossed saddle;
At nightfall he returns
to scent of rouge and powder.³⁹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 25

HSÜEH-O SECRETLY DIVULGES THE LOVE AFFAIR; LAI-WANG DRUNKENLY VILIFIES HSI-MEN CH'ING

Amid terraces and kiosks of prominent houses
a myriad blossoms bloom;
Manipulating the ropes of their swings
girls vie voluptuously.
The morning sun lends added warmth
to their new brocades;
The spring breeze gusts congenially
across old gates and walls.
By jade flagstones orchid shoots may grow,
in many a beauteous pair;
But crimson bed curtains should enclose
a single preferred spray.
How laughable that the domestic doe should
breed domestic doom;
The women's quarters, from this time on,
know no behavioral norms.

THE STORY GOES that:

The Lantern Festival having passed,
The Ch'ing-ming Festival¹ was at hand.

Ying Po-chüeh called on Hsi-men Ch'ing that morning to extend an invitation and found him already entertaining Ch'ang Shih-chieh at breakfast in the summerhouse in the garden. They looked on as a considerable number of silversmiths who had been called in for the purpose plied their trade in front of them. Sun Kua-tsui had offered to stand treat and had invited them all to join him in a festive excursion to the suburbs.

Before this Wu Yüeh-niang had already had the frame for a swing constructed in the garden. Now that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home and the ladies were at leisure, she led her sisters into the garden to try it out and thus dispel the ennui of the spring day.

Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou were the first to sit down on the swing and try it together. After they had enjoyed it for a while they got off and suggested that Li Chiao-erh and P'an Chin-lien take their places. Li Chiao-erh begged off on the grounds that she was too heavy to work the swing and suggested that Li P'ing-erh should take a turn with Chin-lien.

After they had swung for a while, Yü-lou called out, "Sister Six, how about joining me in doing a standing swing? Don't anybody laugh. Just see how we do."

Thereupon, the two women:

Grasping the gaudy ropes with their jade hands,
Stood themselves erect upon the painted board.

Yüeh-niang told Sung Hui-lien to stand underneath to push the swing for them and she was joined in this task by Ch'un-mei. Truly, it is a case of:

Red-rouged powdered face facing
red-rouged powdered face;
Jade-white creamy shoulders next to
jade-white creamy shoulders.
Two pairs of jadelike wrists
tug and then retug;
Four tiny golden lotuses are
tossed and then retossed.²

Chin-lien, who was the uppermost of the pair, was:

Falling into a heap with laughter.

"Sister Six," Yüeh-niang called out to her. "There's nothing wrong with your laughing so hard up there, but if you were to slip and fall:

It would be no laughing matter.”³

As she spoke, who could have anticipated it, but the painted board was slippery and it was hard to maintain a steady footing on it in high-heeled shoes. All they heard was a clattering sound, and Chin-lien came tumbling off the swing. Fortunately she managed to catch hold of the frame and save herself from a severe fall, but she nearly dragged Yü-lou off with her.

“I warned you not to laugh so hard, Sister Six,” said Yüeh-niang. “It serves you right to have fallen off.”

Then she turned to Li Chiao-erh and the others and continued, “The one thing not to do when swinging is to laugh. What’s the point of laughing too hard, anyway? Your legs are sure to go soft on you and off you fall. Back when I was still a girl in my own home, the family of Censor Chou next door had a garden in which they had set up a swing. It was just like this on a day during the festival season in the third month that their daughter, Miss Chou, along with three or four of us other girls, were playing on the swing. We too were laughing uncontrollably, and Miss Chou slipped off and landed astride the painted board, which ruptured her hymen. Later, when she got married, the groom’s family claimed she was not a virgin, repudiated the match, and sent her back to her family. From now on, when you swing, avoid laughing above all else.”

“Meng the Third isn’t up to snuff,” said Chin-lien. “Let me and Li P’ing-erh do a standing swing together.”

“The two of you be careful now,” said Yüeh-niang.

She ordered Yü-hsiao and Ch’un-mei to stand to their right in order to push the swing for them.

Just as they were about to start, who should come in from outside but Ch’en Ching-chi, who said, “So you ladies are in here playing on the swing, are you?”

“Son-in-law, you’ve arrived in the nick of time,” said Yüeh-niang. “You can push the swing for the two ladies. The maidservants aren’t strong enough to do it properly.”

As for Ching-chi, it was just like the time:

When the old monk neglected to ring the bell:⁴

This was just the signal he’d been waiting for.

Thereupon,

Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes, he stepped forward and said, “Let me push the swing for the two ladies.”

Then, pausing to tuck Chin-lien’s skirt in place, he said, “Steady on your feet, Fifth Lady. Your son-in-law will give you a push.”

The swing flew up into the air, so that they looked just like a pair of immortals in flight.⁵

When she saw how high the swing was going, Li P’ing-erh called out apprehensively, “It’s not straight. Son-in-law, you’d better give me a push too.”

Somewhat flustered, Ch’en Ching-chi replied, “Don’t be so demanding. If you let me take my own time I can manage you both. If you go on at this rate, first one of you calling for me and then the other, it will bring on a case of consumption, and I won’t have the stamina to do the job.”

Thereupon, he proceeded to adjust the bottom of Li P’ing-erh’s skirt, exposing the extremities of her scarlet underdrawers, as he gathered it into a bunch.

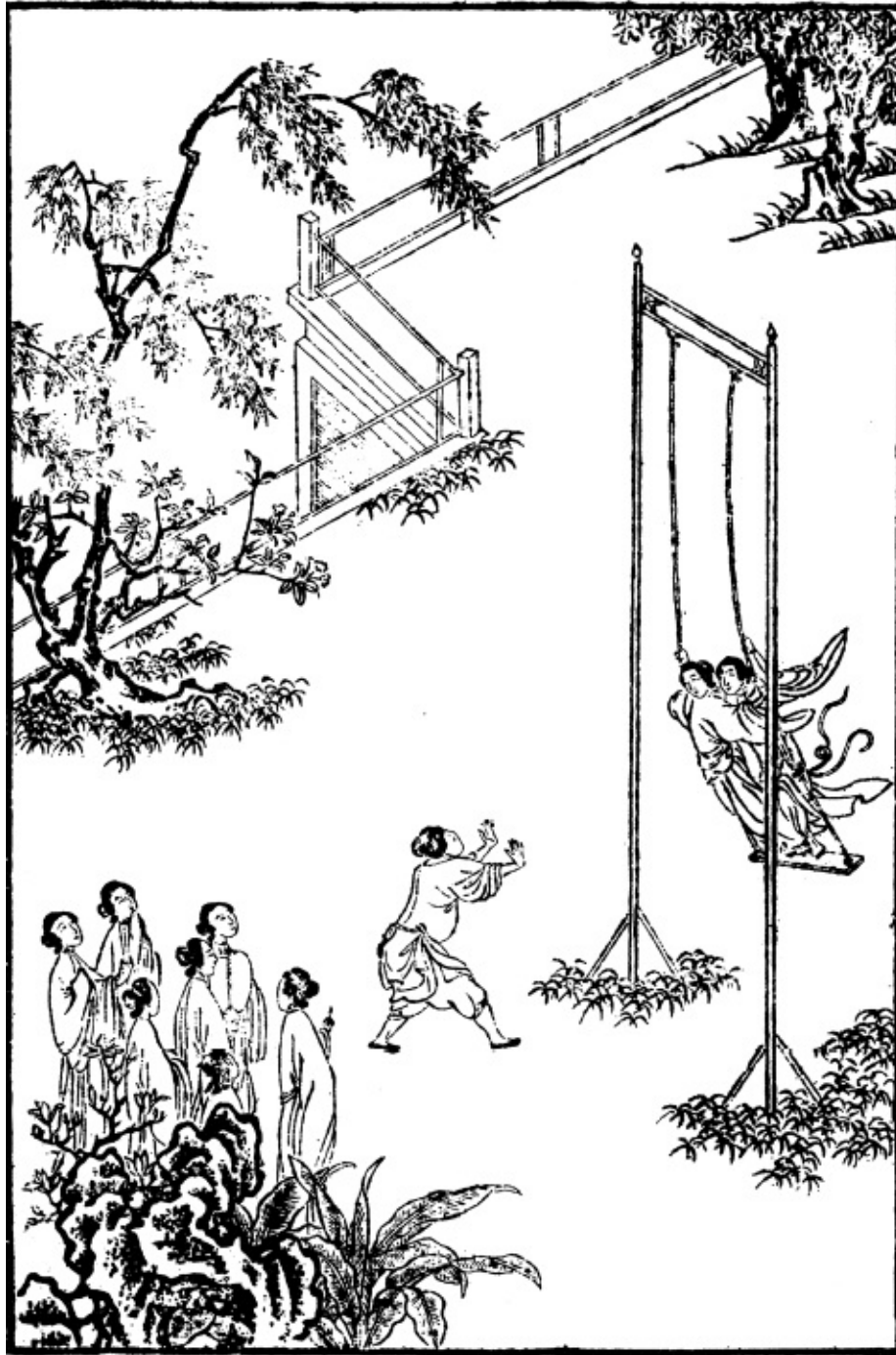
“Son-in-law,” Li P’ing-erh said, “Take it easy. My legs are going soft on me.”

“You shouldn’t call for more if you’re not up to serious drinking,” said Ching-chi. “Only a moment ago you were making such a fuss my head was spinning.”

“Sister Li, you’re stepping on my skirt,” complained Chin-lien. “It’s a wonder you haven’t pushed me right off the swing.”

The two of them continued to swing for some time and then stepped down.

Ch’un-mei and Hsi-men Ta-chieh then took a turn.



Ladies Enjoy the Swing on a Spring Day

Finally, Yü-hsiao and Sung Hui-lien were induced to try a standing swing together. Hui-lien grasped the gaudy ropes with her hands, stood straight up with her feet firmly planted on the painted board below, and without asking anyone to give her a push caused the swing to soar up into the clouds, and then suddenly fly down again. Truly, they were just like a pair of immortals in flight, a captivating sight.

When Yüeh-niang saw this, she said to Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh, "Just look! That chambermaid can really swing."

As she spoke, a gust of wind caught Hui-lien's skirt, exposing her scarlet underdrawers of Lu-chou silk, tucked into sand-green leggings, adorned with fine variegated silk embroidered kneepads, the ends of which were tied in place with pink cord.

Yü-lou pointed this out to Yüeh-niang, but she only laughed, cursed, "What a lousy preternatural creature," and let it go at that.

Yüeh-niang and the others continued to enjoy their swinging. But no more of this.

At this point the story divides into two. Let us now return to the story of Lai-wang, who had gone to Hang-chou to arrange the manufacture of the garments for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on the occasion of his birthday. He had now returned, in charge of numerous saddlebags and trunks full of valuables. Leaving his cargo at the dock, he went ahead in order to announce his arrival.

When he reached the gate, he tied up his horse and went inside, dusted himself off, stowed away his gear, and headed for the rear compound. The first person he saw was Sun Hsüeh-o, who was standing in the doorway of the master suite.

He made her a bow and Hsüeh-o greeted him, all smiles, saying, "Good. You've come home. You must be tired from:

The wind and the frost on your journey.⁶

It's not that long since I've seen you, but you've gotten swarthier and put on weight."

Lai-wang then asked, "Where are the master and mistress?"

"Your father has been invited by Ying the Second and that bunch to join them in an excursion outside the South Gate," said Hsüeh-o. "Your mother and Hsi-men Ta-chieh are in the flower garden playing on the swing."

"Ai-ya!" said Lai-wang. "What do they want to do that for? Swinging is a pastime introduced by the northern barbarians.⁷ Southerners don't do it. The women there, in the third month of spring, merely amuse themselves by comparing botanical specimens."

Hsüeh-o then went into the kitchen and poured out a cup of tea for him, asking as she did so, "Have you eaten or not?"

"I don't want anything to eat right now," said Lai-wang. "As soon as I've seen the mistress, I'll go back to my room and wash up."

Then he went on to ask, "How come I don't see my wife around the kitchen?"

Hsüeh-o gave a sardonic laugh, and said, "Your wife is no longer your wife of old. She's risen to quite another plane. Nowadays she spends all her time palling around with the ladies of the household, playing at board games with them, or jacks, or dominoes. She scarcely condescends to do any work in the kitchen."

While they were talking, Hsiao-yü had gone into the garden to report to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Lai-wang's here."

Yüeh-niang came back from the front of the compound and sat down. Lai-wang stepped forward and kowtowed to her, after which he stood to one side. She asked him about the events of his journey and rewarded him with the gift of two bottles of wine.

After a while his wife, Sung Hui-lien, showed up and Yüeh-niang said, "That's enough for now. You must be tired. Go back to your room and wash up and have a rest, so you'll be ready to report to your father when he gets home."

Lai-wang then went back to his room. Hui-lien handed him the key and he opened the door. She dipped up some water for him to wash his face and clean up with and brought in his bag.

"You lousy black jailbird!" she said. "It's not that long since I've seen you, but you've certainly put on a lot of weight."

She helped him change his clothes and fixed something for him to eat. He took a nap, and by the time he got up it was already sunset.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, Lai-wang came to see him and reported, "The garments for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on his birthday, and the clothes for the family, have all been successfully procured in Hang-chou. They have been packed in four trunks and transported on a government boat. All that remains is to hire bearers and see them through customs."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted and gave him the silver to pay the bearers. The next morning Lai-wang arranged to have the trunks carried into the city, had them properly stowed away, and settled accounts with his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with five taels of silver for his personal use and continued to employ him, as before, as a purchasing agent for the household.

Lai-wang had done some business of his own on the side and surreptitiously presented Sun Hsüeh-o with two satin handkerchiefs, two pairs of figured ankle leggings, four boxes of Hang-chou powder, and twenty cakes of rouge.

Hsüeh-o secretly confided to him, "Ever since you went away, during the last four months or so, your wife has been carrying on an affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing. It all started with Yü-hsiao playing the role of pander and delivering a gift of silk. They've used Chin-lien's quarters as their nest, meeting at first in the grotto underneath the artificial hill in the garden, and then, later, actually going to it in her room. They're at it all day long:

Sleeping from morning to night,

And then from night to morning.⁸

He gives her clothing and jewelry, trinkets and silver, which she carries around with her in a big bag. She gets the page boys to buy things for her at the front gate at the rate of two or three mace of silver per day."

"No wonder," said Lai-wang, "her trunk is full of clothing and jewelry. When I asked her about it, she said the mistress had given them to her."

"It's not your mother that gave them to her," said Hsüeh-o. "It's your father who gave them to her."

Lai-wang made a mental note of what she had said.

That night, he went into the rear compound and had a few cups to drink. When he returned to his room, as the saying goes:

Wine releases the words stored in the gut.

On opening her trunk and coming across a bolt of blue silk of unusually fine design, he asked his wife, "Where'd this silk come from? Who gave it to you? Tell me the truth immediately."

His wife:

Not understanding the true state of affairs,⁹
put on a smile and replied, "You crazy louse of a jailbird! What are you asking about that for? It's just a bolt of silk that the mistress in the rear compound gave me when she saw I didn't have a proper jacket to wear. I put it away in the trunk and haven't had time to make it up yet. Really, who do you think would give me such a thing?"

"You lousy whore!" Lai-wang cursed. "You think you can still fool me with such tricks, do you? Who was it who really gave it to you?"

"And where did this jewelry come from?" he went on to ask.

"Phooey!" the woman replied. "You crazy jailbird! Who doesn't have a mother and father?"

Even if you sprung from a crack in a rock,
you'd have a nest.

Even if you were born from a date stone,
you'd have a pit.

Even if you were sired by a clay figurine,
it must have been animate.

Even if you were begotten by a stone tablet,
you'd still have a base.

How can anyone who is human lack relatives or relations? These hairpins and combs were lent to me by my maternal aunt. Who do you suppose gave them to me? How can you be so:

Barefaced and red-eyed?¹⁰

You'll be seeing things till the day you die, you jailbird!"

At this point Lai-wang gave her a blow with his fist that nearly knocked her off her feet.

"You lousy whore! Still shooting off your mouth, are you? I know someone who's actually seen you engaging in hanky-panky with that degenerate pig or dog. I know all about how that maidservant Yü-hsiao played the role of pander and delivered a gift of silk to you; how the two of you made out together in the front garden; how, later on, you moved the scene of operations into that whore P'an's room where you could carry on openly; and how you keep it up all day long till you're fucked out. You lousy whore! And you have the nerve to come around me with all that highfalutin talk!"

The woman then broke into tears, saying, "You'll come to a bad end, you lousy jailbird! What do you think you're doing, coming home and beating me up? What business of yours have I ruined?"

Those may be words but they don't make utterances.¹¹

If you throw a brick or a tile into the air,
It's got to come down to earth.

Some backbiting:

Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,¹²

person, bent on:

Making something out of nothing,

must have put you up to abusing your old lady. Well your old lady's not the sort of unbacked commodity to be trifled with.

Even if you abuse a person to death,
You'd better have clear-cut grounds.

Who says so, anyway? If you don't believe me, just ask around a bit about that Sung girl. If I've slipped up in any way, you might as well turn my name Sung on its head. Would I dare open my mouth to accuse anyone else of anything? That whore and that cuckold have the nerve to bad-mouth me, do they? And as for you, you lousy jailbird:

Before you even get wind of anything,
You're ready for the rain.¹³

The only thing that ought to matter is the truth.¹⁴

If someone told you to kill a person, I suppose you'd just kill him."

With these few words, Lai-wang was reduced to silence.

After some time, he said, "It's not that I intended to beat you. It's just that I've allowed that bastard to get the better of me."

"As for that bolt of blue silk," Hui-lien continued, "I might as well tell you all about it. It was during the eleventh month last year, on the Third Lady's birthday, that the mistress noticed I was wearing a violet jacket along with a skirt I had borrowed from Yü-hsiao that didn't match. 'That's most unbecoming,' she said. 'What a way to dress! It won't do.' It was on that occasion that she gave me this bolt of silk. But who's had the time to make it up? Someone who didn't know the facts must have made up this tale about me. But they don't know who they've got to contend with. Your old lady's not the sort to let anyone off easy. Tomorrow I'll give them a sample of what I can do in the way of a good cursing out. I might as well put my life on the line since nobody's willing to stick up for me."

"As long as you haven't done anything, forget it," said Lai-wang. "Why pick a quarrel with anyone for no good reason? Just make up the bed for me, and be quick about it, so I can get some sleep."

As the woman unfolded his bedding, she muttered, "You'll drop dead in your tracks someday, you crazy jailbird! Once you've had your snootful of that 'saffron soup,'¹⁵ you just sack out and enjoy yourself, leaving your old lady to curse you

to your fucking face for nothing.”

Thereupon, by the time she had turned Lai-wang over on the k'ang, with his face to the wall, he was:

Snoring thunderously.

Gentle reader take note: Most of the adulterous women of this world, no matter how smart their husbands are, even if they are tough enough to chew nails, can get around them with a few phrases that:

Misstate wrong as right,¹⁶

so effectively that nine out of ten of them are deceived. Truly:

Like the bricks in the privy:

They're both hard and smelly.¹⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Hui-lien's illicit affair enables her to
monopolize her master;

Lai-wang, while in a state of drunkenness,
abuses his wife.

Hsüeh-o secretly divulges Chin-lien's share
in arranging the tryst;

Thereby giving rise to open hostilities
in the bosom of the family.

Sung Hui-lien succeeded in placating Lai-wang, and the night passed without further event.

The next day she went to the rear compound and interrogated Yü-hsiao as to who had given the game away but did not succeed in finding out anything. All she could do was to utter an indiscriminate tirade, but Hsüeh-o did not acknowledge her guilt.

One day, the impending catastrophe occurred in the following way. Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü to fetch Hsüeh-o, and she looked all over without being able to find her. As she was going past Lai-wang's door in the course of her search, she saw Hsüeh-o coming out of his room and assumed that she must have been talking to his wife. But who would have thought that when she returned to the kitchen she found Hui-lien there engaged in cutting meat?

Some time later, Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the front compound engaged in a parley with Ch'iao Hung, his neighbor from across the street, who asked him to intervene on behalf of the Yang-chou salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng, who had been incarcerated in Ts'ang-chou by the military commissioner and was willing to promise him two thousand taels of silver if he would ask Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching to have him released as a personal favor. As soon as he had finished with Ch'iao Hung, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Lai-wang, and he was seen to come running out of his room. Truly:

Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets

is not seen until they fly;

Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots

is not known until they speak.

As a result of this, everyone knew that Hsüeh-o had been engaging in hanky-panky with Lai-wang.

One day Lai-wang got drunk and started angrily railing against Hsi-men Ch'ing in the presence of the servants and page boys in the front compound.

“I know all about it,” he said. “When I was away from home he went after my wife. He sent Yü-hsiao to her room with a bolt of blue silk as an inducement and contrived to get her into the garden so he could have his way with her. And I know how, later on, they set it up so they could:

Sleep together all night long,

and how P'an Chin-lien provided cover for them. Well, so much for that. But he'd better not fall into my hands, that's all I can say, or it'll be a case of:

A white blade going in, and

A red blade coming out.¹⁸

For better or for worse, I might as well kill that whore named P'an into the bargain. After all, I've only got one life to lose. You just watch and see:

What I can say,

I can do.¹⁹

Come to think of it, when that whore named P'an was still in her own house, she killed off her first husband, Wu the Elder. And when her brother-in-law Wu Sung came back and lodged a complaint against her, who was it she had to thank for going off to the Eastern Capital to fix things up for her and getting Wu Sung condemned to military exile? Now that she's got:

Both feet on level ground again,

you'd think she'd be content to enjoy it, but instead she encourages my wife to commit adultery. My enmity for her is as big as the sky. As the saying goes, one must either:

Refuse to do something;

Or not stop at anything.

If they cross my path again, they'll have me to reckon with.

If you're willing to risk death by slow slicing,
You can afford to tackle the emperor himself."



Lai-wang Drunkenly Vilifies Hsi-men Ch'ing

Lai-wang was completely oblivious to the fact that:

Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass.

It did not occur to him that every word he said would be overheard by his fellow servant Lai-hsing.

Now this Lai-hsing was originally a native of Kan-chou, in the far northwest, who had been brought back as a servant by Hsi-men Ch'ing's father, Hsi-men Ta, after he made a trip there to engage in the woolen trade. As a consequence, his

name had been changed to Kan Lai-hsing. Twelve or thirteen years had gone by since then, and he had married and had children. Hsi-men Ch'ing customarily employed him as a purchasing agent for the foodstuff required by the household, a lucrative position. Recently, on account of his affair with Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken the job of purchasing agent away from him and given it to Lai-wang. As a result, Lai-hsing was on bad terms with Lai-wang, and a deadly enmity had grown up between the two men. On hearing these words of Lai-wang's, his:

Sense of grievance and desire for revenge,²⁰
could not help being activated.

Thereupon, he set out for P'an Chin-lien's quarters to tell her what he had heard. Chin-lien was sitting with Meng Yü-lou at the time.

On seeing Lai-hsing lift aside the portiere and come in, Chin-lien asked him, "What have you come for? Whose place has your father gone off drinking to today?"

"Today," said Lai-hsing, "Father and Ying the Second have gone outside the South Gate to attend a funeral. Right now, there is something I want to tell you about. But you must keep it to yourself. Don't tell anyone I told you."

"What is it?" asked Chin-lien. "Go ahead and speak. It doesn't matter."

"It's nothing but this," said Lai-hsing. "It's really intolerable. Lai-wang went out somewhere and got stinking drunk yesterday. Then he spent the rest of the day cursing in the front compound:

Making all kinds of threatening noises,
Pointing at the pig but cursing the dog.

He even tried to pick a fight with me, but I kept out of his way and paid no attention. Right in front of the whole household, high and low, he cursed Father and you."

"The lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "What did he say about me?"

"I hardly dare tell you," said Lai-hsing. "The Third Lady is here; it's not as though she were anyone else. That rascal said that Father had deliberately gotten him out of the way so he could go after his wife; that he had sent Yü-hsiao to her room with the gift of a bolt of silk (she could testify to the truth of this allegation); that you had provided cover for them and inveigled his wife into your room where they made out together:

Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning.

He's had a knife made for himself and threatens to kill Father and you, saying it would be a case of:

A white blade going in, and
A red blade coming out.

He also said that back when you were still in your own house you had poisoned your husband, and that you had him to thank for going off to the Eastern Capital to fix things up for you, thereby saving your life. He said that you were now:

Requiting kindness with enmity,²¹
by encouraging his wife to commit adultery.

"As far as I'm concerned:

If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.²²

If I didn't come and warn you, sooner or later, that rascal might do you in."

When Meng Yü-lou heard Lai-hsing's story it was:

Just as though she had been dunked in a
tub of ice water.

She was quite dumbfounded. As for Chin-lien, nothing might have happened if she had not heard about this, but having heard these words:

Her powdered face became suffused with red,²³
Her silver teeth were ground to smithereens.

"That criminal slave!" she cursed. "I've had:

No grudge against him in the past,
No enmity against him in the present.²⁴

If his master saw fit to play around with his wife, why should I be dragged into it? If I permit that slave to remain in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, I might as well not be his wife. So he thinks I owe my life to him, does he?"

Then she instructed Lai-hsing, "You can go, for now. When your father comes home, if he should ask you about this, be sure you tell him just what you told me."

"How can you talk that way?" said Lai-hsing. "It's not as though I'm traducing him, or anything.

If I've got a sentence,
I'll say that sentence.²⁵

No matter what Father asks me, I'll tell it the same way."

When he had finished speaking, Lai-hsing went back to the front compound.

Meng Yü-lou then asked Chin-lien, "Is it really true that Father could have done such a thing?"

"What's the point of asking anything about that shameless good-for-nothing?" exclaimed Chin-lien. "A fine woman she is! No wonder he finds himself in a position to be threatened by a slave. She was formerly employed in another household, where she underwent a full:

Nine calcinations and eighteen firings,
as a slave of a whore at her master's hands. Originally, when she was at Assistant Prefect Ts'ai's place, she got caught colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery, as a result of which she had to leave and marry the cook Chiang Ts'ung. When she catches sight of a man, she can't help waving her hand.

If she's had one, she's had a bushelful.
There isn't much she doesn't know about anything.

"That lousy ruffian of ours:
Deceiving spirits and stupefying demons,
did send Yü-hsiao to her with a gift of silk to make a jacket out of. If I know her, if she ever has the guts to wear it in public, I'll call her a real lady.

"It all happened last winter. I meant to tell you about it at the time but never got around to it. It was on that day when our elder sister had gone to a birthday party at our neighbor Ch'iao Hung's place. You remember, we were all in the front compound playing a board game when a maidservant came in and said that Father had come home, so the party broke up.

"Later, as I came through the inner gate on my way to the rear compound, I saw Hsiao-yü standing in the veranda. When I asked her if Father was inside, she made a negative gesture with her hand. When I retraced my steps as far as the garden, I ran into that little bitch, Yü-hsiao, standing at the postern gate. It so happens that she was acting as a lookout for the two of them, but I hadn't caught on yet. When I tried to go into the garden she barred my way and wouldn't let me proceed, saying that Father was inside. I gave her a piece of my mind, saying, 'You lousy little bitch! Since when have I been afraid of your father?' It was then I began to suspect he was up to some funny business with her. Who would have thought that when I went inside I found the two of them going at it in the grotto underneath the artificial hill. When the woman saw me come in, her face turned crimson with embarrassment and she beat a hasty retreat. When Father saw me he was quite at a loss for words, and I told him off for being such a shameless creature.

"Afterwards that woman came to my room and groveled around on her knees, begging me not to tell Mother about it. Later on, in the first month, Father wanted me to put that whore up in my own quarters so he could spend the night with her there, but both Ch'un-mei and I gave him a real talking to. Since when have we ever abetted him in getting so much as a glimpse of her shadow? That lousy death-defying slave! Don't you try to drag me into it. You say I put them up to it, do you? That slave of a whore with her simpering ways! As though I'd let them get up to their dirty tricks in my own room! And even if I hadn't raised any objections, that little piece Ch'un-mei of mine would never have consented to such a thing."

"No wonder," said Yü-lou, "the lousy little stinker's been putting on such airs. When I find her sitting anywhere, she makes as though she's going to stand up, but doesn't do it. Who could have known she was up to such tricks behind our backs?

"If you stop to consider it, Father really oughtn't to play around with her. After all, it's not as though there aren't any other women to be had. If you give your slave an excuse to raise a rumpus about it outside, what does it look like? It won't sound any too good when it gets abroad."

"The fact is," said Chin-lien, "left or right:
He doesn't have his own boots on straight.

You play around with the wife of a slave, and the slave seduces your own concubine behind your back. You only end up taking turns in your skulduggery. That slavey of a concubine is forever telling tales. She's done it a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. Right now, even if I give her a slap on the mouth, she won't be able to say anything."

"Do you think we'd better tell Father about this," Yü-lou asked Chin-lien, "or not tell him about it? Our elder sister isn't likely to do anything. If that rascal really means what he says, and we don't say anything about it, and Father doesn't know what's going on, he could end up falling prey to him someday. Truly:

When the mindful plot against the unmindful,
How can the unprepared cope with the prepared?²⁶
Sister Six, you really ought to say something about it. Truly:
You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,
So long as you don't injure the redbud tree."²⁷

"I wouldn't let that slave get away with anything," said Chin-lien, "even if he had begotten me!"
Truly:

If you do nothing in your lifetime to make people
raise their eyebrows;
There should be no one in the world prepared to
gnash his teeth at you.²⁸

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Lai-wang, while in his cups, recklessly
vilifies his master;
Lai-hsing, harboring resentment, stirs up
the wind and waves.
Chin-lien, upon hearing the truth about

herself revealed,
Grinds her silver teeth to smithereens,²⁹
in a fit of rage.

That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, he found Chin-lien in her room with her:
Cloudy locks in disarray, and her
Fragrant cheeks wrinkled from sleep,
while her eyes were bleary with weeping. When he asked the reason for this, she told him all about Lai-wang's drunken tirade and his threats to kill his master.

"Now there's Lai-hsing," she said, "who personally heard him cursing you, one day, and uttering these threats against you. If you stop to think about it, while you were plotting to seduce his wife behind his back, he simply turned around and took your own concubine behind your back.

You don't have your own boots on straight.
If that rascal should kill you, it would only serve you right. But what's it got to do with me, that he should want to kill me into the bargain? If you don't do something about it right away, some night, sooner or later, since:

Men don't have eyes in the backs of their heads,³⁰
I fear he may get the better of us."

"Who's been engaging in hanky-panky with that rascal?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know.

"There's no need to ask me," said Chin-lien. "Just ask Hsiao-yü in the master suite and you'll find out."

"It's not the first time that slave has taken liberties with me," she went on.

"He said that to begin with I had poisoned my husband, and that after you married me it was only thanks to his efforts that my life had been saved. He's been out making these allegations in front of people. It's a good thing I haven't:

Produced a son, or
Borne a daughter.

If I had:

Produced a son, or
Borne a daughter,

that lousy slave's allegations wouldn't bear listening to. He'd say things like, 'Originally, before your mother established her position in the household, it was only thanks to your father's string-pulling that her life was saved.' Such allegations would not redound to your credit. You may be devoid of shame, but I won't stand for it. What would I want to go on living for?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing, heeding:

The words of his spouse,³¹

went to the front of the compound, sought out Lai-hsing, found a place where they could be alone, and interrogated him about the whole incident, from beginning to end. The servant gave him a word for word account of the affair. Then he went to the rear compound and took Hsiao-yü's testimony, which did not conflict with what Chin-lien had said.

"It's true," she said, "that on such and such a day I saw Hsüeh-o coming out of Lai-wang's room when his wife was not there. That's really what happened."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was enraged and gave Sun Hsüeh-o a beating. It was only after repeated intercessions by Yüeh-niang that he stopped, but he ordered that all her jewelry and finery should be taken away, and that she should henceforth only be allowed to work in the kitchen along with the servants' wives and no longer be permitted to appear in society. Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently sent Yü-hsiao to call Sung Hui-lien into the rear compound and privately interrogated her.

"Ai-ya, Father!" the woman protested. "Needless to say, he never said any such thing. I'd be ready to swear an oath to that effect on his behalf. He may have had a cup or two too many to drink, but he would hardly have the:

Seven heads and eight galls,
to curse you that way behind your back. If he should:

Live off King Chou's largesse,
And yet call King Chou a villain,³²

on whom could he depend to make a living?

"Father, you shouldn't be so ready to believe what people say. Just let me ask you, who did you hear this story from, anyway?"

This speech of the woman's had the effect of reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence. When pressed for an answer, he replied, "It was Lai-hsing who told me about it. He said he'd been getting drunk every day and, according to the wind-borne words' he had heard, he'd been going around outside cursing me."

"Lai-hsing," retorted Hui-lien, "because you gave the job of purchasing agent to this guy of mine, has been saying we took it away from him, depriving him of the opportunity to make any more money out of it. On account of this grudge against my husband, he's made up this story out of whole cloth and spit this mouthful of blood on him. And you fell for it. Was there ever such an injustice? But I'm not going to let him get away with it.

"Father, do as I say. Don't keep my husband around at home any more. When he's here he only gets into trouble. Give

him a few taels of silver as capital and send him out to engage in trade somewhere where he can be:

Free as he pleases,³³

Far away from home.³⁴

Don't keep him around here where he's got time on his hands. It has always been true that:

A full stomach and warm body give rise to disorder;

Hunger and cold conduce to thoughts of thievery.³⁵

How could he not get up to mischief? If he were not around, but out on the road somewhere, it would be a lot more convenient whenever you had anything to say to me."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was utterly delighted and said, "My child, what you say is true enough. I had originally intended to send him to the Eastern Capital in charge of the birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, but since he just returned from a trip to Hang-chou I felt it wouldn't be right to send him on another mission so soon and decided to send Lai-pao instead. After what you've told me, I'll send him off in the next few days after all. When he gets back, I'll consign a thousand taels of silver to him and send him off with a manager to Hang-chou to engage in the silk trade. How would you feel about that?"

The woman was delighted by this, and said, "Father, if you only do that, it would be great. Don't keep him around at home anymore. The best thing you can do with him is to:

Keep the horse to a steady pace."³⁶

As she spoke, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that there was no one about, pulled her over, and gave her a kiss. The woman responded by sticking her tongue into his mouth, and the two of them fell to sucking each other's tongues.

"Father," the woman said, "you promised you were going to have a proper fret made up for my hair. How come you haven't had it made yet? If I'm not to wear it now, when am I to wear it? I suppose I'll have to keep on wearing this excuse of a hairpiece from one day to the next."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send eight taels of silver over to the silversmith's tomorrow so he can pull it into wire for you."

"I'm afraid your mother may ask about it," Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say. "How will you reply?"

"That's no problem," the woman said. "I'll have a story ready for her. I'll just say I borrowed it from my aunt's place to wear for a while. What is there to be afraid of?"

The two of them talked together for some time and then went their separate ways.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the reception hall and summoned Lai-wang into his presence.

"Get your clothes and your gear together," he said. "The day after tomorrow, the twenty-eighth day of the third month, I'm going to send you off to escort my shipment of birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai. And when you get back, I'm going to send you on another business trip to Hang-chou."

Lai-wang was delighted by this and readily consented. He returned to his room to get his gear together and then went out to buy a few things.

As soon as Lai-hsing heard what had happened he came and reported it all to Chin-lien. Upon inquiry, Chin-lien was told that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse in the garden and went there but did not find him. All she found was Ch'en Ching-chi, who was supervising the packing of the python robes and bolts of fabric.

Before this time Hsi-men Ch'ing had hired silversmiths to come to his residence and create a piece in which four male figurines were depicted holding up a representation of the character for long life. Each of the silver figures in this work was more than a foot high, and it was very skillfully wrought. In addition, there were two gold pitchers in the shape of the character for long life, two sets of jade cups in the shape of peaches, and two python robes of heavy scarlet variegated silk that had been manufactured in Hang-chou. All that was lacking were two bolts of jet abaca linen and two python robes of light scarlet silk, which he had been unable to purchase anywhere.

"On the second floor of my place over there," said Li. P'ing-erh, "I've got a number of python robes that haven't been made up yet. Let me go take a look."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing joined her, and they went up to the second floor of her belvedere to have a look. She pulled out four items, two bolts of jet abaca linen and two python robes of light scarlet silk with variegated insignia and brocade borders, ten times better in quality and design than the ones from Hang-chou. Hsi-men Ch'ing was as pleased as could be. These were the materials that Ch'en Ching-chi was having packed up in the summerhouse.

"Where's your father?" Chin-lien asked him. "And what are you packing?"

"Father was here just a minute ago," said Ching-chi. "He's gone up to the second floor of the Sixth Lady's place. I'm packing up the birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital."

"Who's being sent to deliver them?" Chin-lien asked.

"I heard that yesterday Father ordered Lai-wang to go," replied Ching-chi. "No doubt he's sending Lai-wang."

Chin-lien was just stepping down off the stylobate to head for the garden when she ran into Hsi-men Ch'ing and pulled him into her room.

"Who are you sending to the Eastern Capital tomorrow?" she asked.

"Lai-wang and my manager, Wu Tien-en," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's that matter of the thousand taels of silver to fix things up for the salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng. That's why I'm sending two people."

"You may do as you please," the woman said. "You don't pay attention to anything I say, but listen only to the one-sided words of that slave of a whore. Whatever she does is only designed to cover up for her husband. He's already

uttered threats against you on more than one occasion. He may well decide to go for broke, abandon his wife to you, appropriate your goods, and abscond somewhere:

Just as easy as you please,³⁷

without giving you a second thought. You may be willing to take your own losses, however gratuitous, but it's too bad about that thousand taels of silver that belongs to somebody else. Never fear, you'll have to compensate him. As for what I say:

Mull it over in your mind; then

Do as you please, do as you please.

"Whatever that woman has had to say for some time now has only been spoken on behalf of that slave of yours. Simply because you covet that wife of his, it's no good keeping him at home, and if you send him away on business it's no good either. If you keep him at home, you'll run the risk, sooner or later, of letting down your guard. If you send him away somewhere and he makes free with your capital, first off, you'll not be in a very good position to accuse him of anything. If you really want to have that slave's wife to yourself, you'd better first contrive to have that slave:

Driven away from this door for good.

As the saying goes:

If one cuts the weeds without pulling up the roots,

New sprouts will grow up as before;

If one cuts the weeds and pulls up the roots,

New sprouts will never grow again.³⁸

For your part, then, you'd have nothing to worry about, and the woman, too, would be able to:

Resign herself to her fate."³⁹

The effect of this speech on Hsi-men Ch'ing was such that:

It was as though he had just been awakened

from a drunken stupor.⁴⁰

Truly:

A few words serve to disclose the proper path

to a gentleman;

A single speech suffices to awaken the sleeper

from his dream.⁴¹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 26

LAI-WANG IS SENT UNDER PENAL ESCORT TO HSÜ-CHOU; SUNG HUI-LIEN IS SHAMED INTO COMMITTING SUICIDE

Be careful, whatever you do, never to say,
 "It doesn't matter";
No sooner have you said, "It doesn't matter,"
 than it will matter.
Those who always strive for precedence
 resort to evil devices;
Words that are uttered in due turn
 have a more enduring savor.
A surfeit of tasty foodstuffs will end up
 making you sick;
Pleasurable events, once over, are sure to
 result in disaster.
Rather than having to seek for medicine
 after you are sick;
It would be better to take preventive steps
 before falling ill.¹

THE STORY GOES that on hearing Chin-lien's argument, Hsi-men Ch'ing changed his mind.

The next day Lai-wang got his gear together and stood ready to start packing the saddlebags and set off on his journey to the Eastern Capital. He waited around until noon but saw no sign of any activity.

What should he see at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who came out to the front compound, summoned Lai-wang into his presence, and said, "I was thinking it over last night and concluded that since you've hardly been back any time at all from your trip to Hang-chou, if I were to send you off to the Eastern Capital now it would be too hard on you. It would be better to let Lai-pao go in your stead and give you a chance to get a few days of rest here at home. I'll look around in the near future for some new business I could open on the street front of my property and put you in charge of it."

It has always been true that:

 The owner may do with his property as he likes;
 The customer may choose whether or not to buy.²

How could Lai-wang presume to protest? All he could do was to accept the situation.

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon turned the birthday gifts, the valuables and silver, the saddlebags and letters all over to Lai-pao and his manager, Wu Tien-en, who set off for the Eastern Capital on the twenty-eighth day of the third month. But no more of this.

Lai-wang went back to his room, enraged that his master had decided not to put him in charge of escorting the birthday gifts but to send Lai-pao instead. He managed to get falling-down drunk in his room, uttering all kinds of nonsense, taking it out on Sung Hui-lien, and threatening to kill Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hui-lien gave him a piece of her mind.

"Don't you know that:

 The dog that bites does not show its teeth.³
 Those may be words but they don't make utterances.
 Walls have cracks,
 Fences have ears.⁴

Now you've had your snootful of that saffron soup, just sack out and sleep it off."

She managed to get him to bed, and he fell asleep.

The next day she went to the rear compound and induced Yü-hsiao to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come out and see her. The two of them went to a secluded spot beneath the rear wall behind the kitchen to have a talk, while Yü-hsiao stood at the back gate to act as a lookout for them.

The woman complained vociferously to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Father, what kind of a man are you? Originally you said you would have him go, but now you've changed your tack and decided to send someone else. You've got:

 The mind of a ball:
 Bobbing down, bobbing up.⁵

You're like:

A walking stick made of rush:
Not to be relied upon.⁶

If you were to:

Build a temple and put up a flagpole:
It would sway back and forth like the
Lord of Vacillation himself.

Your prevarications are really just as noisome as your farts. I won't believe anything you say from now on. I argued it all out with you, but it doesn't seem to have had any effect whatever."

"That's not it at all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "If it hadn't been for one thing, I would have sent him; but I was afraid he wasn't quite as familiar with the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai in the Eastern Capital, so I sent Lai-pao instead. I'll keep him here and find something for him to do on the street front of the property."

"Tell me," the woman demanded, "just what sort of business will you find him to do?"

"I'll have him engage a manager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and open a wineshop by the front gate."

When the woman heard this she was utterly delighted and, going back to her room, told Lai-wang about it, word for word. They only awaited Hsi-men Ch'ing's further instructions.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the front reception hall and summoned Lai-wang into his presence. Six packages of silver had been placed on the table.

"My child," he said, "when you got back from Hang-chou recently you were quite worn-out. I would have sent you to the Eastern Capital, but I was afraid you weren't completely familiar with the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, so I sent Lai-pao and manager Wu instead. Today I'm turning over to you these six packages of silver, three hundred taels in all, so you can engage a manager and open a wineshop by the front gate. You ought to be able to pay me some interest on a monthly basis and still make a profit on it."

Lai-wang promptly prostrated himself on the floor and kowtowed.

Taking the six packages of silver back to his room, he said to his wife, "He's:

Done a complete about-face.

He's offering me this business in order to placate me. Today he's turned over these three hundred taels of silver to me and wants me to engage a manager and open a wineshop for him."

"You crazy louse of a black jailbird!" the woman said. "And you only got angry when I told you that:

One spadeful of earth won't dig a well:⁷

Things take a little time to make.

How is it that today you're going into business after all? I only hope you'll:

Abide by your lot and behave yourself,⁸

and stop getting drunk and giving vent to all that:

Ridiculous blatherskite."

"Put the silver into the trunk," Lai-wang said to his wife. "I'm going out to look for a manager."

Thereupon, he went out to look for a manager. He continued his search until evening but failed to find a manager and came home very drunk, where his wife put him to bed.

This was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

He had not been asleep very long when, sometime in the first watch as people were just settling down for the night, a hubbub arose in the rear compound and cries of "Catch the thief!" were heard. His wife nudged Lai-wang awake and, although he was still stupefied with drink, he crawled to his feet, reached for the quarterstaff he kept at one end of the bed, and set off for the rear compound to chase the thief.

"It's late at night," his wife expostulated. "You'd better find out what's going on. You ought not to just rush into the situation."

Lai-wang said:

"One maintains troops for a thousand days,

For the one day on which they are needed."⁹

How can one hear there's a thief on the premises without giving chase?"

Thereupon, with his quarterstaff at the ready, he raced through the inner gate in large strides.

What should he see but Yü-hsiao, standing on the stylobate of the reception hall and calling out in a loud voice, "A thief has got into the garden!"

Lai-wang headed straight for the garden. When he got as far as the postern gate by the anterooms on the side of the courtyard, he was taken by surprise as a bench came flying out from the black shadows and tripped him up. What should he see next but a knife falling to the ground with a clatter nearby. From either side four or five page boys came rushing out, calling loudly, "Catch the thief!" Converging upon Lai-wang, they proceeded to take him into custody.

"But I'm Lai-wang!" he exclaimed. "I came to catch the thief. How can you turn things upside down by seizing me?"

His assailants:

Without permitting any further explanation,

With two strokes of a stick for every step,

drove him to the reception hall. What should he see there but Hsi-men Ch'ing, sitting in state in the main reception hall

which was:

Ablaze with lamps and candles.

"Bring him up here," Hsi-men Ch'ing called out.

Kneeling down on the floor, Lai-wang said, "I heard there was a thief on the premises, so I came in to catch the thief. How can you end up seizing me instead?"

Lai-hsing then placed the knife in front of him so Hsi-men Ch'ing could see it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was highly incensed and cursed him, saying:

"Of all living beings man is the most
difficult to save."¹⁰

This rascal is really a murderer. When I saw you come back from your trip to Hang-chou, I turned over three hundred taels of silver to you so you could go into business. Why, then, should you sneak into the interior of my home late at night with the intent to murder me? If that were not your intent, what did you have this knife for? Bring it here so I can have a good look at it by lamplight."

It was a thick-bladed, fine-edged knife that tapered to a piercing point and was as sharp as frost.

On examining it, Hsi-men Ch'ing became angrier than ever and shouted to his attendants, "Take him to his room and bring back those three hundred taels of silver."

The crowd of menservants thereupon escorted him to his room.

When Hui-lien saw them she began to cry out loud, saying, "He went into the rear compound to catch the thief. How can you seize him for a thief?"

Then, turning to Lai-wang, she said, "I told you not to go, but you didn't pay any attention; and now, sure enough, you've allowed yourself to be made the instrument of someone else's revenge."

She opened the trunk and took out the six packages of silver, which were taken back to the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing opened them by the light of the lamps and found that only one of them contained silver. The others all contained ingots of pewter or lead.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was highly incensed and demanded, "How could you hope to get away with such a substitution? Where's my silver gotten to? The sooner you tell me the truth the better for you."

Lai-wang wept, saying, "Father was kind enough to give me the opportunity to go into business. How could I dare take such a liberty as to substitute anything for your silver?"

"You had this knife made," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and wanted to kill me with it. The knife is right here as evidence. How can you make any further excuses?"

Then he called for Kan Lai-hsing and had him kneel down and give his evidence.

"Didn't you, on such and such a day," Lai-hsing said, "openly state, in the front compound in front of everybody, that you were going to kill Father, because you were so angry that he was no longer steering any business your way?"

Lai-wang could only sigh.

His mouth dropped open, and
He was unable to close it.

Summoning his menservants, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to them, "Since the goods and the weapon are in evidence, tie him up and lock him in the gatehouse. Tomorrow I'll have a formal complaint drawn up and turn him over to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission."

Who should appear at this point but Sung Hui-lien, who came running into the reception hall in such a state that:

Her clouds of hair were in disorder, and
Her clothes were in disarray.

Kneeling down to perform an obeisance to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

she said, "Father, this business is all your doing. He went inside to chase the thief with the best of intentions, and you've had him seized as though he were a thief! I put those six packages of silver of yours away myself, and:

The original seals have not been tampered with."¹¹

How could any substitution have been made for no good reason? You can't just bury someone alive like this without offending against Heavenly principle. If he has committed some offense, just give him a beating appropriate to the offense. Where are you sending him off to with such a fuss?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her:

His anger turned to joy,

and he said, "My child, it has nothing to do with you. You can get up. This unreasonable and outrageous behavior of his has been going on for sometime. Now he has secreted a knife on his person and tried to kill me. You knew nothing about it, so you can relax. It's not your affair."

Then he turned to the page boy Lai-an and ordered him, "Quickly now, help your elder brother's wife back to her room; and don't do anything to upset her."

Hui-lien remained on her knees and refused to get up, saying, "Father, how can you be so cruel!

If you won't do it for the priest's sake,
do it for the Buddha's.

When I plead with you this way, won't you accede to my request? As for him, although he does drink too much, he would

never do such a thing.”

She pestered Hsi-men Ch'ing until he was frantic and ordered Lai-an to help her to her feet and coax her back to her room.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing wrote a personal note about the matter and instructed Lai-hsing to be prepared to testify as a witness, to take the formal complaint with him, and to escort Lai-wang to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. He was to say that on such and such a day, while in his cups, he had secreted a knife on his person and, late at night, made an attempt on the life of his master; and also that he had substituted base metal for the silver he had been given, etc.

Just as they were about to set out, who should appear but Wu Yüeh-niang, who:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,

and came out to the main reception hall, where she repeatedly urged clemency on Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, “If a slave does anything wrong, why don't you punish him at home and make an end of it? Why should you want to make such a fuss and have him:

Haled before the judge and exposed in the courtroom?”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words he:

Opened wide his two eyes,

and shouted at her, “You're only a woman who doesn't understand anything. The slave intended to kill me and yet you urge me to forgive him!”

Thereupon, disregarding Yüeh-niang's plea, he ordered his minions to escort Lai-wang to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.

All that Yüeh-niang could do was to retire in confusion and go back to the rear compound, where she said to Meng Yü-lou and the others, “Right now in this household:

Chaos is king.

The nine-tailed fox fairy has appeared in the world.¹²

I don't know whose words he's been taken in by that he should drive a servant out of the household for no good reason. Even if you're going to falsely accuse him of being a thief:

The only thing that ought to matter is the truth.

What justification is there for:

Pasting a paper coffin on someone?¹³

He's really acting like an irrational, good-for-nothing, benighted ruler!”

Sung Hui-lien knelt down in front of her and wept.

“Child,” said Yüeh-niang, “you can get up. There's no need to weep. Your husband, in any case, cannot be convicted of a capital crime. Even people guilty of manslaughter sometimes get off. That lousy ruffian has:

Swallowed a soul-disorienting drug.¹⁴

Nothing we say is worth listening to. We're like:

Women serving in the army:

Merely taking up space.”¹⁵

Yü-lou said to Hui-lien, “Your father is just at the height of his rage. Later on we'll approach him gradually and try again to dissuade him. You'd better calm down and return to your room.”

Let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it, but return to the story of how Lai-wang was escorted to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent Tai-an ahead to deliver “a hundred piculs of white rice” to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling and Battalion Commander Ho Chin. Only after they had accepted this gratuity did they take their seats in the tribunal.

Lai-hsing handed up Hsi-men Ch'ing's formal complaint, which stated that Lai-wang, having previously accepted a sum of silver with which to start a business:

On seeing the money developed ideas,¹⁶

and substituted base metal for the silver; whereupon, fearing that his master would discover the imposition, he had late at night secreted a knife on his person and intruded into the inner reception hall with the intent of killing his master, etc. On perusing the complaint, Hsia Yen-ling and Ho Chin were greatly incensed and had Lai-wang haled before them to answer the charges.

“I hope Your Honor will look carefully into the matter,” pled Lai-wang. “If you permit me to speak, I will presume to speak. If you don't permit me to speak, I will not presume to speak.”

“You rascal,” said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, “the evidence of your guilt is clear. There's no getting around it. You'd better tell me the truth lest I put the screws on you.”

Lai-wang gave a full account of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had initially deputed someone to tempt his wife, nee Sung, with a bolt of blue silk, how he had then flirted with and seduced her, and how he was now deliberately framing him in order to get him out of the way so he could have sole possession of his wife.

Judicial Commissioner Hsia shouted to his minions to slap the prisoner across the mouth, saying, “You slave! You've betrayed your master. This woman of yours was provided for you by your master to be your wife. He also entrusted capital to you so you could start a business. While you:

Not thinking to repay your obligation,¹⁷

instead got drunk and broke into his sleeping quarters late at night, secreting a knife upon your person with the intent to murder him. If every slave were like you, the people of the empire would not dare to employ servants.”¹⁸

Lai-wang continued to claim he was being dealt with unjustly until Judicial Commissioner Hsia called up Kan Lai-hsing to testify against him. At this, Lai-wang:

Though he had a mouth, had nothing further to say.

Truly:

Though he was master of all the Heavenly arts,
He could not avert the calamity before his eyes.¹⁹

Judicial Commissioner Hsia thereupon ordered his minions to bring out the largest grade of ankle-squeezers. These were applied to Lai-wang, and, after they were tightened in place, he was given twenty strokes with a heavy bamboo. They beat him so severely that:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood flowed down his legs.

The lictors were then ordered to take him away and put him in the lockup.

Lai-hsing and Tai-an went home and reported what had happened to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was utterly delighted.

He gave orders to his servants, as follows, “None of you is to deliver any bedding or food to Lai-wang in prison. Even the fact that he was beaten; I don't want any of you coming home and telling his wife about it. Just say that he was not beaten a single stroke in the yamen, and that after he's been held for a few days they'll let him go.”

The servants all assented, saying, “We understand.”

Sung Hui-lien, from the time that Lai-wang was taken away:

Did not comb her hair,
Did not wash her face,
Allowed her features to become fallow,
Did not straighten her skirt,
Scuffed around with her slippers on backwards,
Wept behind closed doors, and
Consumed neither tea nor food.²⁰

Hsi-men Ch'ing became frantic about it and sent Yü-hsiao and Pen the Fourth's wife to her room, again and again, to try to reason with her.

“You ought not to take it so hard,” they said to her. “Because of the way he got drunk and misspoke himself, Father has just had him locked up for a few days to teach him a lesson. It won't be long before he'll let him out again.”

Hui-lien did not believe them. She sent the page boy Lai-an to deliver food to him in prison and when he returned interrogated him about it, but he repeated the same story.

“When Elder Brother went before the magistrate,” he said, “he was not beaten a single stroke. He ought to be home in a day or two. He said for you to stay home and not to worry about it.”

Only after hearing these words did Hui-lien stop crying. Every day, she:

Lightly painted her moth eyebrows,²¹
Judiciously applied rouge and powder,

and came out and went about her business. Hsi-men Ch'ing frequently came and went outside the door of her room.

From beneath the bamboo blind the woman called to him, saying, “There's nobody else here. Won't you come in and sit down for a while?”

Hsi-men Ch'ing slipped into the room and the two of them had a tête-a-tête together.

Hsi-men Ch'ing deceived her, saying, “My child, you can relax. For your sake I wrote a note to the officials so that he has not been beaten a single stroke. They're going to keep him locked up for a few days to teach him a lesson, but he ought to be out in a day or two, after which he can resume his business as before.”

The woman put her arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck, saying, “My own daddy! Whatever you do, for my sake, give him a hard time for a few days and then let him out again. I don't care whether you have him open a business for you or not. Once he gets out this time, I'll see to it that he stops drinking altogether. No matter whether you:

Send him near or send him far,

he can hardly refuse to go. Or better yet, if you feel the situation is too inconvenient, find another wife for him. That would settle the matter as far as he's concerned, and I would no longer feel that I belonged to him forever.”

“Dear heart,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “what you say is true. One day soon I'll buy the Ch'iao family's property across the street and fix up a three-room house for you to live in. Once you've moved in over there the two of us can:

Enjoy ourselves to our heart's content.”

“Darling,” the woman said, “Whatever you propose to do will be all right with me.”

When they had concluded their parley they closed the door of the room.

It so happened that during the summer months the woman was in the habit of going without her underdrawers, so she only had on a pair of skirts. On the occasion of this encounter with Hsi-men Ch'ing, all she had to do was to lift her skirts out of the way and they could fall to it. She kept a breath-sweetening lozenge in her mouth at all times.

Thereupon:

Untying her girdle pendant, she discloses the jade

of the Nymph of the Hsiang River;²²
Distending her ruby lips, she displays the cloves
of the Han dynasty Secretariat.²³
Her pair of wild ducks flies to his shoulders;²⁴
As they consummate a bout of clouds and rain.

The woman unfastened the white silver-striped silk drawnwork scent bag with four dangling tassels that hung at her waist—it was filled with pine and cypress seeds, rose petals, and aromatic lysimachia from Annam and was adorned with a drawnwork eight-character inscription reading:

Winter and summer forever green,
Delicate, fragrant, beautiful, and lovely—

and had Hsi-men Ch'ing tie it to his own waist-string. He was as pleased as could be with this and only wished the two of them could:

Swear fealty in life and death,
Unable to tear themselves apart.

Reaching into his sleeve he fished out one or two taels of silver and gave it to her to buy sweetmeats with.

As they dallied with each other in her room he repeatedly reassured her, saying, "There's no need to worry. I'm afraid you'll only worry yourself sick. Tomorrow I'll write a note to His Honor Hsia and have him released."

After they had spoken for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid someone would come by and hurriedly took his leave.

The woman, having obtained this promise from Hsi-men Ch'ing, went to the rear compound where, in speaking to the maidservants and wives, she did not succeed in preventing some intimation of it from leaking out in her words and expression.

Meng Yü-lou soon found out about it and came to tell P'an Chin-lien what she had heard, saying, "Father has determined, sooner or later, to release Lai-wang and find another wife for him. He's going to buy the Ch'iao family's residence across the street, move her over there, set aside a three-room house for her to live in, and buy a maidservant to wait on her. He's going to have a fret of silver filigree and other jewelry made for her as well."

Word for word she recounted the whole story. "She'll be on an equal status with you and me. What sort of behavior is that? And our elder sister won't do anything to prevent it."

Nothing might have happened if P'an Chin-lien had not heard about this, but having heard about it:

Anger swelled her breast but there was
no place to put it;
The red of her two cheeks was further
augmented with red.

"So he's really going to accede to her demands?" she said. "I refuse to believe it. I'll tell you right now, if I let that slave of a whore become Hsi-men Ch'ing's seventh concubine—and this is no idle boast—you might as well turn my name P'an on its head!"

"If our husband ignores the proprieties," said Yü-lou, "and his legitimate wife won't do anything about it:

We may be able to run, but we can't fly,
Where can we hope to get to?"

"You're really hopeless," said Chin-lien. "What's this life worth anyway!

Though you live to be a hundred, you'll only
be butchered for your meat.

If he doesn't go along with me, I'll put my life up against hers any day; what's it to me?"

"I don't have the stomach to cross him," laughed Yü-lou. "If you've got what it takes, I'll stand by and watch you take him on."

To make a long story short, that evening Hsi-men Ch'ing took a seat in his study in the Kingfisher Pavilion in the garden and was about to send for Ch'en Ching-chi to get him to draft a note for him to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, instructing him to release Lai-wang, when Chin-lien suddenly showed up, leaned over the writing desk, and asked, "What note are you having your son-in-law draft for you, and who is it addressed to?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Could not conceal the situation,²⁵

and told her all about how he intended to have Lai-wang punished with a few strokes and then released.

The woman stopped the servant, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Don't send for your son-in-law."

Then she sat down beside him and said, "You only pretend to be a real man while all the time you're just a good-for-nothing who:

Adjusts his rudder to the wind,²⁶ and
Pushes the boat along with the current.²⁷

You ignore everything I took the trouble to say to you and go along with that lousy slave of a whore's every whim. No matter what lengths you go to:

Mixing granulated sugar with honey,

for her to eat every day, she will still only hanker after that husband of hers. Now if you insist on releasing that slave, you really can't very well take on his wife without giving him a pretext to use against you. If you keep her around the

house under such circumstances she'll be:

Neither fish nor fowl.

What sort of status will you assign to her? If you treat her as your concubine, that slave will still be in the way. If you treat her as the wife of your slave, you've been indulging her too inappropriately. She's been:

Assuming privileges above her station,²⁸

for everyone to see, making a real spectacle of herself. Even if you found another woman for that slave so you could appropriate his wife; in the future, if the two of you were sitting together someplace and that slave came in to report something, how could he help being angry when he saw you two together? When the woman saw him, should she stand up or remain seated? Just to start out with, this alone wouldn't look right. If it got around, not only would your neighbors and relatives laugh at you, but even the members of your own household, high and low, would not be able to take you seriously.

Truly:

If the ridgepole is not straight,

The rafters will be crooked.²⁹

"If you are really determined on this business you're acting like someone who:

Swears he wants to be a loach, but

Is afraid of getting mud in his eyes.³⁰

You would do better to be:

Once ruthless, ruthless to the end,³¹

and polish off this slave once and for all. Then you could embrace his wife with an easy mind."

With these few sentences she succeeded once again in persuading Hsi-men Ch'ing to change his mind.

A note was written and dispatched to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, directing Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling to settle the case against Lai-wang within three days. He was subjected to a severe interrogation during the course of which he was squeezed and beaten until he was scarcely recognizable. The two judicial commissioners, as well as the inspectors, the detectives, the orderlies, and even the turnkeys in the jail, both high and low, had all been paid off by Hsi-men Ch'ing to see that the prisoner was treated severely rather than leniently.

Among them there was a chief clerk in charge of the files whose name was Yin Chih, or Good Deed.³² He was a native of Hsiao-i³³ district in Shansi province and was an exceedingly benevolent and honest man. Because the officials of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, both high and low, had accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes and colluded in framing the prisoner so that he could appropriate his wife, they had indicted him for the serious crime of "a servant coveting his master's property and attempting to murder him with knife in hand."³⁴

Yin Chih thought to himself:

"One must have some regard for Heaven's principles.³⁵

Officials, too:

Raise sons and raise daughters,

Hoping that they will grow to adulthood."³⁶

He repeatedly refused to make out the papers that would enable Lai-wang to be brought to trial and argued the case with the judicial commissioners face to face. However, the two judicial commissioners had both been bought off by Hsi-men Ch'ing. The result was an impasse that made it difficult to proceed any further. Moreover, Lai-wang had no money of his own to distribute in the jail, so he was subject to mistreatment. Fortunately for him, Yin Chih took pity on the fact that he had:

Suffered injustice and harbored resentment,

and was without resources of his own, and ordered the jailers in the prison to treat him leniently and look out for him.

Yin Chih succeeded in delaying the disposition of the case for several days, but eventually:

His obligations canceled each other out,

and Lai-wang was given forty strokes of the bamboo in the courtroom and sentenced to be remanded under penal escort to the jurisdiction of Hsü-chou, his native place. It was determined that seventeen taels of the misappropriated silver had already been spent and the remainder, along with the five packages of pewter or lead, were turned over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's retainer, Lai-hsing, to be returned to their rightful owner. A note was written by the authorities and dispatched to Hsi-men Ch'ing to inform him of the outcome of the case.

It was ordered that the prisoner should set out under penal escort that same day. The judicial commissioners issued the necessary papers on the bench, and two guards were deputed to bring Lai-wang before the court. He had already been beaten to a pulp. He was subsequently fastened into a cangue, which was duly sealed, and the guards were ordered to set out that same day for Hsü-chou and turn him over to the authorities there.

Lai-wang was in a pitiable state. He had been incarcerated for half a month or so without any money of his own. As a result his body was lacerated, his clothes were tattered, and he had nowhere to turn.

Weeping unceasingly, he appealed to his guards, saying, "With all due respect to you two brothers, I've just been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. As a result:

I haven't a candareen to my name,

Nor so much as an inch of cloth.

If I am to come up with something in the way of remuneration for you two, I've got no place to raise it. If you will only

take pity on me and escort me to my master's residence, my wife is there and also a boxful of my clothes. If I can get them out and sell them off, I should be able to realize enough to compensate you for your trouble and make things a little easier for us on the road."

The two guards said, "You don't know what you're up against. Since it's your master, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is responsible for your predicament in the first place, what likelihood is there that he would consent to relinquish your wife or your boxes? Don't you have any other relatives or friends? Out of consideration for Master Yin, we might be willing to:

Deceive our superiors but not our inferiors,³⁷
and take you there to raise some money or rice for the expenses of the trip. Who's expecting anything else in the way of remuneration from you?"

"My two brothers," said Lai-wang, "for pity's sake, just take me as far as the gate of my master's house and I'll beg two or three neighbors to put in a good word for me.

If there isn't a lot, there'll be a little."³⁸

"All right," said the two guards, "we'll escort you as far as his gate."

Lai-wang first applied at the house of Ying Po-chüeh, but Po-chüeh pretended not to be at home. He then asked Hsi-men Ch'ing's close neighbors, Chia Jen-ch'ing, or False Feelings, and I Mien-tz'u, or Ostensibly Benign,³⁹ if they would intercede on his behalf for the return of his wife and things. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not appear himself but sent out five or six page boys with sticks to prevent them from making any further disturbance outside his gate. Chia Jen-ch'ing and I Mien-tz'u were thoroughly mortified. His wife, Sung Hui-lien, who was in her room at the time, was kept as completely in the dark as if she had been:

Locked tight in an iron bucket,
and didn't know a word about it. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that any page boy who leaked information on the subject would be sentenced to twenty strokes with the bamboo.

The two guards then escorted Lai-wang to the house of his father-in-law, the coffin seller, Sung Jen, where Lai-wang, thus and so, tearfully told him the whole story. Sung Jen sent him off with a single tael of silver and came up with one string of copper cash and a peck of rice for the two guards in the way of traveling expenses.

It was the first decade of the fourth month when, weeping and wailing, Lai-wang set out on his journey away from Ch'ing-ho district along the highroad toward Hsü-chou. The wounds from his beating had broken open, and he lacked sufficient funds for the trip. He was miserable indeed. Truly:



Lai-wang Is Sent under Penal Escort to Hsi-chou

If one is only able, somehow,
to preserve his foolish life;
He will be happy to go hungry
for the rest of his days.
There is a poem that testifies to this:

The file clerk, in investigating this case,
maintained the utmost impartiality;
He was successful in rescuing Lai-wang

from the toils of incarceration.
Though he was condemned to penal escort
all the way back to Hsü-chou;
The sickly verdure recovered its health
upon exposure to the genial breeze.⁴⁰

We will say no more about how Lai-wang was sent under penal escort to Hsü-chou.

To resume our story, Sung Hui-lien remained at home looking forward every day to her husband's release. The page boys continued to be dispatched as before in order to deliver food to him, but as soon as they got outside they ate it themselves.

When they returned Hui-lien would interrogate them, and they reported, "Brother ate the food. Nothing is happening in the jail. Otherwise he would have been released by now. For the last several days their honors the judicial commissioners have not come to the yamen to conduct business. He should be home in another day or two."

Hsi-men Ch'ing also deceived her, saying, "I've sent someone to take care of it. He should be out before long."

The woman believed this to be true.

One day, she overheard "wind-borne words" to the effect that Lai-wang had been let out of jail and escorted to the front gate where he had asked for his box of clothes and then gone off somewhere or other. The woman asked about this several times but the page boys wouldn't tell her anything.

Then she happened to see Tai-an, who was bringing Hsi-men Ch'ing's horse back to the house, and asked, "How's your brother Lai-wang doing in jail, and when will he get out?"

"Sister-in-law," said Tai-an, "I might as well tell you. By this time my brother must have reached the River of Flowing Sands."⁴¹

When Hui-lien demanded to know what he meant, Tai-an, though he:

Never, ever, should have done it,⁴²

told her, thus and so, "He was beaten forty strokes and remanded under penal escort to the jurisdiction of Hsü-chou, his native place. But you must keep it to yourself. Don't tell anyone I told you."

If the woman had not heard about this, nothing might have happened, but having heard these words, which she recognized to be the truth, she closed the door to her room and began to cry out loud, saying, "My husband, since you've been in this household what business of his have you ever ruined that he should want to:

Paste a paper coffin on you,
and conspire against you behind your back? Since you've been a slave of his you haven't even stashed away so much as a decent article of clothing for yourself. So now it's only fitting that you should be traduced into being packed off:

Far away from home,
leaving me in a pretty predicament. While you're on the road:

I don't know whether you're alive or dead,
I can't tell whether you'll survive or perish.⁴³

They might as well have:

Put a water crock over my head,
for all I knew about it."

She wept for a while and then took a long towel, fastened it to the lintel over her bedroom door, and hanged herself.

Who could have anticipated that Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," whose room was adjacent to hers, happened to have come back from the rear compound and heard her crying for a while, after which there was a period of silence, finally succeeded by the sound of panting. She knocked on the door of her room and called to her, but received no response. Becoming panic-stricken, she got the page boy, P'ing-an, to pry open the window and shin himself inside. Finding the woman, dressed in her everyday clothes, neatly suspended in the doorframe, he cut her down and opened the door, after which they administered artificial respiration and poured ginger extract into her mouth.

It was not long before news of the event reached the rear compound and Wu Yüeh-niang, leading Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Li P'ing-erh, Yü-hsiao, and Hsiao-yü, all came to see what had happened. Pen the Fourth's wife also came to have a look. "The Beanpole" was sitting on the ground holding her in an upright position. She was making choking noises but was still unable to cry audibly. When Yüeh-niang spoke to her she only hung her head, drooling saliva and phlegm from her mouth, and did not respond.

"You're being a silly child," said Yüeh-niang. "If you had anything to complain about, it would have been better to speak up. Why should you feel that you had to resort to this way out?"

She then asked "The Beanpole," "Have you given her any ginger extract yet?"

"I've just given her some," said "The Beanpole," "and she swallowed it."

Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to help prop her up and then personally appealed to her, "Hui-lien, my child, no matter what it is you've got on your mind, you'd do better to blurt it out truthfully. It won't be held against you."

She continued appealing to her for some time, but the woman only sobbed inaudibly for a while and then began to cry out loud:

Clapping her hands and beating her palms.

Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to help her onto the k'ang, but she refused to get onto it. After Yüeh-niang and the others

had endeavored to placate her for some time, they returned to the rear compound, leaving only Pen the Fourth's wife and Yü-hsiao to keep her company in her room.

Who should appear at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who lifted aside the portiere and came in.

Seeing that she was sitting, weeping, on the cold ground, he ordered Yü-hsiao, "Help her onto the k'ang."

"Mother told her to get up there just now," said Yü-hsiao, "but she refused to do so."

"What a stubborn child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'll get a chill from the cold ground. If you have something to say, tell me about it. How could you do such a foolish thing?"

"Father," said Hui-lien, shaking her head, "a fine man you are! That's quite a stunt you've managed to pull off behind my back! You must have some regard for Heaven's principles. How can you express your confidence in someone and then subject him to such drastic measures? The trap had already been sprung, but you continued to keep me in the dark. If you were determined to get him out of the way, why didn't you get us both out of the way? What are you keeping me around for?"

An executioner who likes to play with his victims.⁴⁴

You're so inured to burying people alive that you can bring yourself to:

Kill a person off and then attend the funeral.

All day long you kept on deceiving me. One day you said he'd be released, and the next day you said he'd be released, until you had me believing that he would really be freed. If you were going to have him sent into exile, you could, at least, have let me know what you were up to. Secretly, without giving me so much as an inkling, to send him off so far away! You must have some regard for Heaven's principles. How can you express your confidence in someone and then subject him to such drastic measures? The trap had already been sprung, but you continued to keep me in the dark. If you were determined to get him out of the way, why didn't you get us both out of the way? What are you keeping me around for?"

"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile, "it's got nothing to do with you. Why should I want to get you out of the way because that rascal was at fault? You just relax and leave it to me."

Then he said to Yü-hsiao, "You and Pen the Fourth's wife keep her company overnight. I'll send a page boy with some wine for you to drink."

When he had finished speaking, he went outside.

Pen the Fourth's wife, after some time, succeeded in getting her to sit up on the k'ang. She and Yü-hsiao sat down together with her and did their best to comfort her.

It so happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the shop on the street front of the compound and asked Manager Fu for a string of cash, with which he bought a mace worth of deep fried cutlets, which he had put into a box, together with a bottle of wine, and ordered Lai-an to deliver it to Hui-lien's room.

"Father sent me to deliver these things for you to eat, Sister-in-law," he said.

When Hui-lien saw this, she cursed, "You lousy jailbird! Take them away at once before I throw them all over the floor."

First he beats a person with his big fists,

And then he rubs the bruises with his hand."⁴⁵

"You'd better keep them, Sister-in-law," said Lai-an. "If I take them back, Father will only beat me."

Thereupon, he set them down on the table and went out. Hui-lien jumped off the k'ang, grabbed the wine, and would have run out and thrown it after him, if "The Beanpole" had not stopped her.

As Pen the Fourth's wife was keeping watch and "The Beanpole" was biting her fingernails, who should appear but Pen the Fourth's daughter, Chang-chieh, who had come to fetch her mother, saying, "Father's just arrived home and wants something to eat."

Pen the Fourth's wife and "The Beanpole" went out as far as "The Beanpole's" door, where they found Hsi-men Tachieh and Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang, talking to each other.

They asked Pen the Fourth's wife where she was off to, and she replied, "My husband's just arrived home and wants something to eat. I'll just look in there and then come back. I only came over to see what was happening, and then Father insisted that I stay and keep her company. How could I have known I'd get tied up and be unable to get away?"

"What could she have been thinking of," they went on to ask, "that led her to take this way out?"

"It's lucky for her I happened to come back from the rear compound," said "The Beanpole," picking up where Pen the Fourth's wife had left off. "I could hear her crying in her room and then I didn't hear anything. That disturbed me, so I tried to force my way through her door, but it wouldn't open. Then I called P'ing-an and got him to jump in through the window. It was only then that he succeeded in cutting her down. If he'd been a minute later she would have been a goner, like:

The bearded oldster who blew out the lamp,

Only to burn himself to death."⁴⁶

"When Father was in her room just now, what did she have to say?" asked Hui-hsiang.

Pen the Fourth's wife laughed, saying, "Who could have known that Lai-wang's wife would turn out to be such a peppery article? She gave him tit for tat, just as though they were equals. Who ever heard of a servant's wife carrying on so high-handedly?"

"This servant's wife," said Hui-hsiang, "is not like other servants' wives. She's more like a daughter-in-law who can hardly be wrested from her father-in-law's embrace. Who is there in this whole household, high or low, who is her equal?"

Having had her say, Hui-hsiang went home.

"Sister-in-law," said "The Beanpole," "Hurry back after you get home."

"Needless to say," replied Pen the Fourth's wife. "If I didn't come back, Father would be really upset with me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing had Pen the Fourth's wife and "The Beanpole" sit with Hui-lien during the daylight hours and Yü-hsiao sleep with her at night.

Little by little Yü-hsiao endeavored to talk her round, saying, "Sister Sung, you're an intelligent person. You ought to take advantage of the fact that you're in the prime of life, a flower that has just opened. The fact that your master loves you shows that your:

Affinities are mutually compatible.

Right now:

Though you may not measure up to your superiors,

You are more than a match for your inferiors.⁴⁷

To be attached to a master is better than to be attached to a slave. Now that he's gone, he's gone for good. It doesn't matter that much that you're so upset, but if you should cry yourself sick, you'd be risking your life. As the saying goes:

Whoever is a monk for a day,

Must strike the bell for a day.⁴⁸

After all, a reputation for chastity is hardly going to end up on your head."

When Hui-lien heard this, all she did was weep, refusing every day to eat either food or congee.

Yü-hsiao reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who told P'an Chin-lien to go and speak to her in person, but Hui-lien remained adamant.

This annoyed Chin-lien, who said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "That lousy whore! All she cares about is her husband. She says a thousand times:

One night as man and wife gives rise to

a hundred nights of love.⁴⁹

She says ten thousand times:

To walk a hundred steps with one another,

Is enough to develop a lingering affinity.⁵⁰

With a woman as chaste as that, what can you use to secure her affections?"

"Don't you believe those specious arguments of hers," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she were really as chaste as all that, she would have remained faithful to the memory of the cook, Chiang Ts'ung, instead of consenting to marry Lai-wang."

He then proceeded to take his seat in the front reception hall and summoned all the page boys and menservants before him for an interrogation.

"Some days ago," he said, "when Lai-wang was sent away under penal escort, who was it who told his wife about it? Whoever is willing to identify the culprit, I will not beat so much as a single stroke. Otherwise, if I find out who it was, anyone who knew about it and did not confess will receive thirty strokes of the bamboo and be:

Driven away from this door for good."

Suddenly Hua-t'ung knelt down and said, "Your servant dares not speak."

"Speak up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it won't do you any harm."

"The other day," said Hua-t'ung, "when Tai-an was bringing Father's horse back to the house, I overheard Sister-in-law ask him about it in the enclosed passageway, and he was indiscreet enough to tell her."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he became enraged and shouted out for someone to go find Tai-an. Tai-an was quickly apprised of this and immediately went to seek refuge in Chin-lien's room, from which he refused to come out.

Chin-lien was washing her face when the page boy ran into her room, knelt down, and wept, saying, "Fifth Lady, save me!"

"You lousy jailbird!" Chin-lien upbraided him. "You came in so suddenly you gave me quite a start. What have you been up to this time?"

"It's because I told Sister-in-law how Lai-wang had been sent away," said Tai-an, "that Father wants to beat me. Whatever you do, Mother, put in a word for me. Otherwise, if I go out while Father is just at the height of his rage, I'll be as good as dead."

"You crazy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "You're as frightened as a ghost. I wondered what it could be that should so:

Startle Heaven and shake the earth.⁵¹

But it turns out to be nothing but the affair of that slave of a whore. I order you to remain in this room and don't go out."

Thereupon, she hid him behind the door.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing found that he was unable to summon Tai-an into his presence, he raved like thunder in the front reception hall. He sent two page boys, one after another, to Chin-lien's room to look for him, but they were forced to leave, empty-handed, with Chin-lien's curses on their heads.

Finally, like a gust of wind, Hsi-men Ch'ing descended upon Chin-lien's room in person, with a riding crop in his hand, and demanded, "Where is that slave?"

Chin-lien paid no attention until Hsi-men Ch'ing had made a search of the premises, dragged Tai-an out from behind the door, and was about to beat him.

At this point, Chin-lien grabbed the riding crop out of his hand, threw it on top of the tester above the bed, and said,

"You shameless good-for-nothing! It's a wonder you have the face to play the master. That slave of a whore so hankered after her husband that she hanged herself, and you're so mortified you vent your spleen on a page boy. What's it got to do with him?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing was bug-eyed with rage.

"You go back to the front of the compound," Chin-lien said to the page boy, "and go on about your business. Don't pay any attention to him. If he tries to beat you again, he'll have me to contend with."

Taking advantage of this reprieve, Tai-an headed straight for the front of the compound. Truly:

With two hands he tore open the road
between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through
the gate to perdition.

P'an Chin-lien, having witnessed several such instances of Hsi-men Ch'ing's preoccupation with Sung Hui-lien, thereupon:

Came up with a plan in her mind.⁵²

Going into the rear compound, she set out to provoke Sun Hsüeh-o, saying, "Lai-wang's wife has been talking about how you seduced her husband and told him what she was up to, with the result that Father became angry and had her husband gotten out of the way. When he gave you that beating the other day and took away your jewelry and finery, it was all because of her talebearing."

Sun Hsüeh-o, having been regaled with such an earful of venom, developed a heartful to match.

Taking her leave of Hsüeh-o, Chin-lien then proceeded, in one breath, to make her way to the front of the compound and do the same to Hui-lien, saying, "Sun Hsüeh-o has been talking in the rear compound about how when you were a slave employed by the Ts'ai family you were already an old hand at inveigling your master into adultery. If you hadn't been making out with your master behind your husband's back, he would never have been driven out of the household. She claims that those tears of yours are only crocodile tears."

Chin-lien's efforts stirred up a:

Sense of grievance and desire for revenge,
on both sides.

One day it was one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

It was the eighteenth day of the fourth month, Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and Auntie Li and Li Kuei-chieh from the licensed quarter had come to help celebrate the occasion. Wu Yüeh-niang invited them to join the other female guests in the rear reception room for a feast. Hsi-men Ch'ing had accepted a social engagement elsewhere and was not at home.

Sung Hui-lien, having eaten breakfast and put in an appearance in the rear compound during the morning, slipped back to her room and slept until the sun began to sink in the west. One maidservant after another was dispatched from the rear compound to call her, but she ignored them all and refused to come out. This was just the pretext that Sun Hsüeh-o had been looking for.

Going to her room to call her, she said, "Sister-in-law, you must think you're Wang the Beauty,⁵³ you're playing so hard to get."

Hui-lien paid no attention to her but continued to lie on the bed with her face to the wall.

"Sister-in-law," Hsüeh-o continued, "no doubt you're thinking of your Lai-wang. It would have been better if you had thought about him a little earlier. If it hadn't been for you he wouldn't be dead. He'd still be here in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."

On hearing these words, Hui-lien was reminded of what P'an Chin-lien had said to her.

Turning over and jumping out of bed, she said to Hsüeh-o, "There's no need for you to come here to work off your wanton rancor. If it was on my account that he was gotten out of the way, how come you were given such a beating and relegated to a position in which you can't even appear in decent society any more? You ought to consider yourself lucky people refrain from confronting you about it. Everyone should exercise some mutual forbearance. What need is there for you to stick your neck out and find fault with anyone?"

Hsüeh-o became enraged and cursed her, saying, "Why you adulterous whore of a lousy slave! Have you got the colossal nerve to criticize me?"

"If I'm a whore of a slave," retorted Hui-lien, "you're nothing but the mistress of a slave. If I've committed adultery, at least it was with my master; which beats your adultery with a slave. First you seduce my husband behind my back, and then you have the nerve to come around and kick up a fuss about me."

These few words were clearly designed to hit Hsüeh-o where it hurt, and they had the desired effect. Before Hui-lien could do anything to protect herself, Hsüeh-o stepped forward and slapped her full in the face, turning it bright red.

"How dare you strike me?" Hui-lien exclaimed.

Thereupon, she went for her assailant and the two of them started to tussle with each other. Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," hurriedly came over and tried to persuade them to break it up. Even after Hsüeh-o had been forcibly disengaged from her, the two of them continued to:

Reville each other without ceasing.⁵⁴

Wu Yüeh-niang came up and gave them a piece of her mind, saying, "Neither of you have the slightest regard for

propriety. No matter whether there are guests present or not, you're willing to:

Turn the whole household upside down.⁵⁵

Just wait till your master comes home and see whether I tell him about it or not."

At this, Hsüeh-o stalked off to the rear compound.

Seeing that Hui-lien's hairdo had been pulled undone, Yüeh-niang said to her, "You'd better comb your hair as quickly as you can and come back to the rear compound."

Hui-lien did not say a word in reply but saw Yüeh-niang on her way and then went into her room, locked the door on the inside, and gave herself up to tears. She continued to cry until it was time to light the lamps. Everyone was busy with the feast for the female guests in the rear compound. Alas, the woman:

Unable to contain her chagrin,
took out two of her foot bindings, fastened them to the doorpost, and:

Hanged herself until dead.⁵⁶

At the time of her death she was twenty-four years of age. Truly:

The good things of this world are
none too enduring;
Colored clouds are prone to scatter
and glass is brittle.⁵⁷

At just that time:

Strange as it may seem,⁵⁸

who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang should pass right in front of Hui-lien's room as she was seeing off Auntie Li and Kuei-chieh. The door was closed and all was silent within, which made her feel rather apprehensive. As soon as she had seen Auntie Li and her daughter into their sedan chairs, she came back and pushed at Hui-lien's door and called to her but was unable to get it open. Becoming panic-stricken, she had a page boy jump in through the window as before. Truly:

The earthenware crock cannot avoid being
broken on the well curb.⁵⁹

They cut the foot bindings by which she was suspended, laid her down, and administered artificial respiration for some time, but, though nobody knew just when it had happened:

Alas and alack,
she was already dead. Behold:
Her four limbs are cold as ice,
Her breath is an extinguished lamp.
Her fragrant soul is dim;



Sung Hui-lien Is Shamed into Committing Suicide

Already headed for the Terrace
 of Homeward Gazing Spirits.
 Her starry eyes are dark;
 Its spirits fled, her body
 lies on the bare ground.⁶⁰
 Who knows to what place her vital essences
 have flown;
 Unless they are in the flying clouds and the
 autumn waters?⁶¹

When Yüeh-niang realized that their efforts to revive her would prove unsuccessful, she was thrown into consternation and hurriedly sent the page boy, Lai-hsing, to ride on horseback outside the South Gate and ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come home.

Sun Hsüeh-o was afraid that when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home he would:

Pull up the trees to investigate the roots,
and end up putting the blame on her. So she went to the master suite and groveled around on her knees, imploring Yüeh-niang not to mention the fact that she had quarreled with her.

Although Yüeh-niang saw how frightened she was, she couldn't bring herself to let her off completely and said, "If you're as afraid as all that, wouldn't it have been better if you had both had a little less to say in the first place?"

That evening, however, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, she only said, "Hui-lien was hankering after her husband and cried all day long. Then, when everyone was busy in the rear compound, we don't even know when exactly, she committed suicide."

"She was just a foolish woman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who was not destined to be happy."

He sent a servant to the district magistrate, Li Ta-t'ien, with a written report of the incident, which stated:

The said woman was responsible for the silver utensils during a feast for female guests in the household of the deponent and was unable to account for a silver cup. Fearing that the master of the house would investigate and punish her, she hanged herself until dead.

He also presented the magistrate with thirty taels of silver. For this reason the district magistrate was anxious to do him a favor and routinely dispatched the clerk from the office of punishment, along with a number of coroner's assistants, who conducted a perfunctory examination of the corpse. Hsi-men Ch'ing then purchased a coffin, obtained a red death certificate, and deputed Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing to deliver the corpse to the Ksitigarbha Nunnery outside the South Gate to be cremated.

They gave the workers at the crematory five mace of silver for the purchase of additional fuel, and they were just about to light the fire when, who could have anticipated that Hui-lien's father, the coffin seller, Sung Jen, having heard what had happened, should arrive on the scene and put a stop to the proceedings. He loudly proclaimed that an injustice was being perpetrated and that his daughter had died under suspicious circumstances.

"Hsi-men Ch'ing," he claimed, "must surely have endeavored to force his attentions upon her. My daughter, wishing to preserve her honor, refused to go along with him, and he has coerced her into committing suicide. I plan to lodge formal appeals to the governor and the surveillance commissioner. Who dares to cremate the corpse?"

The workers promptly dispersed, not daring to carry out the cremation. Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing had no alternative but to leave the coffin in the nunnery and return to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Truly:

The Green Dragon and the White Tiger
accompany each other;
Good fortune and bad fortune cannot
be safely predicted.⁶²

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 27

LI P'ING-ERH COMMUNICATES A SECRET IN THE KINGFISHER PAVILION; P'AN CHIN-LIEN ENGAGES IN A DRUNKEN ORGY UNDER THE GRAPE ARBOR

The Azure Heaven over our heads he would
wantonly defy;
Taking peoples' lives¹ to gain possession
of their wives.
You must know that his thousands of crafty and
evil schemes;
Will only result in putting his own household
in jeopardy.
Excess and debauchery have always arisen from
ill-gotten wealth;
Avarice and anger, if one but repents, need not
prevent salvation.
The Lord of Heaven still sees fit to let man
propagate himself;
Despite the fact that human hearts remain so
intractably perverse.²

THE STORY GOES that Lai-pao, on returning from his trip to the Eastern Capital, dismounted and went to the summerhouse to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"On arriving in the Eastern Capital," he said, "I first went to see the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien, who reports directly to the grand preceptor, and gave him your letter. Afterwards he took me to see the grand preceptor himself, who glanced at your communication and then had your presents taken inside. When this transaction was completed, he gave instructions that a letter should be written within a few days and dispatched posthaste to the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng,³ directing him to release the salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng, and the others, twelve men in all, who have been incarcerated in Ts'ang-chou. Uncle Chai also sent his respects to you and said that he hoped you would come to the capital yourself for the grand preceptor's birthday on the fifteenth day of the sixth month, because there is something he would like to discuss with you."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this report he was utterly delighted. Lai-pao himself had profited from this trip to the tune of fifty taels of silver from the salt merchant Wang Ssu-feng. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent him off to report the news to Ch'iao Hung. Who should appear at this juncture but Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing. When they saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse talking to Lai-pao, they waited to one side.

As soon as Lai-pao had gone off to Ch'iao Hung's house, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Pen the Fourth, "Are you back already from taking care of the cremation?"

Pen the Fourth was too frightened to answer, but Lai-hsing came forward and:

Whispered into his ear in a low voice,
thus and so, "Sung Jen showed up at the crematory, laid claim to the corpse, and refused to let it be cremated. His language was so discourteous I would not dare repeat it."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, nothing might have happened, but having heard these words, he became enraged and cursed, "That dead duck of a 'bare stick'! How contemptible can you get!"

Turning immediately to a page boy, he said, "Go fetch my son-in-law to write a note for me."

He dispatched Lai-hsing to deliver the note to the district magistrate, Li Tat'ien, who forthwith deputed two lictors, with a length of rope, to haul Sung Jen before the bench, where he was charged with attempting a shakedown, relying on the corpse of the deceased in order to extort money. Right there in the courtroom he was put in the squeezers and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo, so severely that:

Fresh blood flowed copiously down his legs.

He was required to sign a legal recognizance forbidding him to make any further trouble for the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The local constable was also ordered to have the crematory workers, in the presence of someone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, carry out the cremation forthwith and report back to the magistrate.

Sung Jen had been beaten so severely that his two legs were covered with wounds. When he returned home he developed an acute fever, contracted a seasonal ailment, and before a few days had passed:

Alas and alack,

he died. Truly, it was a case of:

A sleepy slugabed encountering the General
of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into
Chung K'uei.⁴

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The greed and corruption of the district magistrate
are truly lamentable;
On receipt of gold and silk he is prepared to
commit any iniquity.⁵
Because of his daughter, Sung Jen is condemned to
tread the road to the shades;
The resentful souls of the victims of injustice
pervade the entire yamen.

No sooner had Hsi-men Ch'ing disposed of the case of Sung Hui-lien than he proceeded to get together three hundred taels of silver and engage Silversmith Ku, at the head of a considerable number of other silversmiths, to come to the summerhouse in his garden and create a piece in which four male figurines were depicted holding up a representation of the character for long life in honor of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's birthday. Each of the silver figures in this group was more than a foot high. He also had them manufacture two gold pitchers in the shape of the character for long life and obtained two sets of jade cups in the shape of peaches. It took less than half a month to get everything ready. Hsi-men Ch'ing unpacked the python robes that Lai-wang had had manufactured for him in Hang-chou but was still lacking a bolt of abaca linen and a python robe of light silk. He doled out the money and sent people looking for these items everywhere but was unable to find any of good quality and had to make do with the best they could find.

One day, on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month, when the birthday presents had been properly packed up, he turned them over to Lai-pao and his manager, Wu Tien-en, and they departed from Ch'ing-ho district and set off for the Eastern Capital.⁶ But no more of this.

Two days later it was the first day of the sixth month, the beginning of the dog days of summer. Truly:

Great heat does not exceed that of the *wei*
and *shen* days of the sixth month;
Great cold does not exceed that of the *ch'ou*
and *yin* days of the twelfth month.⁷

The weather was extremely hot. It was that time when:

The "red raven" is at its zenith,
An umbrella of fire suspended in space,
Without half a speck of cloud cover,
Melting rock and liquefying metal.⁸

A poet of yore has left us a poem that describes this heat:

Chu-jung has come from the south, whipping
his fiery dragon;
His flaming banners are all ablaze, turning
the heavens red.
The sun's wheel is at its zenith, immobilized,
refusing to move;
The myriad nations feel as though they are in
a red-hot furnace.
On the Five Peaks all verdure is parched,
the clouds obliterated;
The God of Waves, beneath the sea, is afraid
his domain will dry up.
Will that evening ever come when the metallic
autumn wind will blow;
And favor us by sweeping away the heat
from the world below?⁹

Your narrator would remark that in this world there are three kinds of people who fear the heat, and three kinds of people who do not fear the heat. What are the three kinds of people who fear the heat?

The first kind of people who fear the heat are the farmers in the countryside. Every day they till their fields and tread their dikes, pushing the plow and dragging the harrow. In order to meet the deadlines for the semiannual agricultural taxes, they must relinquish whatever surplus grain is in their storehouses. During the dog days of summer, if there is no rain for their fields, their hearts burn within them as though afire.

The second kind are the merchants who must travel in pursuit of trade. They are away from home for years on end,¹⁰ peddling their safflower and gromwell, their beeswax and breath-sweetening lozenges.¹¹ On their shoulders they bear heavy burdens, with their hands they push cumbersome barrows. As they travel along the road, they become hungrier and hungrier, thirstier and thirstier. Their faces are bathed in sweat and saliva, their clothes are soaked through, and they cannot find so much as an inch of shade. Truly it is rough going.

The third kind are the soldiers on the frontier. Their heads burdened with heavy helmets, their bodies clad in iron mail, when thirsty they lick the blood from their swords, when tired they rest on the pommels of their saddles.¹² They campaign for years on end without being able to return home. Their clothes are infested with lice, their wounds suppurate, and not an unscathed patch of skin remains on their bodies.¹³

These are the three kinds of people who fear the heat. There are also three kinds of people who do not fear the heat.

The first of these are those who dwell within the inner precincts of the imperial palace. By their waterside rotundas and breezy pavilions, serpentine streams form pools and flowing springs make ponds. Large pieces and small pieces of ornamental jade are juxtaposed to objects sculpted out of reversed-pattern rhinoceros horn.¹⁴ By lapis lazuli balustrades are planted exotic fruits and rare flowers. In crystal basins are piled objects of agate and coral. On tables of inlaid crystal are arrayed inkstones from Tuan-ch'i, writing brushes with ivory stems,¹⁵ ink cakes that once belonged to Ts'ang Chieh,¹⁶ and note-paper designed by Ts'ai Yen,¹⁷ as well as crystal brush racks and white jade paperweights. When suffering from ennui, such men compose rhapsodies and indite poems. When affected by drink, they take naps in the southern breeze.

And then there are the nobility and distaff relatives of the imperial house, the members of wealthy households and prominent families. Every day is spent in their "snow caves" and cool pavilions. All day long they occupy their breezy studios and waterside retreats. Their hanging screens are made of raddled "shrimps' whiskers," their bed curtains are fashioned of woven mermaid silk. Jasmine-scented pomanders are suspended in their quarters. On their beds of inlaid mother-of-pearl are spread cool mats of ripple-patterned bamboo and coral pillows adorned with mandarin ducks. Punkahs are everywhere in motion to stir up the air. Ready at hand are basins of ice water in which lie soaking submerged plums and floating melons,¹⁸ red caltrops and snowy lotus roots, bayberries and Chinese olives, apples and water chestnuts. And there are also flowerlike beauties¹⁹ standing by to cool them with their fans.

And then there are the Taoist priests and Ch'an monks in their temples and monasteries, occupying their cloud-encroaching scripture halls and their skyscraping bell towers. In moments of leisure they resort to the abbot's cell to explicate the Way of Nirvana or recite *The Scripture of the Yellow Court*.²⁰ From time to time they visit their monastic gardens to pluck the peaches of immortality or exotic fruits. When suffering from ennui, they summon their acolytes and strum the zither athwart their knees in the shade of the pines. When affected by drink, they take along their chessboards and chat with their friends in the shade of the willows.

These are the three kinds of people who do not fear the heat. There is a poem that testifies to this:

The red sun blazes as if it would set
everything afire;
In the fields below half the crops are
withered and scorched.
The hearts of the farmers are like
seething caldrons:
While in their belvederes the nobles
ply their fans.²¹

When Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and saw how hot it was, he decided not to go out that day but to stay at home, leaving his hair undone and merely throwing on a tunic,²² in order to avoid the heat. He went to his summerhouse in the garden, the Kingfisher Pavilion, and watched the page boys as they watered the flowers. What should he see, right in front of the Kingfisher Pavilion, but a planter of sweet-smelling daphne in full flower. Hsi-men Ch'ing had the page boy, Lai-an, fetch a small sprinkling can and looked on as he watered it.

At this juncture who should appear but P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, dressed in their everyday garb of white silver-striped silk blouses and long trailing skirts of honey yellow silk brocade with a drawnwork motif of "phoenixes traversing the flowers." Li P'ing-erh was wearing a vest of scarlet abaca linen and Chin-lien one of pink, both of which were trimmed with purpled gold-spangled edging. Chin-lien was not wearing a formal headdress but had done her hair up into a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, fastened in place with a cloud-shaped ornament with kingfisher feather inlays. Two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple, next to which, on the forehead of her powdered face, she had pasted three gold-flecked turquoise beauty patches, which served to further enhance her:

Powdered face and glossy hair,²³
Ruby lips and white teeth.²⁴

The two of them, holding hands and giggling to each other, suddenly arrived on the scene and saw Hsi-men Ch'ing supervising the watering of the flowers.

"So this is where you are," they said, "seeing to the watering of the flowers. Why, you haven't even done your hair yet!"

"Tell a maidservant to go fetch some water," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can do my hair right here."

"Put your sprinkling can down," said Chin-lien to Lai-an, "and go back to my room. Tell one of the maidservants to bring some water and a comb, and be quick about it. Your father wants to do his hair here."

Lai-an assented and went off on his errand.

Chin-lien noticed the sweet-smelling daphne and was about to pick a blossom to stick in her hair when Hsi-men Ch'ing stopped her, saying, "Hands off, you crazy little oily mouth! I've got a blossom for each of you here."

It so happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already plucked a few partly opened blossoms from the sides of the cluster and had put them to soak in a turquoise gallbladder-shaped porcelain vase.

"My child," said Chin-lien with a laugh, "What do you mean plucking all these blossoms for yourself without presenting one to your mother?"

Thereupon, she snatched one of them, before he could give it to her, and stuck it in her hair. Hsi-men Ch'ing presented another one to Li P'ing-erh.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, carrying a dressing mirror and comb, and Ch'iu-chü, with the water for him to wash his face in.

Hsi-men Ch'ing handed three of the blossoms to Ch'un-mei and instructed her, "Deliver these to Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou to wear in their hair, and ask the Third Lady to join us. Tell her I'd like to hear her play something for me on the moon guitar."

"Give the one for Meng the Third to me," said Chin-lien. "I'll deliver it to her. You can have Ch'un-mei deliver the ones for the First Lady and Li Chiao-erh and then come back. And give me one more of those blossoms for myself. Since I'm going to the trouble of calling the singing girl for you, I deserve another one."

"You go ahead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll give it to you when you come back."

"My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous?" said Chin-lien. "You think you can trick me into calling Meng the Third for you, and then you won't give me a thing. I won't go. You'll have to give it to me first before I'll go for her."

"You lousy little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Even in something like this you've got to have your finger in the pie."

Thereupon, he gave her another blossom, and Chin-lien stuck it in the hair beside her temple. Only then did she consent to go off to the rear compound, leaving Li P'ing-erh alone with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the Kingfisher Pavilion.

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that beneath her light silk skirt she was wearing scarlet silk underdrawers that were:

Delicately translucent,²⁵

when she stood in the sunlight, exposing her:

Jade bones and icy flesh.²⁶

Before he knew it, his:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Seeing that:

There was nobody about,²⁷

he neglected to comb his hair, but bending Li P'ing-erh over a cool-surfaced summer bench:

Turned up her beige skirt,

Took down her red drawers,

and, stooping over her back, proceeded to:

Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains.

He kept at it for some time and had not yet ejaculated, as the two of them:

Enjoyed to the full the pleasures of connubial bliss.

Who could have anticipated that P'an Chin-lien did not actually go back to the rear compound to call Yü-lou but went only as far as the postern gate leading out of the garden and then turned over Meng Yü-lou's blossom to Ch'un-mei to deliver for her. She thought for a while and then retraced her steps, silently tiptoeing up to the latticework window of the Kingfisher Pavilion in order to eavesdrop on the events within. She continued to eavesdrop for some time and could tell that the two of them inside were just in the thick of things.

"Dear heart," she overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing saying to Li P'ing-erh, "Your daddy doesn't love anything else so much as this delectable white bottom of yours. Today you're letting your daddy enjoy it to the full."

After some time, she heard Li P'ing-erh say in a low voice, "My own daddy! Don't bang away at me quite so hard. I'm feeling poorly in my present condition. You were a little too rough with me the last time and left me with a pain in the lower abdomen that has only begun to get better in the last few days."

"What do you mean," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "when you say you're feeling poorly in your present condition?"

"I won't keep you in the dark any longer," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'm expecting and am already approaching my final month of pregnancy. So please go a little easy with me."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words he was utterly delighted and said, "Dear heart! Why didn't you tell me before? If that's the way it is, your daddy will be content to make only a casual game of it. Thereupon:

When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense;

Responding to her with abandon,²⁸

he gripped her around the hips with both hands and:

Ejaculated like a geyser.²⁹

The woman, from underneath, arched her hips, the better to receive his semen.

Some time elapsed, during which all that could be heard was Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Panting and puffing,
and the woman:

Cooing softly like an oriole.

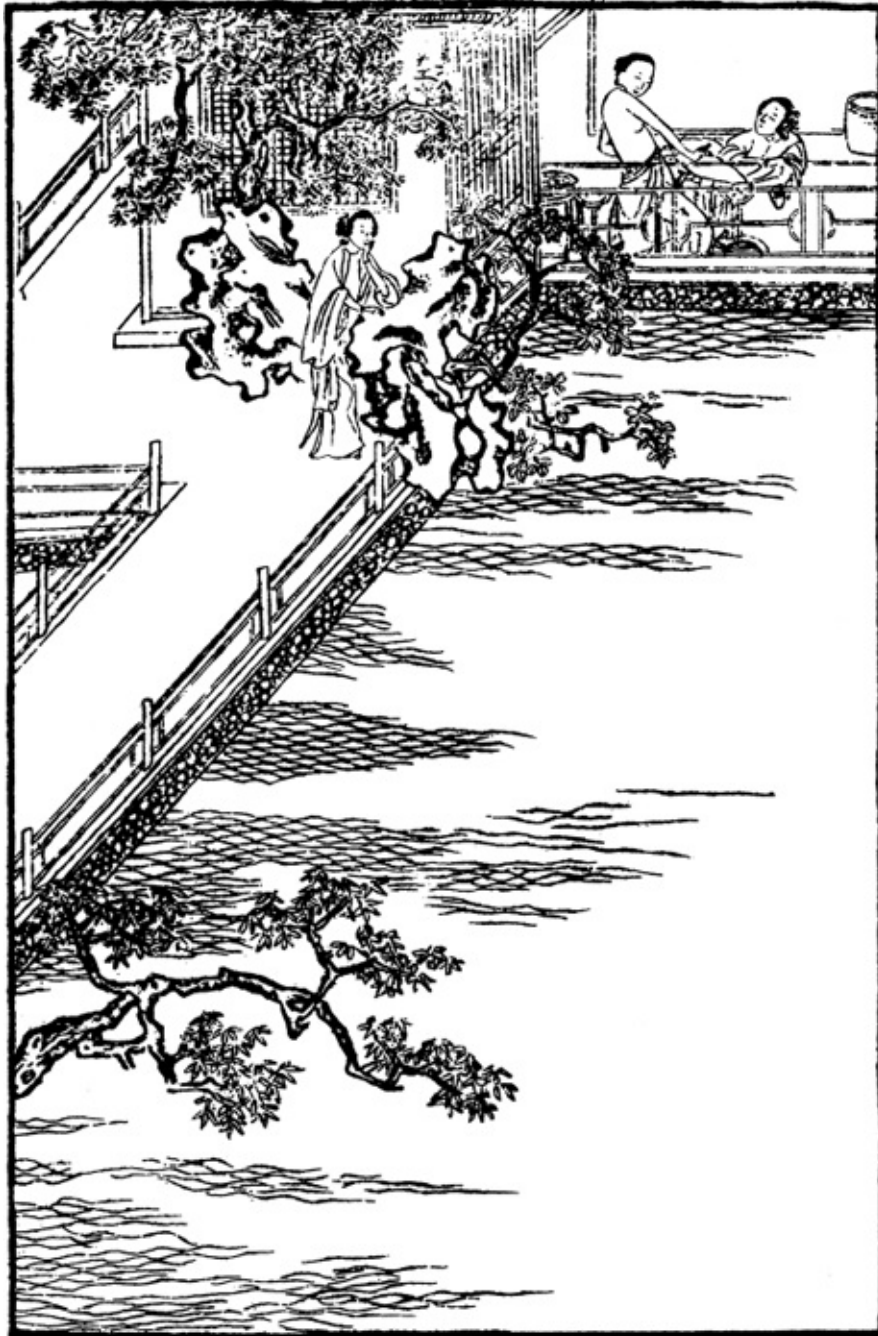
All of this was so clearly overheard by Chin-lien from her vantage point outside the window that she might well have ejaculated:

"Is it not delightful?"

While she was still listening, who should appear but Meng Yü-lou, who suddenly arrived from the rear compound and said, "Slavey Five, what are you doing here?"

Chin-lien silenced her with a negative wave of the hand, and the two of them then proceeded to walk into the summerhouse together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was so flustered he hardly knew what to do with himself.

"I've been gone half the day," Chin-lien said to him, "and what have you been up to? It seems you haven't even combed your hair or washed your face yet."



"I've been waiting for a maidservant to bring the jasmine soap," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I could wash my face."

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," said Chin-lien. "You're so insistent on having that particular soap for your ablutions, it's no wonder your face has been scrubbed even whiter than a certain person's bottom."

Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this remark, but chose to ignore it.

Later, after he had done his hair and washed his face, he sat down with Yü-lou, and asked, "What have you been up to in the rear compound? Did you bring the moon guitar with you?"

"I've been in the master suite," said Yü-lou, "stringing pearls and other ornaments for Elder Sister to wear in her hair when she goes to the tea-present ceremony for her nephew Wu Shun-ch'en's bride-to-be, Third Sister Cheng, a few days from now.³⁰ Ch'un-mei has gone to fetch the moon guitar."

Before long, Ch'un-mei showed up and said, "I've delivered the blossoms to the First Lady and the Second Lady and they've acknowledged them."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told her to prepare some wine for them.

It was not long before:

In basins of ice water there lay soaking,
Submerged plums and floating melons;
In cool pavilions he indulged himself,
Cuddling the red and hugging the turquoise.³¹

"Why don't you send Ch'un-mei to invite Elder Sister to join us?" said Yü-lou.

"She doesn't like to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's no point in inviting her."

The four of them then settled down to make a party of it. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in the place of honor, and the three women ranged themselves to either side. Truly, it is a case of:

The finest vintage poured from the flagon,
The rarest delicacies graced the platter.

P'an Chin-lien refused to sit on her chair but sat down on a pea-green cool porcelain taboret instead.

"Sister Five," said Meng Yü-lou, "come over and sit on this chair. I'm afraid that cool taboret may give you a chill."

"It doesn't matter," said Chin-lien. "Old as I am, and without any fetus to chill, what is there to worry about?"

After a while, when:

Three rounds of wine had been consumed,

Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to fetch the moon guitar for Yü-lou to play and the *p'i-p'a* for Chin-lien and said, "You two sing me the song suite that begins with the tune 'Cries of the Wild Geese in Flight' and opens with the words:

The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze
in the Great Void."³²

Chin-lien refused, saying, "My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? If we sing, the two of you will have nothing to do but enjoy yourselves. I won't do it, unless Sister Li also has an instrument to play."

"But she doesn't know how to play anything," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If she can't play," said Chin-lien, "let her stand to one side and keep time with the clappers."

"This little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she ever does is pick nits."

He instructed Ch'un-mei to go fetch a pair of red ivory clappers and had Li P'ing-erh agree to hold them in her hand.

Then the two musicians, with Yü-lou's maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, standing by to cool them with her fan:

Deftly extended their slender fingers,
Gently strummed the silken strings,

and sang together, to the tune "Cries of the Wild Geese in Flight":

The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze
in the Great Void.

When they had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing presented each of them with a cup of wine.

As the party continued, P'an Chin-lien made herself conspicuous by the assiduity with which she gulped down ice water and devoured fresh fruit.

"Sister Five," protested Yü-lou, "how come you're consuming only fresh cold things today?"

"Old as I am," laughed Chin-lien, "there's nothing of any consequence going on in *my* belly, so why should I worry about eating cold or glutinous things?"

This so embarrassed Li P'ing-erh that her face became a patchwork of red and white blotches.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Chin-lien a look and said, "You little whore! All you ever do is talk nonsense."

"You've got too much to say yourself," said Chin-lien. "After all, I'm only like:

The bedridden old woman trying to eat cured meat:
I can only cope with a single shred at a time.

What's it to you, anyway?"

As they continued drinking, all of a sudden:
Clouds massed in the southeast,
Fog obscured the northwest.³³
Thunder rumbled indistinctly,³⁴ and
A heavy downpour occurred,
as a result of which the flowers and vegetation in front of the summerhouse were completely soaked. Truly:
The waters of the Yangtze, Yellow, Huai, and Chi Rivers
are newly augmented;
The emerald bamboo and the red pomegranate blossoms
are rendered pristine.³⁵
Before long the rain stopped, the remnant of a rainbow hung suspended in the distant sky, and a glimpse of the sun
reappeared in the west. Truly, it is a case of:
The passing of a fine rain imparts a sheen to the
azure promontory;
The cooling of an evening breeze enhances the purity
of the courtyard.
Who should appear at this juncture but Hsiao-yü, who came out from the rear compound looking for Meng Yü-lou.
“Elder Sister wants my help,” Yü-lou explained. “There are still some pearls and ornaments that need to be strung. I’d
better go or she’ll be annoyed with me.”
“The two of us can go together,” said Li P’ing-erh. “I want to see how Elder Sister is doing with the stringing of the
pearls and ornaments too.”
“Let’s give you a send-off,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.
Thereupon, he picked up the moon guitar and gave it to Yü-lou to play while he clapped his hands in accompaniment
as they all sang together, to the tune “Liang-chou Prelude”:

As evening falls, rain passes over the
southern pavilion,
Disordering the rouged surface
of the pond.
Spring thunder rumbles indistinctly;
The rain is over and the clouds disperse.³⁶
For ten li, the fragrance of lotus blossoms
pervades the senses;
The new moon is a solitary hook.
The beauty of this scene is infinite.
Emerging from the orchid-scented water,
Her evening makeup mussed,
It is dusk in the secluded courtyard, and
she is too languid to sleep.

Chorus:

Sing “Golden Threads,”³⁷
Drain “azure funnels,”³⁸
By icy mountains and snowy balustrades,
prepare to feast.
How many people live to see
such times of peace?

They continued to sing to the same tune with a modified opening:

In the shade of the willows, the stridulation
of the new cicada resounds,
Flittering fireflies become visible as they
invade the courtyard.
Somewhere the song of caltrop gatherers is heard,
Returning at evening in their painted boats.
Behold, the stars of the “Jade Rope”
hang low,³⁹

Within red gates there is no sound.⁴⁰
This scene is even more to be envied.
Rising, he takes her by the silk-white hand,⁴¹
And straightens her coiffure.
The moon shines on the gauze-curtained bedstead,
but they are not yet asleep.

Chorus:

Sing "Golden Threads,"
Drain "azure funnels,"
By icy mountains and snowy balustrades,
prepare to feast.
How many people live to see
such times of peace?

They continued to sing to the tune "Higher Ever Higher":

Amid the ripples, mandarin ducks play,⁴²
Overturning the green lotus leaves;
Pure fragrance is wafted abroad as
jeweled drops spatter.
A perfumed breeze fans,
The banks of the fragrant pond,
Beside the secluded pavilion.
Sitting here, quite unawares, one's
spirits are refreshed.
What need is there for Gardens of Paradise
or Isles of the Blest?

Chorus:

We only fear the west wind will once more
surprise us with autumn;
Before we know it, all unobserved, the
flowing years have passed.⁴³

As they sang, before they knew it, they had arrived at the postern gate. Meng Yü-lou handed her moon guitar to Ch'un-mei and went back to the rear compound with Li P'ing-erh.

"Meng the Third," P'an Chin-lien called after her, "wait for me. I'm coming too."

She was about to abandon Hsi-men Ch'ing and go with the others, when he reached out and grabbed her with one hand, saying, "Little oily mouth, you may be slippery, but I'm not going to let you get away."

He gave her such a tug as he spoke that it was a wonder she didn't lose her footing.

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" said the woman. "I'm fully dressed. Haven't you seen enough of my arm by now? Tiresome child! The two of them are both gone. I wonder what you want to keep me around for."

"Let's get some wine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have a game of pitch-pot⁴⁴ here under the T'ai-hu rockery, just for the fun of it. Come, share three cups with me."

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" the woman exclaimed. "If we're going to play at pitch-pot, let's do it in the pavilion. Why do it here, of all places? If you don't believe me, just try it out on that little piece, Ch'un-mei. She won't even fetch the wine for you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to run this errand for them, and Ch'un-mei relinquished the moon guitar to her mistress and went nonchalantly off without more ado.

The woman took the moon guitar in her hand and strummed at it a while, saying, "I've had Meng the Third teach me a few lines."

As she was playing she noticed that beside the T'ai-hu rockery there was a pomegranate blossom in full bloom after the rain.

Playfully plucking a sprig, she stuck it on one side of her cloudy locks,⁴⁵ saying:

"Not having had a bite for three days,
I've got flowers before my eyes."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he stepped forward and, hoisting her two tiny golden lotuses into the air, threatened mischievously, "You little whore! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, I'd fuck you to death."

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" the woman retorted. "Cut the kidding. Wait till I get rid of this moon guitar."

Thereupon, she casually leaned the moon guitar against the side of the raised flower bed and said, "My child, the more demanding you get, the less likely you are to succeed. Just now you've been off screwing around with Li P'ing-erh and don't know how to cover your embarrassment. What do you want to pester me for?"

"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense. Who's been up to anything with her?"

"My child," the woman said:

"No matter what you do, you cannot deceive the
local tutelary god.

Who do you think your mother is, that you should try to deceive me? While I was off delivering that blossom in the rear compound, those were fine doings the two of you were up to."

"You crazy little whore!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Cut the nonsense."

Thereupon, bending her down beneath the flower bed, he gave her a kiss.

The woman promptly responded by sticking her tongue into his mouth.

"If you call me 'My own daddy,' " said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll forgive you and let you up."

The woman found him to be too much for her and said, "My own daddy!

I'm not the one you're after, so what are you pestering me for?"

As for the two of them, truly:

Inspired by sunshine, the oriole's tongue
displays its virtuosity;
Moistened with rain, the flowery branch is
more than ever enticing.⁴⁶

After the two of them had toyed with each other for a while, the woman said, "Why don't we go over by the grape arbor and play our game of pitch-pot there. Come on, let's go."

Thereupon, balancing the moon guitar on one arm as she walked, she played the concluding song to the suite that begins with "Liang-chou Prelude," to the tune "Higher Ever Higher":

On this clear evening, hearts are light;
it is gloriously cool;
Moonlight bathes the Pure Empty Hall
on the Jasper Terrace.⁴⁷
Immortal lovers,
Spread tortoiseshell mats,
For yet another revel.
Let the silver arrows of the jade clepsydra
press forward as they may,
The sounds of pipe and song will continue
in the Crystal Palace.⁴⁸

Chorus:

We only fear the west wind will once more
surprise us with autumn;
Before we know it, all unobserved, the
flowing years have passed.

Coda:

Light and darkness alternate swiftly,
like lightning flashes;
Even this wonderful evening is, alas,
drawing to its end.
Risk everything for pleasure, as song
and laughter resound.⁴⁹

Day after day, a feast among the flowers;
Night after night, jade damsels as companions.
How long a span of life are we allotted?

What are we to do if not enjoy it?⁵⁰

The two of them walked along shoulder to shoulder. Before long they had made their way around the azure pool, skirted the banksia rose trellis, passed in front of the Kingfisher Pavilion, and arrived at the grape arbor. They opened their eyes wide and took a good look and, truly, it was a fine grape arbor. Behold:

On all sides are carved balustrades
and stone masonry;
On every hand the emerald leaves
are densely massed.
Glaucous hues greet the eyes,
A thousand clusters of purple pellets
dangle like beaded tassels;
Autumn scents assail the nostrils,
Ten thousand banks of green cloud
trail brocaded sashes.
Suspended “mare teats”:⁵¹
These crystal spheres contain
carnelian juice;
Tumbling green pearls:
The gilded arbor is decked with
emerald drapes.
These species have been transplanted
from the Western Regions;
Their fragrance has been cultivated
in the Sweet Springs Palace.⁵²

Truly:

In all four seasons it is embellished by
rare blossoms on flowering trees,
The bright moon and clear breeze cannot
be purchased at any price.⁵³

It so happened that when the two of them arrived underneath the grape arbor, they found that four cool porcelain taborets had been placed there with a bronze vessel for the game of pitch-pot to one side. Chin-lien leaned the moon guitar against one of the taborets and started to play pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

At this juncture, what should they see in the distance but Ch'un-mei bringing the wine and Ch'iu-chü totting a box of delicacies, with a bowl of iced fruit on top of it.

“You little piece!” the woman exclaimed. “You went off in a huff just a minute ago. How come, now, you’re delivering the goods after all?”

“We’ve been looking all over the place for you,” Ch'un-mei complained. “Who could have anticipated that you’d sneak over here?”

Ch'iu-chü put down her burden and left.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the box and found it divided into eight compartments with a different delicacy in each. One compartment contained goose gizzards and goose feet preserved in a fermented mash. One contained shreds of cured meat that had been pressed into laminated sheets and bundled together like the pages of a document. One contained preserved whitebait flavored with osmanthus. One contained split sun-dried pullet breasts and wings. One contained fresh lotus seeds. One contained fresh walnut meats. One contained fresh caltrops. And one contained fresh water chestnuts. There were also a small silver flagon of grape wine⁵⁴ with a spout shaped like the crop on the neck of a bird, two tiny gold cups in the shape of lotus seedpods, and two pairs of ivory chopsticks.

When these things had been set out on a low cool-surfaced table, Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman sat down across from each other and continued to amuse themselves at pitch-pot. They played the variations called “Crossing the Bridge,” “Inserting the Arrow Upside Down,” “A Pair of Wild Geese in Flight,” “Passing the Examinations and Qualifying for Office,” “The Two Ch'iao Sisters Read a Book,”⁵⁵ “Yang Kuei-fei Takes a Spring Nap,” “The Black Dragon Penetrates the Cave,” and “Rolling the Pearl Curtain Bottom Side Up.”⁵⁶

By the time they had played ten games or more, the woman had become quite drunk. Before she knew it:

Peach blossoms had bloomed upon her cheeks, and
Amorous glances escaped the corners of her eyes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing still wanted to drink some medicated Five Spice Wine⁵⁷ and sent Ch'un-mei to fetch it.

“Little oily mouth,” Chin-lien said, “please do me another favor while you’re at it. Go to my room and bring a cool bamboo bed mat and a pillow. I’m completely pooped and would like to lie down here for a while.”

Deliberately affecting the coquetry of a spoiled child, Ch'un-mei said, “Enough is enough! Haven’t I already got my hands full with all these errands? Who’s got the energy to go fetch anything for you too?”

“If you don’t want to do it,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “just tell Ch'iu-chü to bring them here while you go after the wine.”

Ch'un-mei went off, shaking her head as she went.

After what seemed like half a day, Ch'iu-chü was the first to appear, holding a cool bamboo bed mat, a pillow, and a quilt in her arms.

"Put the bedding down," the woman instructed her, "and latch the garden gate on your way out. Then go look after the room, and don't come back unless I call for you."

Ch'iu-chü nodded in assent, put down the bedding, and went off straightaway.

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon stood up, took off his jade-colored silk tunic, hung it over the balustrade, and went over under the flower trellis beside the juniper hedge on the west side of the peony bed to relieve himself.

By the time he returned, the woman had already unrolled the cool bamboo mat and positioned the pillow and quilt to her satisfaction. She had stripped herself so that not a stitch of silk remained on her body, above or below, and was reclining face-up on the mat, wearing scarlet shoes on her feet, and cooling herself with a white silk fan that she held in her hand.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back and beheld this sight, how could it help but:

Stimulate his lecherous desires?

Thereupon, exhilarated by the wine, he took off his own clothes, above and below, sat down on a cool porcelain taboret, and started out by titillating her clitoris with his toe. He titillated it to such effect that her vaginal fluids began to flow, like a snail secreting its slime.⁵⁸ He then took off the woman's red embroidered shoes, unwound her foot bindings, and amused himself by using them to suspend her two feet from the grape arbor overhead, so that she looked just like "A Golden Dragon Extending Its Claws." As a result:

Her vaginal orifice was greatly distended,

Her "Red Hook" was completely exposed, and

Her "Chicken Tongue" protruded from within.

Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by stooping over her and placing his jade chowrie handle⁵⁹ inside the mouth of her vagina,⁶⁰ thus demonstrating the position known as "Inserting the Arrow Upside Down." Supporting himself with one hand on her pillow, he proceeded to thrust with all his strength. He continued to thrust until her vaginal secretions flowed uninterruptedly, making a sound like a school of loaches plunging through the mud.⁶¹ The woman, from underneath, inarticulately called out, "Daddy!" unceasingly.

Just as they were approaching the height of bliss, who should appear but Ch'un-mei, who had come with the heated wine. As soon as she saw what was happening, she put down the wine flagon and fled straight to the top of the artificial hill, the highest point in the garden, where she leaned over a chess table in the Cloud Repose Pavilion and toyed with the chess pieces.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked up and saw where she had gone, he beckoned to her with his hand but was unable to induce her to come down.

"Little oily mouth!" he exclaimed. "If I can't get you down here, I might as well give up."

Thereupon, abandoning the woman, he set off in pursuit, but by the time he had run up the stone steps in great strides, all the way to the pavilion on the summit, Ch'un-mei had come down by way of a winding "sheep's-gut" path on the right side of the hill, passed through the whitewashed "snow cave" of Hidden Spring Grotto, and arrived at the Dripping Emerald Cavern halfway down in the "waist" of the hill, where the flowering vegetation was at its thickest.

Just as she was in the act of hiding there, Hsi-men Ch'ing unexpectedly caught sight of her and, embracing her around the waist as she stood in the shadows, said, "Little oily mouth! I've got you after all."

He then lightly picked her up and carried her down to the grape arbor where, saying with a laugh, "You must have a cup of wine," he proceeded to sit her down on his lap and the two of them passed a cup of it back and forth between them.

When Ch'un-mei saw that the woman's two feet were suspended from the arbor, she said, "What do the two of you think you're up to? In broad daylight too! If anyone should happen along and catch you in the act it would look most unbecoming."

"Was the postern gate closed or not?"⁶² Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"I put the latch on it when I came in," said Ch'un-mei.

"Little oily mouth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can look on as I play a game of 'pitching into the fleshly pot.' This variation is called 'Shooting the Silver Goose with a Golden Pellet.' You watch; for every pellet that hits the target I'll drink a cup of wine."

Thereupon, he reached into the bowl of ice water for a jade-yellow "imperial damson" plum⁶³ and pitched it at the orifice of the woman's vagina. He pitched three of these in a row and each of them struck the clitoris. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly downed three cups of the medicated Five Spice Wine. He also had Ch'un-mei pour a cup of wine and give it to the woman to drink.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then inserted a damson plum into the woman's vagina and neither removed it nor proceeded to any further action, which had the effect of arousing the woman until:

Her amorous desires were in a tumult, and

Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,

but she was too embarrassed to call out. Instead:

Her starry eyes grew dim, and

Her four limbs lay inert upon pillow and mat.⁶⁴

Finally she called out:

Her oriole's voice all aquaver,

"What a cruel lover! You'll do me to death yet."

Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention to her but told Ch'un-mei to stand by and cool him with a fan as he devoted himself to the wine. As the cups passed back and forth, he continued to drink until he ended up reclining faceup on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair and fell fast asleep.

As soon as Ch'un-mei saw that he was in a drunken stupor, she came over to make sure by giving him an experimental caress and then disappeared in a cloud of dust through the whitewashed "snow cave" on her way back to the rear compound. She heard someone calling to get in through the postern gate, and when she opened it, it turned out to be Li P'ing-erh.

No one disturbed Hsi-men Ch'ing's nap, and he slept for about two hours before waking up. When he opened his eyes he saw that the woman's two fresh white legs were still splayed to either side as they hung suspended from the grape arbor overhead.

Unable to restrain his lust,⁶⁵

he noticed that Ch'un-mei was no longer in evidence and, turning to the woman, said, "All right, I'll let you have it now."

Thereupon, he first fished the damson plum out of her vagina and made the woman eat it. Then he sat down on a pillow, pulled the bag of sexual implements out of the wallet attached to his silk jacket, and fastened in place first the silver clasp and then the sulfur-imbrued ring.⁶⁶

At first he only dallied back and forth in the mouth of her vagina, refusing to penetrate deeply, which had the effect of arousing the woman until she arched her back in response to his every movement, while crying out unceasingly, "Daddy, hurry up and get inside! You're driving this whore of yours crazy! I know you're upset with me on account of Li P'ing-erh and are deliberately pulling out the stops to teach me a lesson. After what you've put me through today, I won't dare defy you anymore."

"You little whore," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as long as you understand what's what, we can negotiate the better."⁶⁷

Thereupon, after titillating her clitoris a little further, he withdrew his organ, opened the bag from his wallet, picked out a glob of the aphrodisiac ointment called "Amorous Cries of Boudoir Beauties"⁶⁸ with his finger and thumb, and, daubing it in the mouth of his urethra, plunged the object into her vagina and gave a few thrusts with it. In no time at all his organ became proud and firm.



P'an Chin-lien Engages in a Drunken Orgy under the Grape Arbor

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
 as it became engorged with rage. Hsi-men Ch'ing:
 Bent his head the better to observe,
 The coming and going, thrusting and retraction;⁶⁹
 Savoring the sight as it went in and out.⁷⁰

As the woman lay beside the pillow:

Her starry eyes grew dim, and
 She moaned incessantly,

inarticulately calling out, "My big-dicked daddy! What are you up to? Go all the way in and be done with it. The itch in the clitoris of the cunt of this whore of yours has entered into the marrow of her bones. Take pity on me and let me off for now."

In the mouth of this whore no expression, no matter how unspeakably obscene, was left unsaid.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, once he got started he was good for three or four hundred thrusts at a time. Supporting himself facedown on the pillow and mat with both hands, arching his back and exerting all his strength, responding to her movements and raising himself to the task, he retracted his organ as far as its neck and plunged it in all the way up to the root another hundred times or so.⁷¹ The woman, from underneath, used a napkin to wipe away her vaginal secretions, but they continued to flow, as a result of which the mat was completely soaked. Hsi-men Ch'ing alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, moving back and forth and teasing her without mercy.

Turning to the woman, he said, "I'm going to demonstrate the position known as 'The Old Monk Rings the Dinner Bell.'"

All of a sudden, he arched his back and lunged forward, thrusting himself inside her until the tip of his organ penetrated all the way to her cervix. The cervix is the innermost recess of the vaginal chamber and contains a fleshy growth like the budding pistil of a flower. When the glans of his penis penetrates to this point without being deflected, the man will feel a melting sensation the pleasure of which is indescribable.⁷²

The woman was hurt and responded with a sudden upward buck of her body, as a result of which, what could be heard but a cracking sound as the sulfur-imbrued ring broke inside her. As for the woman:

Her eyes dimmed, her respiration slowed,
The sound of her breathing was barely audible,
The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and
Her four limbs lay inert upon the mat.⁷³

Hsi-men Ch'ing became alarmed and hastily unfastened the foot bindings by which her feet were suspended from the arbor. He then fished the sulfur-imbrued ring and the "titillating bell" out of her vagina and broke them in two.

Thereupon, he helped the woman into a sitting position, and it was only after what seemed like half a day that:

Her starry eyes flashed open with surprise,⁷⁴
and she gradually came back to her senses.

She then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, with coquettish tears,⁷⁵ "My own daddy! How could you be so cruel to me today? You almost cost me my life. From now on you must never do anything like that again.

It would be no laughing matter.

As it is:

My head feels so dizzy,
I hardly know where I am."⁷⁶

Noticing that the sun was already sinking in the west, Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily helped her on with her clothes and called for Ch'un-mei and Ch'iu-chü to put away the bedding and help him get her back to her room.

Ch'un-mei returned to the garden to oversee Ch'iu-chü as she cleared up the tableware from the feast. Just as she was about to close the garden gate, the head servant Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, came scrambling out from underneath the flower trellis and pestered her for some fruit to eat.

"Where did you come from, you little jailbird?" said Ch'un-mei, giving him a few damson plums and peaches. "Your father's drunk. Hadn't you better get back to the front of the compound? If he sees you, I fear, you're likely to get a beating."

The little monkey took the fruit and went off straightaway. Ch'un-mei closed the garden gate and then went back to the room where she helped Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman as they:

Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

But no more of this. Truly:

In the morning he attends feasts in Golden Valley,⁷⁷

In the evening he favors beauties in ornate houses.

But do not consider these to be occasions for joy,

Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.⁷⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 28

CH'EN CHING-CHI TEASES CHIN-LIEN ABOUT A SHOE; HSI-MEN CH'ING ANGRILY BEATS LITTLE IRON ROD

In tempestuous surroundings it is hard
to maintain one's footing;
In one's way of coping with the world
do not be too demanding.¹
Everything that happens goes wrong
on account of haste;
One's heart should ever seek to find
contentment in quietude.
Where the road is level one can proceed
in greater safety;
When people's feelings are constant they
will withstand scrutiny.
Just as it seems that, first to last,
there is nothing to regret;
No sooner are the branches formed than
they begin to proliferate.²

THE STORY GOES that after Hsi-men Ch'ing had helped the woman into her room he took off his own clothes, above and below, wearing nothing but a short undershirt of thin floss silk and leaving the rest of his body stark naked. The woman wore nothing but a bodice of thin red silk. The two of them sat down:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh;
Refilled their empty cups, and
Resumed drinking the fragrant wine.

Putting an arm around her powdered neck, Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to drink with her, passing the same cup back and forth between them.

They could not have been more affectionate.

Looking at the woman out of the corner of his eye, he saw that:

Her cloudy locks were somewhat askew,³
Her creamy breasts were half exposed,⁴
Her captivating eyes were all a blur, so that
She resembled a drunken Yang Kuei-fei.

With her slender fingers she toyed uninterruptedly with the organ that lay between his loins until:

The organ started up in response.⁵

It still had the silver clasp fastened around it, but, limp, flaccid, and limber:

It was tumid and long.⁶

"Are you still fooling around with him?" Hsi-men Ch'ing joked. "It's all your fault, earlier, for scaring him into such a dumbstruck fit."

"What do you mean by 'a dumbstruck fit'?" the woman asked.

"If he's not having a dumbstruck fit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come he's so flaccid and feverish that he can't even stand up for himself? You'd better get down on your knees and see what a little coaxing will do."

The woman gave him a laughing glance and then, squatting down and pillowing her head on one of his thighs, proceeded to tie the waist-string from his underpants around the base of his organ.

Taking it in her hand, she addressed it, saying, "You rascal, you! Just a little while ago you were so heady and wide-eyed you made me dizzy, and now you pretend to be having a dumbstruck fit and play dead."

After she had manipulated it for a while, she laid it against her powdered cheek and brushed it back and forth for some time before putting it in her mouth and sucking it.⁷ She then proceeded to explore the mouth of his urethra with the tip of her tongue, and in no time at all his organ became engorged with rage.

In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye
grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells
itself erect.⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat up on the pillow and ordered the woman to remain on all fours inside the gauze mosquito netting and suck away:

In order to augment his pleasure.⁹

Before long:

His lewd excitement was rekindled,¹⁰

and he engaged her in intercourse another time.

The woman pled with him, saying, "Daddy, let me off for now! Do you really mean to pester me again?"

That night the two of them:

Indulged their lusts without restraint.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The battle at its height, joy reaches its zenith,
the clouds and rain disperse.

Her captivating eyes are all a blur.

Holding the jade stalk in her hand,

it remains as hard as ever.

She pleads with her talented gentleman,

"Take it easy just a bit!"

Urging each other to drain the golden cup to the dregs,¹¹

Both of them are passionate, "half drunk, half crazed."

Her snow-white jade body is visible

through the bed curtains;¹²

Her mouth is like a cherry, her fingers

are like reeds.

A single rivulet flows between them,

each drop distinct;

Their mutual feelings are enmeshed,¹³

deluded by lust.

Tossed first this way and then that,

fish nibble at the algae;

Slowly advancing and lightly retreating,

the cat devours the chick.

So long as the "divine turtle" does not disgorge

the water of its sweet spring;

How can the Goddess of the Moon be induced to

temporarily disengage.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing went out, and it was almost lunchtime before the woman got up. Taking off the pair of sleeping shoes she had on, she looked around for the pair of red ones she had worn the day before:

Trying first this and then that,

but was unable to find one of them.

She asked Ch'un-mei about it, and she said, "Yesterday, when Father and I helped you inside, it was Ch'iu-chü who brought in your bedding."

The woman called for Ch'iu-chü and asked her about it.

"Yesterday," Ch'iu-chü said, "I didn't see you wearing any shoes when you came in."

"What rubbish!" the woman said. "If I wasn't wearing any shoes when I came in, do you mean to say that I came in barefooted?"

"Mother," said Ch'iu-chü, "if you had your shoes on, why aren't they here in the house?"

"You lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her, "still playing the innocent, are you? But if it is here in the house, you'd better give it a thorough going over."

Ch'iu-chü searched everywhere, in all three rooms, on top of the beds and under the beds, but was unable to come up with the missing shoe.

"It seems this house of mine is haunted," said the woman. "Some demon has made off with this shoe of mine, I suppose. If you can't even keep track of the shoes I wear on my feet, what do I need a slave like you in the house for, anyway?"

"Maybe you've just forgotten," said Ch'iu-chü, "that you left it somewhere in the garden, and didn't have it on when you came in."

"No doubt I was screwed silly!" the woman said, "And didn't even know whether I had my shoes on my feet or not."

Then she called for Ch'un-mei and said, "Take this lousy slave into the garden and have her conduct a search. If she comes up with it, that will be that; but if she fails to come up with my shoe, make her kneel down in the courtyard with a

stone balanced on her head.”

Ch’un-mei escorted her all over the garden, including the vicinity of the grape arbor, but, search as she would, there was not a shoe to be found. Truly:

It was just as if one of the six Ting gods¹⁴
had stolen it away;
Amid the reed catkins, by bright moonlight,
it was hard to find.¹⁵

After searching the entire garden, they returned empty-handed.

Ch’un-mei mocked her, saying, “You slave, you’re in the same pickle now as:

The go-between who lost her way: you’ve no
occasion to speak; or
Dame Wang who sold her grindstone: you’ve no way
to grind your axe.”¹⁶

“It’s uncanny,” said Ch’iu-chü. “Who could have made off with Mother’s shoe? I didn’t see her wearing any shoes when she came in. I wouldn’t be surprised if when you opened the garden gate yesterday you let someone in who picked up Mother’s shoe.”

Ch’un-mei responded by spitting a thick glob of saliva in her face and cursing at her, “You lousy slave! You’ve been seeing things. And now you’re trying to drag me into it. When the Sixth Lady called to open the gate, I shouldn’t have opened it, I suppose! But you would have it that I let someone in. It was you who brought in her bedding and didn’t check things out properly, and you still have the nerve to shoot your mouth off.”

Ch’un-mei then escorted Ch’iu-chü back to the house and reported to her mistress, “She didn’t find the shoe.”

The woman told her to take her out to the courtyard and make her kneel down there.

Ch’iu-chü started to cry, saying, “Let me go make another search of the garden. If I fail to find it this time, Mother can beat me if she likes.”

“Don’t you believe her,” said Ch’un-mei. “The garden grounds have been swept as clean as can be. Even a needle could have been found there. What chance is there of turning up a shoe?”

“Wait till I fail to find it,” said Ch’iu-chü, “and then let mother beat me. Why do you have to keep on wagging your tongue on the sidelines?”

“All right,” the woman said to Ch’un-mei. “You go along with this slave and see where she goes to look for it.”

Ch’un-mei once again escorted her on a round of the garden, including the “snow caves” underneath the artificial hill, the flower beds, and the juniper hedge, but it was not to be found. Ch’iu-chü began to panic, and Ch’un-mei gave her a couple of boxes on the ear and started to drag her back to confront her mistress.

“There’s still that other ‘snow cave’ where we haven’t looked yet,” said Ch’iu-chü.

“You mean the Hidden Spring Grotto?” said Ch’un-mei. “That’s Father’s hideaway. And besides, Mother hasn’t been in there for some time now. I’ll watch while you take a look, but if you don’t come up with anything I’ll have something further to say to you.”

Thereupon, she escorted her into the whitewashed “snow cave” of the Hidden Spring Grotto. There was a couch facing the door with an incense table beside it, but Ch’iu-chü found nothing there and began to rummage in Hsi-men Ch’ing’s letter case.

“That letter case is where Father keeps his calling cards and stationery,” said Ch’un-mei. “How would Mother’s shoe get in there? You’re just up to your tricks, playing for time. If you muss everything up that way and he ever finds out about it, there’ll be another ruckus for sure. You splay-legged whore, you’re just asking for it.”

After some time, lo and behold, Ch’iu-chü exclaimed, “Isn’t this Mother’s shoe? It’s wrapped up in a paper bag together with some sticks of incense and lysimachia.”

She took it out and showed it to Ch’un-mei, saying, “How is it that I’ve come up with Mother’s shoe after all? And just now you were inciting her to beat me.”

Ch’un-mei looked at it and, sure enough, it was a scarlet flat-soled shoe.

“If it really is Mother’s,” she said, “how did it ever get into this letter case? It’s very strange indeed.”

Thereupon, they went back to see their mistress.

“So you have my shoe, do you?” the woman asked. “Where did it turn out to be?”

“It was in a letter case in Father’s hideaway in the Hidden Spring Grotto,” said Ch’un-mei, “that we found it. It was in with his calling cards and stationery, wrapped up together with some lysimachia and benzoin.”

The woman took it in her hand and then picked up her other shoe to compare with it. They were both embroidered shoes of scarlet silk, figured with flowers from each of the four seasons and the symbolic representations of the “eight treasures,” with flat, white satin soles, green heel lifts, and blue hook and eye fastenings. Only the chain stitching of the two shoes was slightly different. One was chain stitched with sand-green thread, and the other with turquoise-blue thread. Without careful scrutiny they could not have been told apart.

The woman tried them on her feet to test the fit and found that the newly discovered shoe was slightly tighter than the old one. Only then did she realize that it must have belonged to Lai-wang’s wife, Sung Hui-lien.

“Who knows when,” she thought to herself, “she must have given it to that lousy ruffian of ours. He didn’t have the

nerve to bring it into the house so he surreptitiously hid it there. How could he have anticipated that it would be turned up by this slave?"

After looking at it for a while, she said, "This is not my shoe. You slave, you'd better get out there right away and kneel down as you've been told."

Turning to Ch'un-mei, she said, "Find a stone and make her balance it on her head."

Ch'iu-chü started to cry, saying, "If it isn't Mother's shoe, whose shoe is it? Even though I found the shoe for you, you still intend to beat me. If I'd been unable to find it, who knows what a beating I would have had."

"Hold your tongue, you lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her.

Ch'un-mei accordingly lifted up a large stone and balanced it on top of Ch'iu-chü's head.

The woman then changed into another pair of shoes and, feeling that the room was too hot, told Ch'un-mei to take her dressing mirror up to the Flower-viewing Tower so she could do her hair there. After doing her hair she intended to give Ch'iu-chü a beating. But no more of this.

To resume our story, that morning Ch'en Ching-chi had come in from the pawnshop to look for some clothing. When he got to the postern gate leading into the flower garden he encountered Little Iron Rod, who was playing there.

Seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi was carrying a pair of silver hairnet rings in his hand, the youngster asked, "Uncle, what's that you've got there? Let me have them to play with."

"This is a pair of hairnet rings that somebody pawned," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "They've come to redeem them, and I'm taking them out to return to them."

"Uncle," said the little monkey with an ingratiating smile, "Let me have them to play with. I'll give you something nice in exchange."

"A fine child you are!" said Ch'en Ching-chi. "These are things that somebody pawned. If you want, I'll find another pair for you to play with. What sort of nice thing have you got? Let me see it."

The monkey then reached inside his waistband, pulled out a scarlet embroidered shoe, and showed it to Ching-chi.

"Where'd it come from?" asked Ching-chi.

"Uncle," the monkey said with an ingratiating smile, "I'll tell you all about it. Yesterday I was playing in the garden and saw that Father had suspended the Fifth Lady's two feet from the grape arbor overhead and they were having quite a stormy time of it. Later, after Father had gone inside, I pestered Auntie Ch'un-mei for some fruit to eat and picked up this shoe under the grape arbor."

Ching-chi took it in his hand and saw that it was:

As curved as the new moon at heaven's edge,

As red as the fallen petal of a lotus blossom.

When he cradled it in his palm, it was:

Barely three inches long,

and he knew that it must be an object that had graced Chin-lien's foot.

"Give it to me," he said, "and tomorrow I'll find another pair of nice rings for you to play with."

"No fooling, Uncle," the monkey said. "Tomorrow I'll come and demand them of you."

"I'm not fooling you," said Ching-chi.

At this the monkey laughed and went off to play.

Ch'en Ching-chi tucked the shoe into his sleeve and thought to himself, "I've flirted with her more than once, and she always sounds ready enough; but when it comes to the point, she's proven elusive. Who would have thought that:

As providence would have it,

this shoe should have fallen into my hands. Today I'll give her cinders a real stirring. Never fear, she's bound to come around."

Truly:

There is no need for the people of today to

practice threading needles;

How could the Weaving Maid have the leisure

to confer such dexterity?¹⁷

Ch'en Ching-chi, with the shoe in his sleeve, headed straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters. When he had made his way around the spirit screen, what should he see but Ch'iu-chü kneeling in the courtyard.

"Young lady," he joked, "what have you done this time? It looks as though you've joined the New Army and have to spend your time lifting stones."

Chin-lien overheard this sally from her vantage point on the second floor and called to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Who is it who says she's lifting stones? I wouldn't be surprised if the slave's taken the stone off her head."

"It's your son-in-law," said Ch'un-mei. "Ch'iu-chü has still got the stone on her head."

"If it's you, Son-in-law," the woman called out, "there's no one else up here. Why don't you come upstairs."

The young scamp:

Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes,

raced up the stairs. What should he see but the woman, sitting on the second floor, with two windows open in front of her, over which bamboo blinds had been let down, gazing into her dressing mirror and doing her hair. Ch'en Ching-chi

went right up beside her and sat down on a low stool.

He looked on as the woman combed lock after lock of her glossy black hair, which reached all the way to the floor. Then she bound it with a red silk ribbon and did it up in a "bag of silk" chignon, over which she placed a fret of silver filigree in such a way as to set off a coil of fragrant hair. She had placed a quantity of rose petals inside her fret, and two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple. In fact she was so made up as to look like an avatar of the Goddess Kuan-yin.

In a little while, as he watched the woman complete her toilet, she put away her dressing mirror, rinsed her hands in a washbasin, put on her outer clothes, and called to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Bring our son-in-law a cup of tea."

While this was going on, Ching-chi merely smiled, without saying a word.

"What are you smiling for?" the woman finally asked.

"I'm smiling," said Ching-chi, "because I know that you've lost something."

"You lousy short-life!" the woman said. "If I've lost anything, what's it to you? And what do you know about it, anyway?"

"You see," said Ching-chi:

"Even my best intentions are treated like the
entrails of an ass.

You'd rather mock me, would you? Well, if that's the way it is, I might as well go."

So saying, he got up and started down the stairs.

The woman grabbed hold of him with her hand, saying, "You crazy short-life! You can put on quite an act, can't you? Now that Lai-wang's wife is dead, you've no one to think about, and so you've contrived to remember your old mother."

"Go ahead and guess," she went on to say. "What is it that I've lost, do you think?"

Ching-chi pulled the shoe out of his sleeve and dangled it by its heel lift, saying with a laugh, "Look at this. Who does this goody belong to?"

"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said. "So it was you who made off with my shoe, causing me to beat my maidservant and search all over the place."

"Make a guess," said Ching-chi. "How do you suppose it came into my hands?"



Ch'en Ching-chi Teases Chin-lien about a Shoe

"Who else ever comes into my place?" the woman said. "You must have sneaked in here:
Like a furtive thieving rat,¹⁸
and made off with this shoe of mine."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Ching-chi. "Since when have I been in your place the last couple of days? How could I have stolen anything of yours?"

"A fine, lousy short-life you are!" the woman said. "Just wait till I tell Father about it. First you steal my shoe, and then tell me I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"All you ever seem able to do," said Ching-chi, "is try to use Father to scare me."

"You've got quite a nerve, don't you?" the woman said. "You knew perfectly well that Father was:

Playing at sevens and eights,¹⁹
with Lai-wang's wife, but you flirted with her anyway. As though that whore would share her favors with the likes of

you! If it wasn't you who stole my shoe, how did it fall into your hands? The sooner you confess the truth and return my shoe, the better for you. It has always been true that:

When an object meets its owner,
It is sure to be repossessed.²⁰

If you dare utter so much as:

Half the word 'no,'²¹

I'll see to it that:

You'll die without a plot to be buried in."

"You're just like a plainclothes officer:

You've got a real knack for knavery,"²²

said Ching-chi. "There's no one else here, so we can talk freely. If you want this shoe, you'll have to give me something in exchange for it. Otherwise, you couldn't beat it out of me with a steelyard."

"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said. "It's my shoe, and you ought to return it to me. What do you want in exchange for it, anyway?"

"Fifth Lady," said Ching-chi with a laugh, "if you give your son that handkerchief in your sleeve, your son will return your shoe to you."

"I'll find you another nice handkerchief tomorrow," the woman said. "Your father has seen this one often enough to recognize it, so it wouldn't do to give it to you."

"I don't want another one," said Ching-chi. "Even if you gave me a hundred, it wouldn't make any difference. My heart is set on this particular handkerchief."

"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said.

"You're such a practiced old hand,

I don't have the strength to contend with you any longer."

Thereupon, she reached into her sleeve and pulled out a fine, tasseled, white satin handkerchief, decorated with a drawnwork motif of:

Ts'ui Ying-ying Burning Evening Incense,²³

which also had a silver chatelaine with three pendant charms attached to it, and tossed it over to him. Ching-chi deftly caught it in his hands and made her a deep bow.

"You'd better keep it well hidden," the woman instructed him. "Don't let your wife see it. She's got a nasty tongue in her head."

"I understand," Ching-chi said, handing her the shoe, and then proceeded, thus and so, to give a full account of how "Little Iron Rod picked it up in the garden yesterday and this morning offered to exchange it for a pair of hairnet rings for him to play with."

When the woman heard this:

Her powdered face became suffused with red, as she
Silently gnashed her silvery teeth.

"Look at this," she said. "That lousy little slave with his greasy hands has smudged my shoe till it's as black as lacquer. Just see if I don't get Father to give him a thrashing."

"You'll do me in yet," protested Ching-chi. "I don't care if he gets a beating as long as I'm not implicated. Whatever you do, don't say that I told you about it."

"As for sparing that little slave," the woman said, "I'd sooner spare a scorpion."

Just as they were in the midst of their conversation, they suddenly heard that the page boy, Lai-an, had come looking for Ch'en Ching-chi.

"Father's in the front reception hall," he reported, "and wants Uncle to go write some gift cards for him."

The woman hurriedly sent him on his way.

After coming downstairs, she told Ch'un-mei to fetch a bamboo cane so she could beat Ch'iu-chü.

Ch'iu-chü protested and refused to lie down, saying, "I found Mother's shoe, and now Mother still wants to beat me."

The woman showed her the shoe that Ch'en Ching-chi had just given her and cursed her, saying, "You lousy slave! You tried to pass off that other shoe as mine, but where did you put this one?"

When Ch'iu-chü saw it, she stared at it for some time but refused to acknowledge her mistake, saying, "What a strange business! How could Mother turn out to have three shoes?"

"You impudent slave!" the woman said. "First you try to palm somebody else's shoe off on me, and now you suggest that I'm a three-legged toad!"²⁴ How do you account for this shoe then?"

Without permitting any further explanation, she ordered Ch'un-mei to bend her over and proceeded to give her ten cuts with the cane.

Weeping and trying to protect her bottom with her hands, Ch'iu-chü turned to Ch'un-mei and said, "It was all your doing. When you opened the garden gate yesterday, you must have let someone in who picked up Mother's shoe. And now you're inciting Mother to beat me."

"It was you who brought in Mother's bedding and lost her shoe," Ch'un-mei cursed at her. "Mother has only given you these few strokes with the cane, and you have the nerve to try to blame someone else. It's a good thing it was only this

old shoe. No doubt if it had been Mother's hairpin or earring that was lost, you'd be even more anxious to find a scapegoat. Mother has been lenient in letting you off so lightly. If it were up to me, I'd call in one of the page boys from outside and get him to give you twenty or thirty sharp cuts with the cane and see how you liked that."

This tirade reduced Ch'iu-chü to silence. There was nothing she could do but:

Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had summoned Ch'en Ching-chi to the front reception hall in order to take charge of sealing up a bolt of material and other gifts to be sent to Battalion Commander Ho Chin from the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, who had recently been promoted to the post of principal judicial officer in the Huai-an office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. His friends and relatives from the local Guard Battalion were all going to give him a farewell party at the Yung-fu Ssu, or Temple of Eternal Felicity. But no more of this.

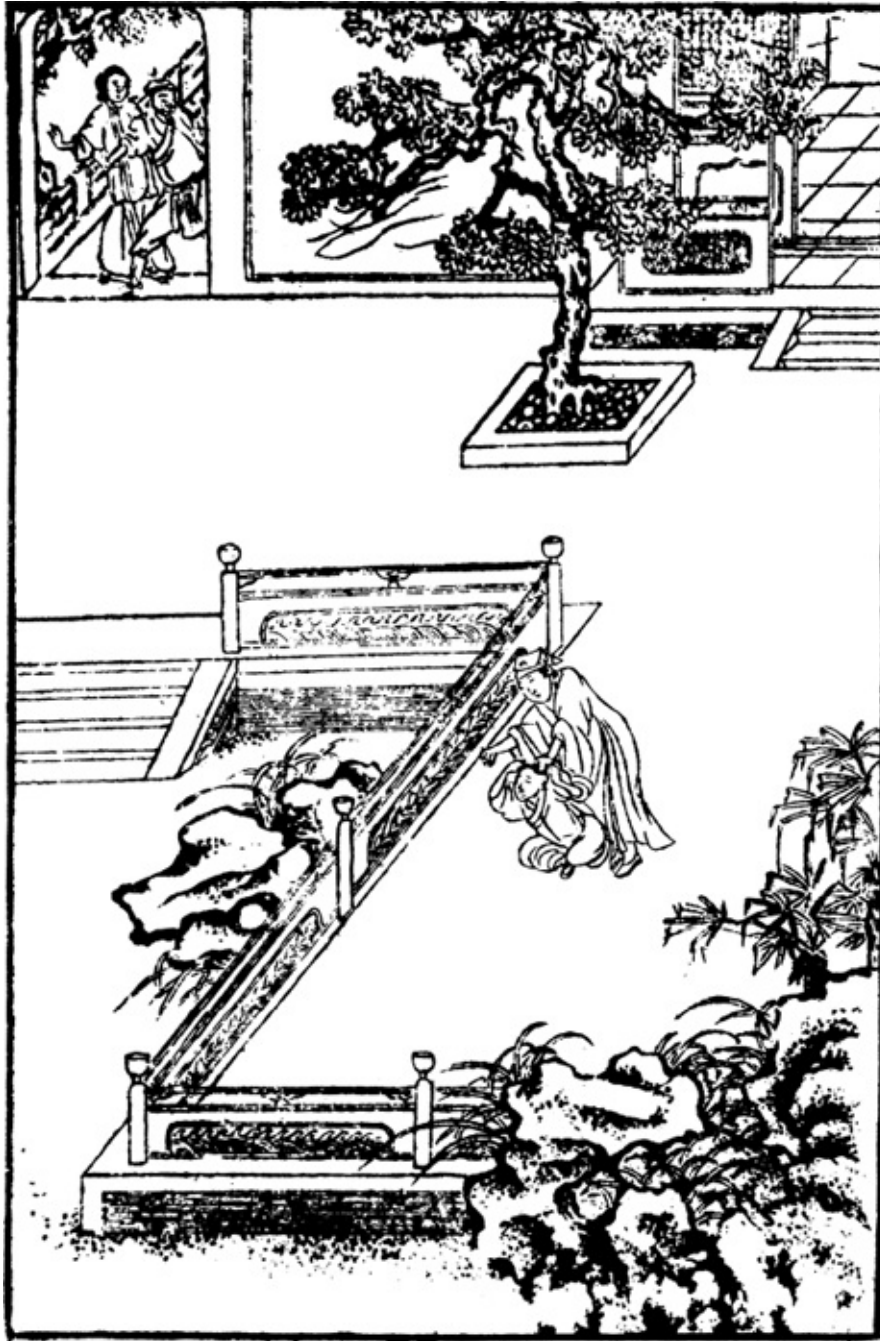
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent off Tai-an to deliver the gifts, he joined Ch'en Ching-chi in having something to eat in the reception hall and then went back to Chin-lien's quarters. Chin-lien, though she:

Never, ever, should have done it,

told him the whole story of how Little Iron Rod had picked up her shoe.

"You ill-bred good-for-nothing!" she railed at him. "It was your pointless shenanigans that led to that lousy death-defying little slave's being able to pick up my shoe in the first place. If he took it outside the compound, who knows who might have seen it. As soon as I found out about it, I managed to get it back from him. If you don't give him a couple of licks he'll soon be incorrigible."

Hsi-men Ch'ing didn't bother to ask how she had found out about it but made off in a fit of rage for the front of the compound. The little monkey, who was quite oblivious to the situation, was playing on the stone stylobate around the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing grabbed hold of him by the tuft of hair on the crown of his head and assaulted him with both fists and feet. Not until he:



Hsi-men Ch'ing Angrily Beats Little Iron Rod

Howled like a stuck pig,
did he desist.

The little monkey was left lying unconscious on the ground and remained so for quite a while until Lai-chao and his wife showed up in consternation and succeeded, after some time, in reviving him. They saw that the youngster's nose was bleeding and had to carry him back to their room. Only after prolonged interrogation did they ascertain that it was all because he had picked up Chin-lien's shoe and exchanged it for a pair of hairnet rings from Ch'en Ching-chi that the trouble had started.

Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," fuming with rage, went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and:

Pointing to the east while cursing the west,²⁵
gave vent to an indiscriminate tirade, saying, "You'll come to a bad end, you lousy whore and you cuckold's spawn! What have you got against my son? He's only twelve or thirteen years old. What does he know about anything? He doesn't

even know where your cunt is located. But you go out of your way to incite your man into giving him a thrashing for no good reason, and beat him until his nose bleeds. Suppose you had killed him. It would have gone the worse for you, you whore and you cuckold. And what purpose of yours would that have served?"

Thereupon, having given vent to her tirade in the kitchen, she went up to the front of the compound and gave a repeat performance, continuing along the same lines for a whole day or two without stopping. Because Chin-lien was in her quarters drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she still knew nothing about it.

That evening, when they went to bed for the night, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that the woman had on a pair of sand-green pongee sleeping shoes with scarlet heel lifts and said, "Ai-ya! What are you wearing those things on your feet for? They look weird and don't become you."

"I only have one pair of red sleeping shoes," the woman said, "and that little slave picked up one of them and soiled it for me. Where would I get a second pair?"

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "make a new pair tomorrow and wear them on your feet. You don't know how much your daddy prefers the sight of you in red shoes. It excites me just to see them."

"You crazy slave!" the woman said. "So that's the way it is? But that reminds me of something I meant to bring up and then forgot."

So saying, she ordered Ch'un-mei, "Bring that other shoe here and let him see it. Do you recognize whose shoe this is?"

"I don't know whose shoe it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Just look at him!" the woman exclaimed. "Still playing the innocent!"

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail.

Those are fine tricks you've been up to behind my back. You took this shoe off the stinking hoof of Lai-wang's dead wife, treasured it like the pearl on a piece of jewelry, and secreted it in your "snow cave" in the Hidden Spring Grotto, under the artificial hill in the garden, carefully tucked away with the stationery in your card case, wrapped up together with sticks of incense. As though it were some exotic rarity! It's really outrageous. No wonder that lousy whore went straight to the Avici Hell²⁶ when she died."

Pointing to Ch'iu-chü, she continued her tirade, saying, "That slave turned it up, thinking it was my shoe, and I had to give her a beating."

Then, turning to Ch'un-mei, she instructed her, "Throw it out of here, this minute."

Ch'un-mei tossed the shoe onto the floor and said to Ch'iu-chü, "Here's something you can wear if you want it."

Ch'iu-chü took it up in her hand, saying, "This shoe of Mother's is so small I'd be lucky if I could get a toe into it."

"You lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her. "Whose cunt of a mother are you talking about? She must have been your master's mother in an earlier incarnation. Otherwise, why should he treasure her shoe in such a way, as though it were a family heirloom to be passed on from generation to generation? The shameless good-for-nothing!"

Ch'iu-chü picked up the shoe and started out of the room, but the woman called her back, saying, "Fetch me a knife so I can chop that whore into pieces and throw them into the privy. I'll fix it so that lousy whore ends up:

On the far side of the mountains of Hell;

Never again to be reborn in human form."²⁷

Then she turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "The more it hurts you to see this, the more thoroughly I'll cut it up, just to show you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "You crazy slave! Why don't you call it quits? What do I care about it?"

"If you don't care," said the woman, "swear an oath on it. As for that whore:

Nobody knows where the dead end up going to."²⁸

So what are you still keeping her shoe around for? It must be that whenever you think of her, early or late, you want some memento to remind you of her. Meanwhile, for those of us who are properly married to you, you haven't a thought to spare. How can you expect anyone to be:

Of one heart and one mind,
with you under the circumstances?"

"That's enough, you crazy little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're always up to your tricks. When she was alive she never failed to perform what duty demanded of her where you were concerned."

Thereupon, putting an arm around her powdered neck, he gave her a kiss, and the two of them proceeded to engage in the game of clouds and rain together. Truly:

The spring beauty arouses the beholder,
complaisantly alluring;

The fragrant corolla attracts the butterfly,
in redolent surrender."²⁹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Vainly expressing her fragrant heart, to whom
is she to speak;

Where can she hope to find a fit repository
for her longings?

Though her longings may come to an end,

her passion is unending;
Every day it returns to affect her during
all twenty-four hours.³⁰

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 29

IMMORTAL WU PHYSIOGNOMIZES THE EXALTED AND THE HUMBLE; P'AN CHIN-LIEN ENJOYS A MIDDAY BATTLE IN THE BATHTUB

One has but a hundred years of autumn moons
and spring flowers;
So one might as well relax one's frowning brows
rather than repine.
Recite a few verses in order to dissipate
the worries of the world;
Pour a couple of cups of wine to while away
the fullness of youth.
When idle, play at board games in order to
amuse oneself;
When depressed, pluck the inlaid zither to
elevate your mood.
Of human affairs and the events of the times
take no heed;
Just make poetry and wine the preoccupations
of your life.¹

THE STORY GOES that the next morning P'an Chin-lien got up early and sent Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way. Remembering that she wanted to make a new pair of red shoes for herself, she took her sewing box into the garden with her and sat down on the stylobate of the Kingfisher Pavilion, where she began to sketch the design to be embroidered on the vamps of her new shoes. She sent Ch'un-mei to invite Li P'ing-erh to join her.

When Li P'ing-erh arrived, she asked, "What's that you're sketching, Sister?"

"I want to make a pair of shoes," said Chin-lien, "out of scarlet iridescent silk, with flat white satin soles, the toes of which will be embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach.'"

"I've got a square of scarlet variegated silk," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'll make a pair just like your's, except that I want high heels on mine."

Thereupon, she fetched her sewing box and the two of them sat down to work together.

When Chin-lien had finished sketching the pattern on one vamp, she set it aside, saying, "Sister Li, sketch the other one for me, will you? I'm going to the rear compound to fetch Sister Meng the Third. She told me yesterday that she was going to make a pair of shoes too."

She went straight to the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou was in her room, leaning on the bedrail, stitching away at a shoe that she held in her hand.

When Chin-lien came in the door, Yü-lou said, "You're up and about early today."

"I got up early," said Chin-lien, "and sent Father off to attend the farewell party for Battalion Commander Ho Chin outside the South Gate. I've arranged with Sister Li to do some needlework together in the garden while it's still cool in the morning. In a little while the sun will be too hot and we won't be able to continue. I've just finished sketching the design for one shoe and asked Sister Li to do the other one for me while I came straight over here to invite you to join us. The three of us can do our work together."

"What kind of shoe is that you're working on right now?" she went on to ask.

"It's that pair of jet silk shoes you saw me start on yesterday," Yü-lou replied.

"What a fine fellow you are," exclaimed Chin-lien. "You've managed to finish one of them already."

"I stitched that one yesterday," said Yü-lou, "and I've already done a good deal on this one."

Chin-lien asked to have a look at it and said, "What kind of decoration are you going to put on the toe?"

"I'm not to be compared with you youngsters," said Yü-lou, "with your flashy fashions. I'm too old for that. I'll have gold-spangled toes, with a motif of white mountains around them, stitched out with sand-green thread, white satin soles, and high heels. How does that sound?"

"All right," said Chin-lien. "Get your stuff together now. Let's go. Li P'ing-erh is waiting for us."

"Sit down," said Yü-lou, "and have some tea before we go."

"Let's not drink it here," said Chin-lien, "but take it with us and drink it there."

Yü-lou instructed Lan-hsiang to make the tea and deliver it to them in the garden. The two women then tucked the

shoe vamps into their sleeves and set out for the front compound, holding hands as they went.

Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in the veranda outside the master suite and asked, "Where are you going?"

"Sister Li sent me to fetch Meng the Third for her," said Chin-lien, "to help her sketch the design for a pair of shoes."

So saying, they went straight out to the garden where the three of them sat down together, pulled out their vamps, looked over each other's handiwork, and proceeded to compare notes. Before this, Ch'un-mei had already served them with tea; later on, tea was provided from Li P'ing-erh's quarters; and, finally, Lan-hsiang arrived with more tea from Meng Yü-lou's place, and the three of them drank it together.

"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "what are you making flat-soled red shoes for? They don't look as nice as high-heeled shoes. If you're worried that wooden heels are too noisy, you can put felt on them, as I do, and they won't make a noise when you walk."

"They aren't for everyday wear," said Chin-lien. "They're sleeping shoes. It's all because I couldn't find one of my sleeping shoes, which turned out to have been stolen by that little slave, who soiled it into the bargain, that Father told me to make a new pair of shoes."

"Speaking of shoes," said Yü-lou, "and:

This is not just talebearing,²
mind you, Sister Li is here to bear me witness; yesterday, all on account of this missing shoe of yours, which got picked up in the garden somehow or other by Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, and which you mentioned to Father when you found out about it, he gave Little Iron Rod a thrashing. They say Father beat the monkey until his nose bled and left him lying on the ground unconscious for quite a while. This upset The Beanpole' so much that she indulged in an indiscriminate tirade in the rear compound, saying, That whore and that cuckold's spawn incited him into beating my son. That son of mine, who's still such a child he scarcely knows how to piss, what does he know about anything, that she should egg her man into giving him such a beating? It's a good thing he's still alive. If he'd been dead, that whore and that cuckold's spawn would never get away with it.' I didn't know at the time whom she was cursing as a whore and a cuckold's spawn. It was only later on, when Little Iron Rod came into the rear compound and Elder Sister asked him, 'Why did Father beat you?', that the youngster said, 'While playing in the garden I picked up a shoe and asked Uncle if I could exchange it for a pair of hairnet rings. I don't know who it was who told Father about it and got him to give me a beating. I'm looking for Uncle right now so I can ask him for those rings.' Having said which, he ran right out front again. So it turned out to be Ch'en Ching-chi that she was cursing as a cuckold's spawn. Luckily, the only person sitting there at the time was Li Chiao-erh. Hsi-men Ta-chieh didn't happen to be there. If she had heard it all, there would have been another ruckus, for sure."

"Did Elder Sister have anything to say about it?" asked Chin-lien.

"You might well ask," said Yü-lou. "Elder Sister had quite a lot to say about you. She said, 'Right now in this household:

Chaos is king.

The nine-tailed fox fairy has appeared in the world,
and has got that benighted ruler so befuddled he'll be:

Banishing his son and divorcing his wife,

before you know it. Just remember what she did to that servant, Lai-wang, who's no longer with us. He'd only just gotten back, as nice as you please, from a trip to the south, when she started telling:

First a tale to the east,

And then one to the west,

about how his wife was carrying on with his master, how he was playing the thief all day long:

Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,³

while she was busy committing adultery. She managed to frame him so effectively he was driven out of the household, whereupon she turned her attention to his wife and made her life so unbearable she committed suicide. And now, all on account of a single shoe, she's stirred up enough of a rumpus to:

Startle Heaven and shake the earth.

If it was your shoe, why didn't you keep it on your foot where it belonged? How did it get anywhere where that youngster could pick it up, in the first place? I'll bet it was only because she got drunk out in the garden and was up to something with that man of ours, contriving to be:

As stuck on one another as sugar candy,

that she lost track of her shoe. And now, unable to cover her own embarrassment, she's made a scapegoat of that youngster and he's ended up getting a drubbing. And it's not even over anything important!"

When Chin-lien heard this, she exclaimed, "She should stop talking through her cunt! If murder isn't something important, what is? That slave was out to kill his master with knife in hand!"

Then, turning to Yü-lou, she continued, "Luckily, Sister Three, you're not to be deceived about that. The two of us both heard what Lai-hsing had to say and were scared as could be. And as for you, Elder Sister, you're his primary wife, and yet you dismiss it like that.

'If you won't do anything about it,

I won't do anything about it.'

She wouldn't have seen fit to do anything about it until that slave had murdered our husband. Meanwhile, the slave's

wife was on duty in that rear compound of yours all day long, and you let her do as she pleased, without taking her to task; allowing her to:

Deceive her superiors and oppress her inferiors,⁴
picking fights with first this one and then that one. After all:

For every injustice there is a perpetrator;
For every debt there is a creditor.
If you can make accusations against me,
I can make accusations against you.

And when she hanged herself, you still didn't tell our husband the whole story. Luckily for you, by spending money and pulling strings the affair was successfully hushed up. Otherwise there never would have been an end to it. And you pretend to be so pure and:

Put such a good face on things.
After all:

What's so is so.⁵

If I put our husband up to it, so be it. As for that pair of slaves, husband and wife, if I hadn't been able to get them:

Driven away from this door for good,
with the aid of a stick, what good would I be? No matter what happens:

No one is going to force me down a well."

When Yü-lou saw how angry Chin-lien had become, as:
Her powdered face became suffused with red,
she admonished her, saying, "Sister Six, you and I are sisters. It's just as though we were the same person. When I hear something, how could I fail to tell you about it? But now that I've told you, you must keep it to yourself. Don't let it get about."

Chin-lien did not do as she was bid. That evening she waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room and then gave him a word for word account of what she had heard.

"Lai-chao's wife, 'The Beanpole,' has been cursing at us in the rear compound," she reported, "saying that you gave her child a beating, and threatening to make trouble for us."

Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard this, but having heard it, he made a point of remembering it.

The next day he was going to expel Lai-chao and his family, all three of them, from the household. It was only owing to the repeated remonstrances of Yüeh-niang that he relented. But he would not permit them to reside any longer in the compound and packed them off to look after the house on Lion Street, relieving P'ing-an, who returned home to take charge of the main gate. Afterwards, when Yüeh-niang found out who was responsible, she was very angry with Chin-lien. But enough of this. Truly:

If you don't think thrice before doing something,
you will later regret it;⁶
When people have occasion for self-satisfaction,
it is time to repent.⁷

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the front reception hall and presided over the departure of Lai-chao and his family, all three of them, to look after the house on Lion Street.

One day he happened to be sitting in the front reception hall when P'ing-an, who was now in charge of the front gate, came in and reported, saying, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the commandant's headquarters has sent around a physiognomist, called Immortal Wu, who is waiting at the gate to see you."

"Send in the man who brought him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing; and after the latter person had presented the commandant's card, he said, "Invite him to come in."

Before long, Immortal Wu floated ethereally in from the outside.

On his head he affected a black cotton Taoist cap,
On his body he wore a cotton robe and black sandals,
At his waist hung a yellow silk sash with two tassels,
In his hand he held a tortoiseshell-patterned fan.⁸

He appeared to be something over forty years of age.

His spirit was as pure as the hoary moon
over the Yangtze River;
His visage was as ancient as a tall pine
on the summit of Mount Hua.⁹
His demeanor was awe-inspiring,
His Taoist aura was imposing.¹⁰

It so happens that immortals are possessed of four unusual attributes:

Their bodies are like pines,
Their voices are like bells,
Their repose is like a bow,

Their movement like the wind.¹¹

Behold:

Master of the discriminating mirror of physiognomy,

Adept at interpreting the rules of Hsü Tzu-p'ing;¹²

By examining celestial phenomena he understands
the yin and yang,

By perusing the *Dragon Canon* he can assess
geomantic conditions.¹³

Profoundly conversant with the Five Planetary Features,¹⁴

Deliberating to himself upon the Three Fates;¹⁵

By scrutinizing the astrological circumstances,

He can determine the success or failure of a lifetime;

By observing the humor and the complexion,

He can decide the good or evil of one's allotted years.

If he is not Ch'en T'uan, the realized adept who
sojourned on Mount Hua,¹⁶

He must be Yen Chün-p'ing, who sold fortunes
in the market of Ch'eng-tu.¹⁷

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Immortal Wu come in, he hastened down the steps to welcome him and escorted him into the reception hall. On meeting Hsi-men Ch'ing, Immortal Wu performed a low bow, saluted him in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, and sat down.

A little later, after tea had been served, Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed his guest, saying, "I venture to inquire of Your Reverence:

What are your lofty name and elegant style,

What immortal realm do you hail from,¹⁸

and how do you come to be acquainted with His Excellency Chou Hsiu?"

Immortal Wu inclined his body slightly where he sat and replied, "My surname is Wu, my given name is Shih,¹⁹ and my Taoist appellation is Shou-chen. I am a native of Hsien-yu district in Chekiang province. In my youth I took instruction from a master and was ordained as a priest in the Purple Void Temple of Mount T'ien-t'ai. In the course of my peregrinations in the capital region I decided to seek the Way at Mount T'ai, which brought me into your distinguished vicinity. Commandant Chou asked me to treat his wife, who is suffering from an eye ailment, and has made a point of sending me to your honorable abode to proffer my services as a physiognomist."

"What schools of yin-yang do you practice, Reverend Sir," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and what varieties of physiognomy do you profess?"

"I am roughly familiar with all thirteen schools²⁰ of Hsü Tzu-p'ing's method," replied Immortal Wu. "I am thoroughly conversant with the *Ma-i hsiang-fa* (The physiognomic technique of the Hemp-robed Master),²¹ and equally so with the divine oracles generated by the six recurrences of the *jen* stem in the sexagenary cycle.²² I constantly distribute medicine in order to cure people. Having no love of mundane wealth, I conform to the times and take the world as I find it."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he respected him all the more and praised him by saying, "Truly, you live up to the definition of an immortal."

Then he ordered his attendants to set out a table and provide vegetarian fare for Immortal Wu's entertainment.

"Commandant Chou sent me over here," said Immortal Wu, "and before I have had a chance to examine your physiognomy or read your horoscope, you offer me a vegetarian repast."

"You have come from a distance, Your Reverence," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile, "and must not have had breakfast. It won't be too late for you to tell my fortune after having something to eat."

Thereupon, he joined Immortal Wu in a vegetarian repast. After the plates had been removed, the table was wiped clean, and a brush and inkstone were procured.

"May I begin by having a look at your horoscope?" said Immortal Wu. "After that I will physiognomize your respected countenance."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him the eight characters determined by the celestial stems and terrestrial branches for the year, month, day, and hour of his birth, saying, "I was born in the year of the tiger and am twenty-eight years old. My birth took place in the seventh month, on the twenty-eighth day, during the *tzu* hour that falls around midnight.

Immortal Wu silently:

Calculated on the joints of his fingers,²³

and, after some time, said, "Your horoscope, sir, indicates that you were born in a *ping-yin* year, during a *hsin-yu* month, on a *jen-wu* day, during the *ping-tzu* time period.²⁴ In that year the solar term 'White Dew' fell on the twenty-third day of the seventh month, so your horoscope begins in the eighth month of the year.

"For a person with this horoscope, the combination *hsin-yu* that designates the month of your birth corresponds to the horoscopic category 'injurer of the official.' Tzu-p'ing says of this situation:

When the 'injurer of the official' has done its injury
it serves to augment 'wealth';

When 'wealth' is 'flourishing' it begets 'the official'

bringing prosperity in its wake.²⁵

Your 'mansion of fate' corresponds to the branch *shen*. The symbol of your 'containing note' is 'earth on the city wall.'²⁶ The first of your 'decennial periods of fate'²⁷ began in your seventh year and was designated by the stem-branch combination *hsin-yu*, the second began in your seventeenth year and was designated by the combination *jen-hsi*, the third began in your twenty-seventh year and was designated by the combination *kuei-hai*, the fourth will begin in your thirty-seventh year and be designated by the combination *chia-tzu*, and the fifth will begin in your forty-seventh year and be designated by the combination *i-ch'ou*.

"As I interpret your horoscope, it indicates that:

You are destined to be distinguished and flourishing,
Your eight characters are splendid and remarkable,
If you do not achieve distinction you will gain glory.

However, your 'one-sided official'²⁸ is the element earth associated with the stem *wu*, and you were born in the seventh or eighth month, which means that your horoscopic 'body' is too 'flourishing.' Fortunately the stem *jen*²⁹ in the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth is associated with the element water and also consorts with the stem *kuei*, which is likewise associated with water.

When water and fire complement each other,³⁰
Thereby a mighty instrument may be forged.³¹

"You were born during the *ping-tzu* time period. When the stems *ping* and *hsin* occur in the same horoscope,³² it indicates that in the future you are sure to:

Hold a position of authority,
Enjoy lifelong prosperity,
Be both happy and secure,
Strike it rich, be promoted,
And beget a distinguished son.³³

You will be characterized by:

Upstanding firmness throughout your life, and
Single-mindedness in the conduct of your affairs.

When happy, you will exhibit:

The genial atmosphere of the spring breeze.³⁴

When aroused to anger, you will become like:

A clap of thunder or a raging conflagration.

In the course of your life you will gain much wealth through marriage alliances and will not fail to wear the silk hat of an official. On your deathbed there will be two sons to accompany you to your grave.³⁵

"This year of your horoscope is a *ting-wei*³⁶ year. The stems *ting* and *jen* are 'harmonious,'³⁷ but at present the element fire associated with the stem *ting* is in its 'destructive' phase. But this is compensated for by the fact that:

What 'destroys' the 'self is its 'official'
or 'devil,'³⁸

which in your case is the element earth that 'destroys' fire. This must portend the joy of:

An ascent to the clouds from the level ground,

and the glory of:

Appointment to office and augmented emolument.

Your present 'decennial period of fate' is designated by the stem-branch combination *kuei-hai*. The element earth associated with the stem *wu*, which is your 'one-sided official,' will be moistened by the element water associated with the stem *kuei*, which is sure to stimulate growth. In the near future you can be expected to benefit from the auspicious star and the horoscopic conjunction known as:

The Red Phoenix and Celestial Joy,³⁹ and
The portent of the 'black bears and brown,'⁴⁰

indicating the birth of a son. Moreover, since both your 'mansion of fate' and your 'post-horse'⁴¹ correspond to the branch *shen*, this event will occur before the end of the seventh month."

In the end what is my 'fatal limit' to be?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Will I suffer any calamities or not?"

"Sir," said Immortal Wu, "don't take offense at what I say, but it is unpropitious to have an excess of the *yin* element water in one's horoscope. Later, during the 'decennial period of your fate' designated by the combination *chia-tzu*, you may maintain your ascendancy over women, who represent the *yin* element, but will find yourself inconvenienced by the 'star of effluence,' and the adverse influence of the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth. The indications are that before your thirty-sixth year you will suffer from:

The calamity of spitting blood, and discharging pus, and
The affliction of desiccated bones and emaciated frame."

"What about my situation at the present time?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"In this year of your horoscope," said Immortal Wu, "the only problem is that the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth is adversely affected. The 'five devils' will make mischief in your household and may cause you some grief, but not enough to constitute a calamity. All these troubles will be dissipated by the visitation of the gods of

felicity.”

“Are there any further setbacks in my fortune?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“Years follow in the wake of months,
Months follow in the wake of days,”

replied Immortal Wu. “It’s really hard to say.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing heard this he was utterly delighted.

“Sir,” he then went on to say, “how would it be if you were to physiognomize me?”

“Turn your respected countenance so that it faces straight ahead,” said Immortal Wu, “and I will take a look at it.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing adjusted his seat accordingly.

“It is a dictum in the art of physiognomy,” said Immortal Wu, “that:

Where mind exists without likeness,
Likeness will appear in accord with mind;
Where likeness exists without mind,
Likeness will disappear in accord with mind.⁴²

When I look you over, sir, the following principles apply:

One whose head is round and whose neck is short,
Is sure to be a person who enjoys good fortune.
One whose body is sturdy and whose muscles are strong,
Is certain to be an individual of heroic cast.
One whose forehead is high and prominent,⁴³
Will not lack clothing or emolument in his lifetime.⁴⁴
One whose chin is square-cut and full,
Will certainly acquire glory and honor in old age.⁴⁵

These are all among your good points, but there are also a few deficiencies, which I hesitate to mention.”

“Immortal sir,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “pray express yourself without constraint.”

“Be so good, sir,” said Immortal Wu, “as to take a couple of steps for my benefit.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing took a few steps, as requested.

Immortal Wu said, “It is true of you that:

If one’s gait is like a wind-tossed willow,⁴⁶
He is certainly fated to lose a wife.
If one’s canthi are marked by many lines,
He is destined to suffer enervation.⁴⁷
If one’s eyes do not weep, and yet
they fill with tears,
If one’s mind is untroubled, and yet
his eyebrows are knit,⁴⁸
If he fails to suffer grievous losses,
He will surely sacrifice his own life.

Only after you have gained the ascendancy over your ‘wifely mansion’ will you be all right.”

“I already have,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“Be so good as to let me have a look at your hand,” said Immortal Wu.

Hsi-men Ch’ing extended his hand so that he could examine it.

Immortal Wu said:

“Wisdom and intelligence are manifest in skin and hair,
Sorrow and joy can be observed in hands and feet.⁴⁹
If one’s hands are fine, soft, plump, and smooth,
He is sure to enjoy good fortune, ease, and emolument.⁵⁰
If one’s two eyes are of different dimensions,
He is destined to be wealthy but untrustworthy.⁵¹
If one’s eyebrows project at both ends,
He will always be self-satisfied and happy.⁵²
If the bridge of one’s nose is crossed by three lines,
His substance will surely be wasted or squandered.⁵³
If the skin adjacent to one’s canthi is red or purple,
He will gain much wealth through marriage alliances.
If a yellow aura emanates from one’s upper brow,
He is sure to become an official within ten days.⁵⁴
If a red color appears beneath one’s left eye,
This year he is sure to beget a distinguished son.⁵⁵

But there is yet another item, which I hesitate to mention.

If the flesh under one’s eyelids is full and thick,

It is a sure indication of a lustful disposition.⁵⁶
If the pubic hair around one's anus grows rank,
He will merit a reputation for lasciviousness.⁵⁷

But fortunately for you:

The nose, as the indicator of one's wealth,
Governs the fortune of one's middle years.⁵⁸
The hollow under the lower lip, and the chin,
Control the success or failure of one's old age.⁵⁹

The hollow under the lower lip, and the chin,
should be full and prominent;
The tip of the nose is the indicator of one's wealth
and occupies the middle place.
The vicissitudes of a lifetime
are all determined by fate;
The mysterious dictates of physiognomy
brook no exceptions."

When Immortal Wu had finished his analysis, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Would you be so kind, immortal sir, as to physiognomize my wife and concubines?"

Having said which, he directed a page boy, "Go to the rear compound and ask the First Lady to come out."

Thereupon Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and company all followed the First Lady out to the front reception hall and eavesdropped on the proceedings from behind a hanging screen.

When Immortal Wu saw Yüeh-niang come out, he saluted her in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead. Not presuming to sit down in her presence, he stood to one side in order to observe her.

"Be so kind, my lady, as to turn your respected countenance so that it faces straight ahead," he said.

Wu Yüeh-niang redirected her gaze until she was looking right outside the reception hall.

After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for a while, he said, "As for you, my lady:

If one's face is like the full moon,
Her household fortunes will prosper.
If one's lips are like red lotus blossoms,
Her supply of clothing and food will be ample.⁶⁰
If the features of one's face are evenly placed,
She is sure to gain distinction and bear a son.⁶¹
If the sound of one's voice is ethereal and clear,
She is sure to benefit her husband and gain wealth.⁶²

Be so good as to let me see your hand."

Yüeh-niang extended it from the mouth of her sleeve, exposing her ten slender fingers.

Immortal Wu said:

"If her hands are like dried ginger,
A woman will be good at housekeeping.⁶³
If the hair at her temples is glossy,
A female will have an aura of elegance.

These are all among your good points, but there are also a few deficiencies. Please don't take offense if I speak frankly."

"Immortal sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "pray express yourself without constraint."

Immortal Wu said:

"If one has black moles on the flesh under her eyelids,
She will suffer from lasting ills or do in her husband.
If one has wrinkled lines underneath her eyelids,
She will be incompatible with her six relations.⁶⁴

If a woman's deportment is sedate and proper,
and she has an attractive appearance,
And if she walks as inconspicuously
as a turtle emerging from the water,
If her movements do not disturb the dust,⁶⁵
and her words observe due measure,
And if her shoulders are barely perceptible,
she will marry a man of distinction."⁶⁶

When he had finished physiognomizing her, Yüeh-niang retired.

"There are also my concubines," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you would be so kind as to take a look at them."

Thereupon Li Chiao-erh stepped up.

After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for some time, he said, "As for this lady:

If her forehead is pointed and her nose small,⁶⁷

She will be a concubine or marry three husbands.

If her flesh is heavy and her body plump,⁶⁸

She will have ample food and clothing and live in luxury.

If her shoulders project and her voice is whiny,

She will either be menial or forsaken.

If the bridge of her nose should be too low,

She will either be poor or short-lived.⁶⁹

Be so good as to take a few steps for my benefit."

When Li Chiao-erh had taken a few steps, Immortal Wu said:

"If her forehead is pointed, her posterior sticks out,
and she moves like a snake,

In her early years she is sure to have fallen into
the world of wind and dust.⁷⁰

If it turns out that she does not become
the denizen of a brothel,

She is sure to be a concubine whose place it is
to stand behind the screen.⁷¹

When he had finished physiognomizing her, Li Chiao-erh withdrew.

"Third Sister Meng," Wu Yüeh-niang called out, "come over here and let him take a look at you."

After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, "As for this lady:

One whose 'three sections' are of equal dimensions,

Will not lack clothing or emolument in her lifetime.⁷²

One whose 'six treasures' are full and prominent,⁷³

Will certainly acquire glory and honor in old age.⁷⁴

She will suffer few ills in her lifetime,

All because her 'lunar comet' shines bright.

She will reach old age without mishap,

Since her 'palace of longevity' is sleek.⁷⁵

Be so good, young lady, as to take a couple of steps for my benefit."

When Meng Yü-lou had taken a few steps, Immortal Wu said:

"If her mouth is as square as the character 'four,'
and her spirit is clear,

She will be genial and generous, fit to be compared to
a pearl on the palm.⁷⁶

She will both command respect and know how to please,
being destined to wealth,

And will gain the ascendancy over her husbands,⁷⁷
two or more of them,"

When he had finished physiognomizing Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien was called for, but she merely giggled and refused to come out. Only after Yüeh-niang had urged her repeatedly did Chin-lien consent to present herself for inspection.

Immortal Wu raised his head to scrutinize the woman and then pondered to himself for some time before saying, "As for this lady:

If the hair by one's temples is thick and luxuriant,

She will cast sidelong glances and revel in wantonness.⁷⁸

If one's face is pleasing and one's eyebrows are arched,

Her body will quiver spontaneously without any impetus.

If there are black birthmarks on one's countenance,

She is sure to gain the ascendancy over her husband.

If one's philtrum is short and abrupt,⁷⁹

She is sure to suffer a premature death.⁸⁰

If her movements are light and frivolous,⁸¹

she will be given to wantonness,

If her eyes are like dots of lacquer,⁸²

she will destroy human relationships.

Under the moon, beneath the stars,

if she is never satisfied,
Though she should dwell in spacious structures,
she will find little peace.”⁸³

When Immortal Wu had finished physiognomizing Chin-lien, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Li P'ing-erh to come out and let him examine her.

After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, “As for this woman:

One whose skin is fragrant and smooth,
Will be the daughter of a well-to-do family.
One whose countenance is upright and correct,⁸⁴
Will be the virtuous matron of a prominent house.⁸⁵

The only problem is that:

If the glint in the eye suggests intoxication,
Assignations amid the mulberries are indicated.
If captivating dimples languidly appear,
Trysts beneath the moon are hard to rule out.⁸⁶
If the fold under one's eyelid is glossy and purple,
She is sure to give birth to a distinguished son.⁸⁷
If one's body is white and one's shoulders are rounded,
She is sure to enjoy the favor of her husband.
She will constantly suffer from illness and distress,
If the root of her nose is dingy and sunken.⁸⁸
She will frequently encounter auspicious omens,
If the flesh over her eyebrows is clear and glossy.⁸⁹

These are all among your good points, but there are also a few deficiencies, which you should be on your guard against.

If the root of one's nose is blue or black,
She will weep before or after her twenty-seventh year.
If the lines by one's nostrils are taut or contorted,
How can she survive the years of the cock or the dog?⁹⁰
Beware! Beware!⁹¹

With a flowerlike or moonlike countenance,⁹²
she is sparing of her pinions;
Throughout her lifetime her best friends are
the male and the female phoenix.
The wealth and emoluments of a noble household
are hers to depend on;
Do not make the mistake of regarding her as
merely an ordinary bird,”⁹³

When he had finished physiognomizing her, Li P'ing-erh withdrew. Yüeh-niang then ordered Sun Hsüeh-o to come out and let herself be inspected.

After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, “As for this lady:

If one's body is short and one's voice high,
If her forehead is pointed and her nose small,
though she may have:

Left the dark valley and mounted on high,⁹⁴
nevertheless, throughout her lifetime:
She will laugh sardonically without feeling, and
Her conduct will be devious and mean-spirited.⁹⁵

But she is also destined to suffer from the four deformities, which eventually:

Are sure to indicate a violent death.⁹⁶
The four deformities are as follows:
The lips are deformed in having no projection,
The ears are deformed in having no auricles,⁹⁷
The eyes are deformed in having no spirit, and
The nose is deformed in not being straight.⁹⁸

If one has a swallow's body and a wasp's waist,
she will be but a menial,
If one's eyes wander like flowing water,
without integrity or truth,⁹⁹
If one stands leaning idly against the doorjamb¹⁰⁰

as a general practice,
If neither maid nor concubine, she will fall into
the world of wind and dust.”¹⁰¹

When Sun Hsüeh-o had withdrawn, Yüeh-niang told Hsi-men Ta-chieh to come and be inspected.

Immortal Wu said, “As for this woman:

If the bridge of one’s nose is too sharp,
Her patrimony and her family will be destroyed.¹⁰²
If one’s voice is like a broken gong,¹⁰³
The substance of her house will be squandered.
If the skin on one’s face is too tight,
Though her philtrum be long, her life will be short.¹⁰⁴
If her gait is like the hopping of a sparrow,
She will dwell at home, but lack food and clothing.
Before completing her twenty-seventh year,
She should suffer a calamity.

If adverse bickering with her husband should be
her most potent propensity,
The food and clothing inherited from her parents
will barely sustain her.
If her appearance and her bearing evince inhibition,
success will elude her,
She will either fall victim to an untoward death
or the direst adversity.¹⁰⁵

When he had finished physiognomizing Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Ch’un-mei was also called out to undergo inspection. Immortal Wu opened his eyes wide and saw that Ch’un-mei was not more than seventeen years of age.

Wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a white drawnwork blouse, a peach red skirt, and a blue silk vest, replete with:

Compressed hands and bound feet,¹⁰⁶
she came out and bowed to him, saying, “Many felicitations.”

After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for some time, he said, “As for this young lady:

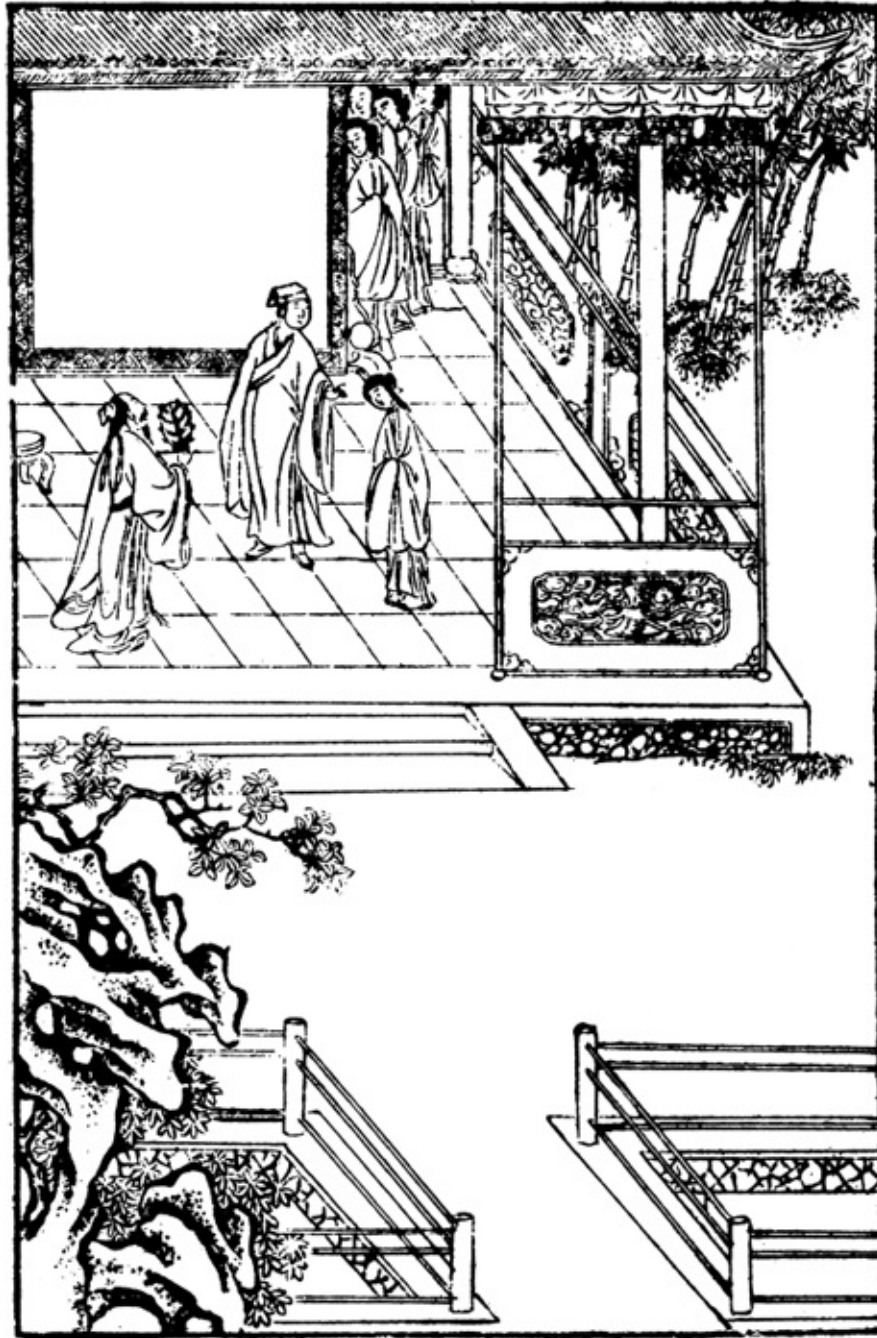
Her ‘five governing features’ are sedate and proper;¹⁰⁷
Her skeletal structure is splendid and remarkable.¹⁰⁸
If one’s hair is fine and one’s eyebrows thick,
Her nature will be demanding and strong.
If one’s spirit is quick and one’s eyes round,
Her character will be hot and bothered.¹⁰⁹
If the root of one’s nose is not discontinuous,
She is sure to have a distinguished husband
and give birth to a son.¹¹⁰
If one’s two brows pay court to each other,
It indicates that at an early age she will
wear a pearl-decked cap.
If one’s gait resembles an immortal in flight,
And the sound of one’s voice is ethereal and clear,
She is sure to benefit her husband and gain wealth,
Obtaining a title of nobility at twenty-six.

But she is disadvantaged because:

If the left eye is large,
She will lose her father at an early age.
If the right eye is small,
She will lose her mother within the year.¹¹¹
If one has a mole beneath the left corner of the mouth,
She will suffer constant trouble from backbiting.¹¹²
If one has a mole on the right cheek,
She will win her husband’s lifelong love and respect.

If one’s forehead is sedate and proper, and one’s
‘five features’ are well-matched,
If one’s mouth appears to be daubed with rouge,
and one’s gait is easy-going,

If one's 'treasuries' and 'storehouses' are full,¹¹³
one's wealth and emolument ample,
She can rely on obtaining the lifelong affection
of some distinguished person."¹¹⁴



Immortal Wu Physiognomizes the Exalted and the Humble

When Immortal Wu had finished physiognomizing them, the women all bit their fingers, acknowledging the supernatural efficacy of his art. Hsi-men Ch'ing had sealed up five taels of silver to give to Immortal Wu and also provided five mace of silver for the servant from Commandant Chou's headquarters, along with a note of thanks for his master.

Immortal Wu repeatedly refused to accept this remuneration, saying, "This humble Taoist:
Wanders like a cloud among the four quarters,"¹¹⁵

Dining in the wind and sleeping in the dew,¹¹⁶

Transforming and saving the myriad creatures.

It was no more than a momentary impulse that led Commandant Chou to send me over here. What would I want this money for?¹¹⁷

I absolutely refuse to accept it.¹¹⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing had no alternative but to bring out a bolt of muslin, saying, "Won't you accept this, Reverend Sir, to make a topcoat out of?"

Only then did Immortal Wu deign to accept it. Instructing his page boy to stow it in his scripture bag, he bowed in thanks to Hsi-men Ch'ing and saluted him in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead. Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him as far as the main gate, where he proceeded nonchalantly to:

Float ethereally upon his way.¹¹⁹

Truly:

At the two ends of his staff he bears
the sun and the moon,
Within his solitary gourd he conceals
mountains and rivers.¹²⁰

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished seeing off Immortal Wu, he returned to the rear reception hall and asked Yüeh-niang and the others what they thought of the fortunes that had been predicted for them.

"The fortunes were all fine enough," said Yüeh-niang, "but there are three people whose physiognomies he was unable to read aright."

"Which three people's physiognomies was he unable to read aright?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It was no great feat to suggest that Sister Li was expecting and would give birth to a distinguished son," said Yüeh-niang, "since it is obvious enough that she is pregnant right now. So much for that. In physiognomizing our own Ta-chieh, he said that in the future she would suffer a calamity, but he didn't specify what sort of a calamity it would be. In physiognomizing Ch'un-mei, he said that in the future she, too, would give birth to a distinguished son. No doubt he figured that you must have had your way with her. After all:

Who can anticipate what children and grandchildren
an individual may have?

But the prediction that I find it hardest to believe is that in the future Ch'un-mei will wear a pearl-decked cap and receive a title of nobility. After all, nobody in our family is an official, so where would a pearl-decked cap come from? And even if there were a pearl-decked cap, it would hardly end up on her head."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "He predicted that I would have the joy of:

Ascending to the clouds from the level ground,
and the glory of:

Appointment to office and augmented emolument.

Now where would I get an official appointment from?

"When he saw Ch'un-mei standing together with the rest of you, but dressed differently than a servant, wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, he must have assumed that she was either a natural or adopted daughter of ours, who might someday marry into a prominent household or bring a distinguished husband into the family. That's why he said that she might be fated to wear a pearl-decked cap.

"It has always been true that:

You may calculate a person's fate,
But you can't predict his conduct.¹²¹
Likeness will appear in accord with mind,
Likeness will disappear in accord with mind.

Since Commandant Chou sent him to us, we could hardly disregard him. I had him physiognomize us so as not to be discourteous, that's all."

When he had done speaking, Yüeh-niang served him lunch in the master suite. After he had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing took a plantain-leaf fan in his hand and strolled idly into the garden, ending up in the great summer-house, the Hall of Assembled Vistas.

All the way round blinds are suspended
over the latticework,
On all four sides flowers and trees cast
intersecting shadows.¹²²

It was just high noon. All he could hear was:

From deep in the green shade,¹²³
The strains of the cicada's stridulation.

Suddenly:

A breeze wafted the scent of the flowers,¹²⁴
Invading the senses as it struck the nose.

There are two poems that testify to this:

Amid green trees the shade is luxuriant;
the summer days are long;
The reflections of towers and terraces
are upside-down in the pond.
The curtain of crystal beads is stirred
as the gentle breeze blows;
A single arbor of roses fills the entire
courtyard with fragrance.¹²⁵

In the secluded grounds of the country villa
the summer grass is green;
The pomegranates are everywhere in bloom,
shining through the blinds.
Shadows of locust trees cover the ground;
it is just high noon;
From time to time one hears the stridulation
of new-fledged cicadas.¹²⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on a chair and was cooling himself with the fan in his hand when he saw the two page boys, Lai-an and Hua-t'ung, come in to draw some water from the well.

"One of you come over here," he said, "and fetch some ice from the underground storehouse to put in a basin for me."

Lai-an promptly came forward, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Go to the rear compound and tell your sister, Ch'un-mei, that if she has any damson punch, she should bring a jug of it here and put it in the ice bowl to cool."

Lai-an assented and went off on his errand. After some time had elapsed, who should appear but Ch'un-mei. She was dressed in her everyday garb, with her head uncovered, wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a pale blue homespun tunic, and a peach red linen skirt. In her hand she carried a jug of candied damson punch.

Giggling as she came, she asked, "Have you had anything to eat yet?"

"I've already eaten in the master suite in the rear compound," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"No wonder you didn't come into our quarters," Ch'un-mei said. "I'll put this damson punch into the ice here, so you can drink it when it's chilled."

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded his head. When Ch'un-mei had finished icing the damson punch, she came over and leaned on the back of his chair.

Taking the plantain-leaf fan out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand, she proceeded to fan him with it, asking, "What was the First Lady talking to you about just now?"

"About the way Immortal Wu physiognomized us," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That Taoist stated, out of the blue, that I would wear a pearl-decked cap," said Ch'un-mei, "which caused the First Lady to remark, 'even if there were a pearl-decked cap, it would hardly end up on her head.' As the saying goes:

Ordinary individuals cannot be judged
by their faces;
The ocean's waters cannot be measured
by the peck.¹²⁷

It has always been true that:

What you can't round on the lathe,
You can round with an axe.¹²⁸

How can one foretell who may not:

Depend upon his wife's connections
for his daily bread?

Does she mean to suggest that I'm doomed to remain a slave in your household forever?"

"Little oily mouth," Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, "that's nonsense. If you should bear a child someday, you'll get to put your hair up like a regular lady."

Thereupon, taking her onto his lap, he took her hand in his and began to toy with her, asking, "Is your mother in the rear compound, or in her own quarters? How is it I haven't seen her?"

"Mother's in her room," said Ch'un-mei. "She told Ch'iu-ch'ü to heat some water for a bath but couldn't wait for her to finish and lay down on her bed for a nap."

"After I've drunk the damson punch," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I'll go have some fun with her."

Thereupon Ch'un-mei reached into the ice basin and poured out a cupful of damson punch for Hsi-men Ch'ing. When he had swallowed a mouthful, the bone-chilling cold:

Pierced his heart and numbed his teeth,
in the same way that:

Sweet dew suffuses the heart.¹²⁹

In a little while he finished the punch and then, leaning on Ch'un-mei's shoulder, made his way around by the postern

gate until he arrived at Chin-lien's bedroom. When he lifted aside the portiere and went in, he saw that directly in front of him the woman was lying asleep on her newly purchased bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl.

It so happens that, because Li P'ing-erh had an alcove bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl in her quarters, the woman had subsequently induced Hsi-men Ch'ing to spend sixty taels of silver in order to buy a balustraded bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl for her. Facing the interior of the bed, the two side panels were decorated with inlaid mother-of-pearl designs depicting:

Towers and terraces, halls and chambers,¹³⁰

Flowers and foliage, birds and animals.¹³¹

The three comb-back shaped back rests inside were decorated with the motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends." From the tester there hung:

Bed curtains of purple gauze,
held in place by:

Brocade sashes and silver hooks,
while from either side:

Aromatic pomanders were suspended.

The woman's:

Jade body was completely naked.

Wearing nothing but a bodice of red chiffon, under a coverlet of red silk, her head resting on a mandarin duck pillow, she lay on the cool bamboo bed mat:

In a state of slumbering oblivion.¹³²

Within the room:

An exotic fragrance assailed the nostrils.¹³³

No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing catch sight of her than, before he knew it, his:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Ordering Ch'un-mei to close the door and go outside, he quietly took off his clothes and got into bed. When he lifted aside the silk coverlet, her jade body lay half concealed and half revealed. Bent on mischief, he gently separated her two thighs, positioned his jade chowrie handle, and slowly inserted it into her vagina. By the time:

Her starry eyes flashed open with surprise,
he had already succeeded in thrusting and retracting several tens of times.¹³⁴

Opening her eyes wide, the woman laughed, saying, "You crazy ruffian! When did you sneak in here without anyone's knowing it? I was sleeping and didn't realize it. I was just enjoying my sleep and you still want to plague me to death."

"It's only me, so it doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But if it were a strange man who got in, you'd probably still pretend not to realize it."

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you!" the woman said. "Who else would have the:

Seven heads and eight galls,
to come into this room of mine? You're the only one allowed in here. How can you be so:

Oblivious to distinctions of status?"¹³⁵

It so happens that the woman, because she had overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing praising the whiteness of Li P'ing-erh's body in the Kingfisher Pavilion the other day, had secretly mixed the stamens of jasmine blossoms with butter-fat and face powder and rubbed the mixture over her entire body, until it was:

White and glossy, shiny and smooth,

Exuding a palpable exotic fragrance,¹³⁶

in the hope of gaining Hsi-men Ch'ing's affection and replacing her rival in his favor.

Thereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing that her body was snow-white, and that she was wearing the pair of scarlet sleeping shoes that she had just made, assumed a squatting position on top of her, lifted up her thighs with his two hands, and proceeded to thrust with all his strength:

Bending his head the better to observe,

The sight presented as he went in and out.¹³⁷

"You *crazy* good-for-nothing!" the woman said. "What are you looking at so attentively? My complexion is black; no match for the white of Li P'ing-erh's body, that's all there is to it. Now that she's pregnant, you're:

Casually enamored and anxiously concerned,¹³⁸
on her behalf. The rest of us are only pickups that you can pester like this whenever you please."

"I hear you've been waiting for me to take a bath," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"How did you know that?" the woman asked.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her what Ch'un-mei had said.

"You go ahead and bathe," the woman said. "I'll have Ch'un-mei bring the water in."

It wasn't long before the bathing tub was carried into the room and filled with hot water. The two of them got out of bed in order to:

Bathe together in the orchid-scented bath, and

Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water.

Thereupon:

Replenishing the bath and changing the water,¹³⁹
they proceeded to bathe for a while.

Acting on a whim, Hsi-men Ch'ing placed the woman so that she was reclining faceup on the bathing-board, took her pair of feet in his two hands, straddled her and thrust away, lifting her body into the air as he rammed away at her no less than two or three hundred times. The sound they made was just like:

Crabs scuttling in the mud;

The noise was incessant.

The woman, fearing lest her:

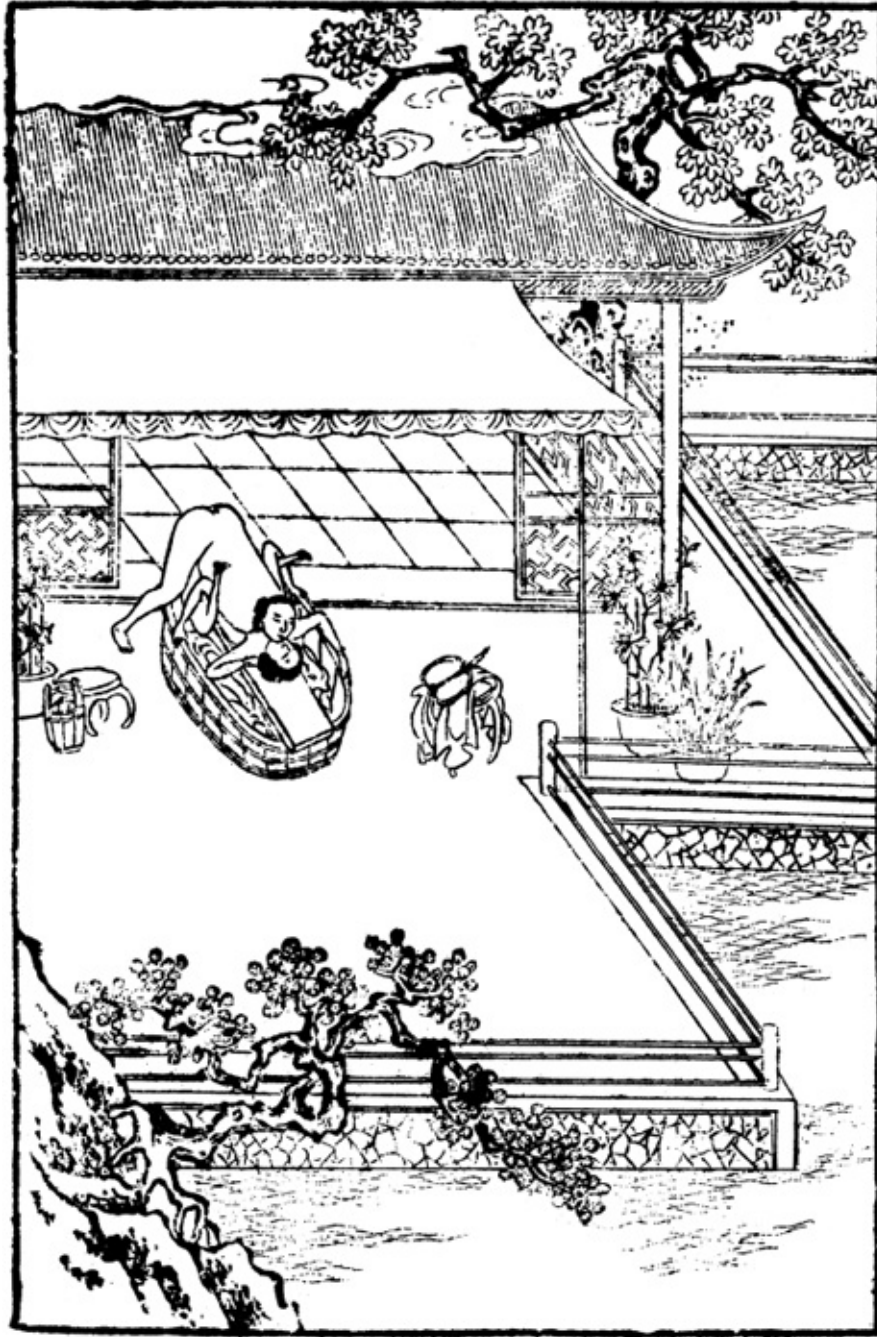
Fragrant locks should tumble awry,

held her clouds of hair in place with one hand while holding onto the bathing-board with the other. Meanwhile:

The swallow's cries and oriole's notes,¹⁴⁰
that issued from her mouth:

Were too multifarious to describe in detail.

What did this battle look like? Behold:



P'an Chin-lien Enjoys a Midday Battle in the Bathtub

The waters of the flowery pond are agitated,
the ripples turbulent;
The turquoise curtains are rolled high,
autumn clouds threaten.
The talented gentleman's feelings are aroused,
he wants to engage;
The woman of beauty's heart is impatient
to show off her skill.
One of them is all aquiver as he sticks out
his adamantite spear;
The other is all aswagger as she brandishes
her implacable sword.

One of them "risks death and forgets life,"¹⁴¹
 as he bores his way in;
 The other proves "addicted to clouds and rain,"¹⁴²
 as she strives for victory.
 With a *p'u-p'u tung-tung* the backsides
 beat a tattoo;
 With a *pi-pi po-po* the spear collides
 with the sword.
 With a *p'a-p'a t'a-t'a* they create a
 resounding racket;
 With a *p'eng-p'eng p'ai-p'ai* they end up
 all of a heap.
 Low-low, high-high, the water seems
 to run upstream;
 Splashing, plashing, the overflow
 creates a freshet.
 Slippery, slithery, how can they
 call a halt?
 Grasping, shoving, it is hard to
 stay in place.
 One comes, the other goes, ranging
 south and north;¹⁴³
 One lunges, the other butts, seeking
 east and west.
 Hot steam, billowing, gives rise to
 ominous clouds;
 Redolent, perfumed; fragrant vapor
 is dispersed.
 One of them, propelling her craft
 against the current,
 Sets her jade legs into motion.
 The other, just as the helmsman
 grips the tiller,
 Keeps her golden lotuses in hand.
 One of them, like a stallion run amok,
 shows off his prowess;
 The other, like a pale-faced sorceress,
 meets his cavalry charge.
 Happy and joyous are the feelings of
 the beautiful woman;
 Rough and ready are the desires of
 the young gentleman.
 Topsy-turvy, their only pursuit
 is gratification;
 Higgedy-piggedy, their feelings
 are all in a daze.
 "A life-or-death struggle,"¹⁴⁴ neither one
 will call a halt;
 "To triumph in every battle,"¹⁴⁵ they vie
 with heart and gall.
 Continually protesting, again and again,
 she threatens murder;
 High-spirited and stiff-necked, his ardor
 remains undimmed.
 In ancient times and modern, such contests
 have been countless;
 But none of them was the equal of this
 battle in the bathtub.

At the time, the two of them tangled in the water for a while, until Hsi-men Ch'ing ejaculated, bringing the contest to a halt. When they had rubbed themselves clean, the bathing tub was removed. Wearing nothing but short undershirts of thin floss silk, they got onto the bed, where a bed table had been prepared for them, replete with wine and delicacies.

"Bring some distilled spirits for your father to drink," the woman instructed Ch'iu-chü.

She also took some stuffed pastries out of a square box on the shelf of her bed cabinet and gave them to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat, fearing he might have an empty stomach.

It was some time before Ch'iu-chü reappeared with a silver flagon of wine. The woman was just about to pour it into a cup when she felt it and, finding it to be ice cold, threw the contents right into Ch'iu-chü's face, soaking her:

Head and face alike.

"Why you lousy dead duck of a slave!" she railed at her. "I told you to decant it for him, but how could you have brought cold wine for Father to drink? Who knows what you've got on your mind?"

"Drag this slave out to the courtyard for me," she told Ch'un-mei, "and make her kneel down there."

"I had just gone out back," said Ch'un-mei, "to roll up Mother's foot bindings for her. I was hardly out of the way for a moment, and you've already gotten into mischief."

Pouting with her lips, Ch'iu-chü mumbled to herself, "Father and Mother have been drinking iced wine every day. Who could have known that today they would change their tune?"

When the woman heard this, she cursed her, saying, "*Why* you lousy slave! *What* did you say? Drag her over here."

"Give her ten slaps on each side of her face," she ordered Ch'un-mei.

"I wouldn't want to dirty my hands on that thick-skinned face of hers," said Ch'un-mei. "Mother, just have her kneel down with a stone balanced on her head, that's all."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,
she was dragged out to the courtyard and made to kneel with a large stone balanced on her head. But no more of this.

The woman, once more, instructed Ch'un-mei to warm some wine and shared several cups with Hsi-men Ch'ing. The wine and the table were then removed, the silk bed curtains were let down, and Ch'un-mei was instructed to fasten the door to the room. The two of them then:

Arm around head and thigh over thigh,
Physically exhausted, went to sleep.

Truly:

If you do not find her on the peak of the
Mountain of Teeming Jade,
You must seek her in King Huai's dream
upon the Radiant Terrace.¹⁴⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 30

LAI-PAO ESCORTS THE SHIPMENT OF BIRTHDAY GIFTS; HSI-MEN CH'ING BEGETS A SON AND GAINS AN OFFICE

Success and failure, flourishing and decay,¹
are all inconsequential;²
To deploy every device at your disposal³
is likewise of no avail.
Human desires are never satisfied,⁴ like
a snake swallowing an elephant;⁵
The affairs of this world, in the end, are like
a mantis seizing a cicada.⁶
There is no medicine that is able to cure⁷
the aging of high officials;
No amount of money will purchase the virtue
of one's sons and grandsons.⁸
To rest content with one's ordinary lot
and take things as they come;
Is the way to enjoy a carefree life of
free and easy wandering.⁹

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien had finished bathing, they went to sleep together in her room. Ch'un-mei was sitting on a cool chair outside in the corridor, stitching the sole of a shoe, when what should she see but Ch'in-t'ung:

Sticking out his head and craning his neck,
around the postern gate.

"What have you got to say," Ch'un-mei asked.

Ch'in-t'ung also noticed that Ch'iu-chü was kneeling in the courtyard with a stone balanced on her head and proceeded to prance around and point at her.

"You crazy jailbird!" Ch'un-mei railed at him. "If you have something to say, just say it, that's all. Why bother:

Gesticulating with both hands and feet?"

Ch'in-t'ung continued laughing for some time before saying, "Chang An, the caretaker of the family graveyard, is waiting outside to speak to Father."

"You lousy jailbird!" Ch'un-mei said. "So it's Chang An, is it? What's the need for:

Such a great show of consternation,

as though you'd seen a ghost, or something? Keep it quiet. Father and Mother are asleep inside the room. If you wake them up, you'll be done for. Just tell Chang An to wait outside a while."

Ch'in-t'ung went outside and, after waiting there for what seemed like half a day, came back again and peered around the postern gate, asking, "Sister, is Father up yet or not?"

"You crazy jailbird!" exclaimed Ch'un-mei.

"Barging right in without more ado,
that way! You gave me quite a start.

As though you didn't know any better,¹⁰
you've come back a second time like a homeless ghost."

"Chang An is still waiting for Father to come out and see him," said Ch'in-t'ung. "After speaking to him, he has to get out through the city gate before it's closed for the night."

"Father and Mother are fast asleep," said Ch'un-mei. "Who would dare disturb them? Tell Chang An to wait a little longer before going. If it becomes too late for him to get home today, tell him to go back tomorrow."

As they were talking, who would have thought that Hsi-men Ch'ing over-heard them from inside the room.

Calling Ch'un-mei inside, he asked, "Who's talking?"

"Ch'un-mei replied, 'The page boy, Ch'in-t'ung, has come in to say that the caretaker of the graveyard, Chang An, is outside and wants to have a word with you.'"

"Get me something to put on," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll get up and go out."

While Ch'un-mei was helping Hsi-men Ch'ing into his clothes, Chin-lien asked, "What has Chang An come to talk

about?"

"Chang An came the other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to tell me that Widow Chao's country estate, which is adjacent to our ancestral graveyard, is being offered for sale, landed property and all. The asking price is three hundred taels of silver, but I'm only willing to give her two hundred and fifty taels. I instructed Chang An to negotiate with her. If the sale is agreed to, I'll have Pen the Fourth and Ch'en Ching-chi go out to pay over the silver.

"There are four wells on the grounds, complete with well railings, from which water can be drawn. If I buy this property, I'll open it up and combine it with my own. I plan to build three summerhouses, three reception halls, an artificial hill, a garden, a juniper hedge, a locust tree arbor, well pavilions, an archery range, a kickball field, and other recreational facilities. It may cost a few taels of silver to do it, but what of that."

"What indeed!" said the woman. "Go ahead and buy it. In the future when your womenfolk have occasion to visit the graveyard, they'll have something pleasurable to do when they get there."

When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the front of the compound to talk to Chang An.

Chin-lien got up and, pausing in front of her dressing mirror to:

Retouch her powdered face, and

Recomb her cloudy locks,

came out into the courtyard to see to the beating of Ch'iu-chü. Ch'un-mei went outside and called in Ch'in-t'ung to wield the cane.

Chin-lien interrogated the culprit, saying, "I told you to fetch the wine. But how could you have brought cold wine for your father to drink? It seems that if anyone in the household, great or small, has the temerity to offer you a word of criticism, you're prepared to brazen it out:

With nail-like mouth and iron tongue."¹¹

She then shouted an order to Ch'in-t'ung, "Give this slave twenty strokes with the cane, well laid on."

Ch'in-t'ung had only administered ten strokes when, luckily for the culprit, Li P'ing-erh came over with an ingratiating smile and persuaded her mistress to put an end to the punishment, so Ch'iu-chü was spared ten lashes. Chin-lien ordered her to kowtow to Li P'ing-erh, after which she let her get up and go off to the kitchen.

"Old Mother Feng," said Li P'ing-erh, "has shown up with a fourteen-year-old slave girl in tow. Our second sister in the rear compound is going to buy her to serve in her quarters. The asking price is seven taels and five candareens of silver. She'd like you to come have a look at her before she completes the transaction."

Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh thereupon went back to the rear compound together. As expected, Li Chiao-erh asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for the money and paid seven taels of silver for the slave girl. She changed her name to Hsia-hua and employed her in her quarters. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment and speak of something else.

Let us now return to the story of how Lai-pao and Wu Tien-en escorted the shipment of birthday gifts to the capital. From the time they set out from Ch'ing-ho district, all along the way:

Every morning they took to the purple road;

Each evening they tramped the red dust.

When hungry they ate, when thirsty they drank;

Stopping by night and traveling by day.¹²

It was the time of the greatest heat, when:

The weather is steaming hot,

Melting rock and liquefying metal,

and travelers find it extremely rough going.

To make a long story short, one day they arrived outside the Myriad Years Gate of the Eastern Capital and sought out an inn at which to take lodgings for the night. The next day, bearing the consignment of birthday gifts with which they had been entrusted, they proceeded straight to the gate of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's mansion by the Heavenly River Bridge, where they paused to reconnoiter. Lai-pao told the manager, Wu Tien-en, to take charge of the gifts, while he, himself, donned his black livery and proceeded to salute the gatekeeper with a bow.

"Where do you come from?" the gatekeeper asked.

"We are servants of the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing of Ch'ing-ho district in Shantung," Lai-pao replied, "and have come to present birthday gifts to His Honor."

"You lousy dead duck of a convict!" the gatekeeper railed at him. "You may make much of your Honorable 'Eastgate' or Honorable 'Westgate'¹³ where you come from. But at the present time, His Honor, our master, is:

Under but one man, and

Above a myriad men."¹⁴

No matter whether it be one of the:

Three dukes or eight ministers;

or whether it be a:

Noble scion or royal princeling;¹⁵

who would dare to use such presumptuous language before His Honor's mansion? Stand back, and make it snappy!"

Among the gatekeepers there was one who recognized Lai-pao and placated him, saying, "This is a newly appointed gatekeeper who has only been on the job a few days. He didn't recognize you. Don't take offense. If you want an audience

with His Honor, wait until I ask Uncle Chai Ch'ien to come out and see you."

Lai-pao then reached into his sleeve, pulled out a packet of silver weighing one tael, and gave it to the man.

"That's not necessary as far as I'm concerned," the man said. "But add an equal amount and give it to these two functionaries. You've got to make allowances for them."

Lai-pao hastily produced three packets of silver, one tael for each, and distributed them accordingly. Only then did the original gatekeeper show something like a smile.

"Since you have come from Ch'ing-ho district," he said, "just wait a little, and I'll take you in first to see the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien. His Honor has just returned from burning incense at the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity¹⁶ and is taking a nap in his studio."

It was some time before the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien, appeared. He was wearing sandals, white socks, and a long black silk Taoist robe.

As soon as Lai-pao saw him, he kowtowed, and Majordomo Chai returned his salutation, saying, "Your efforts on a former occasion are appreciated, and now you have come to present birthday gifts to His Honor."

Lai-pao handed him a sealed document and, after a servant had presented two bolts of Nanking silk and thirty taels of silver, said, "My master, Hsi-men Ch'ing, sends his respects to Master Chai.

Having nothing suitable to express his feelings, he offers these paltry gifts for Master Chai to dispense as he sees fit. On a former occasion, in connection with the Wang Ssu-feng affair, he is deeply appreciative of Master Chai's efforts."

"These gifts," said Chai Ch'ien, "I really ought not to accept. But, enough! Enough! I will provisionally accept them."

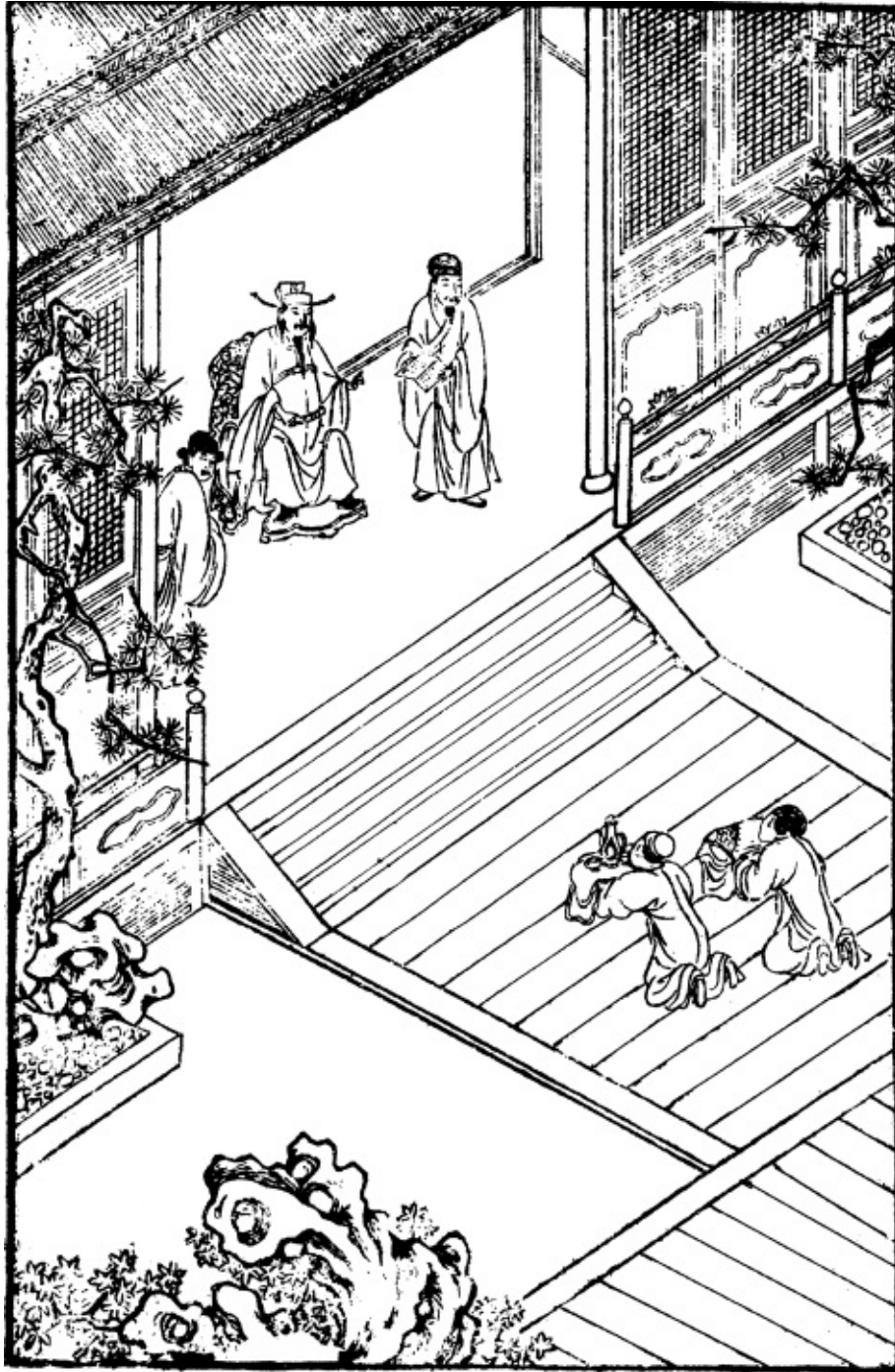
Lai-pao also handed him the list of birthday presents for the grand preceptor.

After perusing it, he returned it to Lai-pao, telling him, "Have the gifts carried in and wait inside the second inner gate."

It so happened that on the west side of the courtyard inside the second inner gate there was an eighteen-foot-wide structure, situated with its back to the south and its front facing north, where miscellaneous persons and those who came and went on errands were entertained with tea while they waited. In no time at all a young page boy brought out two cups of tea and gave them to Lai-pao and manager Wu Tien-en to drink.

In a short while, the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching himself, came into the reception hall. Chai Ch'ien first reported the situation to the grand preceptor, after which the latter ordered Lai-pao and Manager Wu to present themselves, and the two of them knelt down below the dais. Chai Ch'ien first handed up the list of birthday presents for the grand preceptor to peruse, while Lai-pao and Manager Wu made a formal presentation of the gifts. Behold:

Blazing yellow,
Gold pitchers and jade cups;
Glittering silver,
Enchased immortal figurines.
Created by skilled craftsmen, they cost
much expenditure of effort;
Wrought by deft artificers, they are
seldom seen among mankind.
Brocaded python robes,
Whose variegated colors dazzle the eye.
Heavy Nanking silks,
The golds and greens of which blend their hues.
The finest Yang-kao vintage from Fen-chou,



Lai Pao Presents the Shipment of Birthday Gifts

Encrusted with its authenticating seals.
Exotic fruits and seasonal rarities,
Piled high in platters and boxes.

How could he help but be pleased?¹⁷

“As for these gifts,” he said, “It really wouldn’t be right to accept them. You had better take them back with you.”

This threw Lai-pao and his companion into such a state of consternation that they kowtowed below the dais, saying, “Our master, Hsi-men Ch’ing:

Having no other way to pay his respects,¹⁸
proffers these:

Paltry and insignificant gifts,¹⁹
to His Honor for him to dispense as he sees fit.”

“If that is the case,” said the grand preceptor, “let my attendants take possession of them.”

The attendants and waiting men to either side then proceeded to remove all the presents and put them away.

The grand preceptor further went on to say, “The other day, in connection with that matter of the merchant Wang Ssu-feng in Ts’ang-chou, I have already sent someone to deliver a letter about the case to your grand coordinator, Hou Meng. Has he acted on the requested favor or not?”

“As a result of Your Honor’s celestial grace,” Lai-pao replied, “your letter no sooner arrived than the salt merchants involved were all taken before the Salt Distribution Commission, had their tallies returned to them, and were duly released.”

The grand preceptor then turned to Lai-pao and said, “The presents I have provisionally accepted. But I have repeatedly benefited from your master’s efforts on my behalf:

Without having anything to offer in return.

What am I to do? Does your master hold any post or commission?”

“My master,” said Lai-pao, “is but:

A humble villager.

What post or commission could he hold?”

“So he holds no post or commission,” said the grand preceptor. “Yesterday the emperor happened to consign several blank orders of appointment²⁰ to me. If I were to appoint your master to the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, in order to fill the vacancy left by the promotion of Assistant Judicial Commissioner Ho Chin, how would that be?”

Lai-pao hastily kowtowed in thanks, saying:

“His obligations to you are so great,
that even if my master and his entire household should have:

Their heads pulverized and their bodies dismembered,²¹

They could hardly hope to repay you.”

Thereupon, the grand preceptor directed an attendant clerk to bring in his writing desk and forthwith signed and sealed a blank order of appointment, filling in Hsi-men Ch’ing’s name, and designating him a battalion vice-commander in the Left Guard of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, and concurrently, assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch’ing-ho office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission.

Turning to Lai-pao, the grand preceptor said, “The two of you have gone to great pains in delivering these birthday gifts to me.”

He then went on to ask, “What is the relationship to you of the person kneeling behind you?”

Lai-pao was about to report that he was an employee, when Manager Wu stepped forward and said, “I am Hsi-men Ch’ing’s brother-in-law. My name is Wu Tien-en.”

“So you are Hsi-men Ch’ing’s brother-in-law,” the grand preceptor said. “You look to me to have a decent enough demeanor.”

Then he directed an attendant clerk to bring him an order of appointment, and said, “I’ll appoint you to the post of station master of the Ch’ing-ho Postal Relay Station. You ought to be able to handle that.”

Wu Tien-en was so flustered by this that he proceeded to:

Kowtow as though he were pounding garlic.²²

The grand preceptor then took up another order of appointment and filled in Lai-pao’s name, appointing him as a commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün.²³

Both of them kowtowed in gratitude and took possession of their orders of appointment.

The grand preceptor instructed them, “Tomorrow morning you must report to the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War in order to register your names, receive your credentials, and learn the deadlines by which you must report for duty in order to carry out your commissions.”²⁴

He also instructed Chai Ch’ien, “See that they are entertained with food and wine in the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, and get ten taels of silver to give the two of them for their expenses on the road.”

But no more of this.

Gentle reader take note: At that time, during the reign of emperor Huitsung:

The empire was badly governed;

Wicked ministers held positions of power,²⁵

Slanderers and sycophants filled the court.²⁶

The four wicked ministers, Kao Ch’iu, Yang Chien, T’ung Kuan, and Ts’ai Ching, presided at court:

Selling offices and bartering justice,²⁷

Flagrantly trafficking in bribes;²⁸

Promoting officials with scales in hand,

Pointing to the post and demanding the price.

Those who resorted to:

Truckling and insinuation,
Rapidly rose to high position.

Those who were:

Worthy, able, honest, and straightforward,
Went for years without appointment.

As a result:

Public mores deteriorated.
Venal officials and corrupt functionaries,
Overspread the entire empire.
The burdens of corvee and taxation were heavy,
The people were impoverished and bandits arose.
The empire was ripe for revolt.²⁹
Solely because the wicked and sycophantic
occupied positions of power,
It was only appropriate that the Central Plain
should become soaked in blood.³⁰

Chai Ch'ien then proceeded to invite Lai-pao and Manager Wu into an antechamber to be entertained. From the kitchen there appeared a complete array of soups, dishes, and savories, in:

Large platters and large bowls;
The meat as rich as flower cakes,³¹
The wine as lustrous as amber.

After they had eaten their fill, Chai Ch'ien turned to Lai-pao and said, "There is something that I would like to request your master to take care of for me, but I don't know if he would be willing to undertake it or not."

"How can you talk that way, Master Chai?" said Lai-pao. "In view of the way you have looked after my master's interests in dealing with His Honor, no matter what you might ask, you have but to command, and he will:

Not fail to comply with your orders."

"There is no reason for me to deceive you," said Chai Ch'ien. "In my attendance on His Honor, day in and day out, I have but the single person of my wife to solace me. I am approaching forty years of age, constantly suffer from a variety of ailments, and have not been able to have any children. In forwarding my request to your master, just ask him if there should happen to be any healthy young girls in your neighborhood, around fourteen or fifteen years old, if he could seek one out and send her to me. For whatever cost this may incur, I will see that he is fully remunerated."

Thereupon, he sealed up a return present and a reply for Hsi-men Ch'ing and entrusted them to Lai-pao, also presenting the two of them with five taels of silver for their expenses on the road.

Lai-pao repeatedly refused to accept this gratuity, saying, "Just now His Honor has already rewarded us. You had better take this back, Master Chai."

"That was His Honor's business," said Chai Ch'ien, "while this is mine. There is no need for you to refuse."

When they had finished eating and drinking, Chai Ch'ien said, "I'll send a functionary from our staff to accompany you to your lodgings and facilitate your visit to the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War tomorrow morning, to register your names, receive your credentials, and get started on your way. That will save you the need to go back and forth on the road in order to return here tomorrow. On receipt of my instructions, the ministries will not dare to delay in issuing your documents."

Thereupon, he summoned a functionary named Li Chung-yu and told him, "You accompany these two gentlemen tomorrow when they go to the ministries to register their names and receive their credentials, and then report back to me."

That functionary, along with Lai-pao and Wu Tien-en, then said goodbye, went out the gate of the mansion, and proceeded to the vicinity of Heavenly River Bridge, to a tavern that sold distilled spirits, in order to have a chat. After treating him to wine and food, Lai-pao gave Li Chung-yu three taels of silver and arranged with him that, early the next morning, he should take them first to the Ministry of Personnel and then to the Ministry of War, to register their names and receive their credentials.

On hearing that they came from His Honor the grand preceptor's mansion, who would have dared to be dilatory, or refuse to:

Act upon it even in defiance of the law?

Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Imperial Insignia Guard, promptly applied his seal, signed the authorizing documents, and transmitted them to the heads of the appropriate offices, thereby appointing Lai-pao to serve on the staff of the Princely Establishment of the Prince of Yün in Shantung. He also sent a calling card in reply to Majordomo Chai Ch'ien.

In less than two days, everything necessary had been taken care of, so they hired mounts and set out that very day to return to Ch'ing-ho district and report the good news. Truly:

Wealth and distinction are only to be gained
by guile and craft;
Success and fame are utterly dependent
on Teng T'ung's money.³²

To resume our story, one day, during the dog days of summer, when the weather was extremely hot, the members of the Hsi-men family gathered in the great summerhouse, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, in order to enjoy the lotus blossoms, escape the heat, and drink wine together. Wu Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the places of honor, the various concubines and Hsi-men Ta-chieh arranged themselves on the two sides, and Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yu-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, stood in attendance to play their instruments and sing. What were the revels like that day? Behold:

Urns are planted with green shrubs,
Vases are studded with red blossoms.
Portieres of beaded crystal furl
their "shrimps' whiskers,"
Screens of inlaid mica display
their peacocks' tails.
Platters are piled with unicorn flesh;
Smiling beauties proffer goblets
of iridescent hue.
Basins harbor submerged iced peaches;
Lovely women raise on high beakers
made of chrysoprase.
Dainties are prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits are provided just in season.
Pipes and strings accompany the songs,
Producing a surge of pure melody
and lovely harmony.
Clad in silks and decked with jewelry,
There stand two rows of dancing girls
and singing boys.
During the feast the red ivory inlays
of the clappers resound,
The entire surface of the dancing skirts
is comprised of brocade.
Thus does one dissipate the idle days
within the Taoist's gourd;³³
Journeying beyond the corporeal realm
in the universe of the drunk.³⁴

As Hsi-men Ch'ing's wife and concubines were enjoying their wine, it was noticed that Li P'ing-erh was absent.

Turning to Hsiu-ch'un, Yüeh-niang asked, "What has your mistress returned to her room for? Why doesn't she come and drink wine with the rest of us?"

"My mistress is suffering from pains in the abdomen," Hsiu-ch'un replied. "She's sprawled out in her room at the moment but will be here shortly."

"Why don't you quickly go and speak to her?" said Yüeh-niang. "Tell her not to sprawl about that way, but come and sit down with us properly, and listen to the singing for a while."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yüeh-niang, "What's up?" and she replied, "Sister Li has suddenly developed abdominal pains and is lying down in her room. I've just sent her junior maidservant to ask her to join us."

Turning then to Yü-lou, she said, "Sister Li must be in the last month of her term. I fear it may be a miscarriage."

"Elder Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "how could she be due in this month? My guess is it will be an eighth-month child. It's early days yet."

"If it's still too early," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "send a maidservant to invite the Sixth Lady to come and listen to the singing."

Before long, Li P'ing-erh duly made her appearance among them.

"I fear you've caught a chill of some kind," Yüeh-niang said to her. "Have a cup of hot wine and I'm sure you'll feel better."

Before long, the cups in front of each of them were filled with wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Ch'un-mei, "Sing the song suite that begins with the words:

Everyone fears the days of summer,

for us."

Ch'un-mei and the other members of the quartet, after seeing to it that:

The bridges on the psaltery were ranged like wild geese,

and:

The silken strings of the mandola were properly tuned,
Opened their ruby lips,

Exposed their white teeth,³⁵
and proceeded to sing the song suite beginning with the tune "A Single Missive," the first line of which is:

Everyone fears the days of summer,³⁶

etc., etc.

Li P'ing-erh had put in an appearance at the party, but her brows were knit, and without even waiting till the song suite was finished, she returned to her room. Though Yüeh-niang was listening to the lyrics of the songs, she was worried about her and sent Hsiao-yü to her quarters to see how she was.

When she returned, she reported, "The Sixth Lady is suffering from abdominal pains and is writhing about on her k'ang."

Yüeh-niang exclaimed in consternation, "I said that her time must have come, but Sister Six here insisted that it was too early for that. Why don't you call in a page boy and send him to fetch a midwife as quickly as possible?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately ordered Lai-an, "Run like the wind and go fetch Midwife Ts'ai."

Thereupon, the wine-drinking came to a halt, and they all went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to ask after her.

"Sister Li, how do you feel inside?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"First Lady," Li P'ing-erh replied, "in both my chest cavity and my lower abdomen I have a painful sensation of downward pressure."

"You ought to sit up," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't lie down any more. I'm afraid you might injure the fetus by writhing about that way. We've sent for the midwife, and she should be here any minute now."

In a little while, Li P'ing-erh's birth pangs gradually became more severe, and Yüeh-niang demanded to know, "Whoever was sent after the midwife, that she hasn't shown up by this time?"

"Father ordered Lai-an to go," said Tai-an.

"You jailbird!" Yüeh-niang cursed at him. "Why don't you get a move on yourself, and go meet them? It was absolutely senseless to send that child of a slave on such an errand. He doesn't know what's urgent and what isn't."

"Quickly, get on a mule and go after them," Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an.

"It's a matter of fiery urgency," said Yüeh-niang, "and you handle it like any ordinary affair:

Just as slow and easy as you please."

Now P'an Chin-lien, on seeing that Li P'ing-erh was about to give birth to a child, could not help being somewhat sore at heart. After observing the goings on in Li P'ing-erh's quarters for a while, she pulled Meng Yü-lou outside with her, and the two of them stood by a pillar under the eaves of the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, to get a breath of fresh air and have a chat.

"Ai ya-ya!" she exclaimed. "On top of everything else, when it's as hot as it is, to crowd a whole roomful of people in there. It's not as though a child were being born, but as if they all want to see an elephant lay an egg."

After some time, who should they see coming through the gate but Midwife Ts'ai, who approached the group and asked, "Which of you is the mistress of the house?"

"This is the First Lady," said Li Chiao-erh, at which Midwife Ts'ai prostrated herself and performed the kowtow.

"We're imposing on you, Granny," said Yüeh-niang, "but why has it taken you so long to get here?"

"Listen to me, and I'll tell you all about it," said Midwife Ts'ai:

I'm a midwife whose surname is Ts'ai,
Whose two feet can move really fast.
Bedecked with strange green and queer red,
Whatever fret I've got on, it's awry.
My wire-inlaid earrings shine bright,
My yellow kerchief is fixed with a pin.
On arrival, I demand a tip wrapped in red,
Once seated, I expect good entertainment.
Be my client a spoiled girl from a noble house,
An imperial relative, or the mother of an emperor;
She'll have to let me examine her as I like,
Strip off her clothes and handle her at will.
A breech birth will require a cesarean,
Difficult deliveries call for rough handling.
Whether it be the umbilical cord or the placenta,
If need be, I may have to tear it with my hands.
If the child live, I attend the third day lustration;³⁷
If it should die, I clear out as fast as I can.
For these reasons, my patrons are numerous,
So, when called for, I'm not to be found."

"That's enough of your idle chatter," said Yüeh-niang. "Be so good as to take a look at this lady, who's about to bear a

child.”

Midwife Ts'ai approached the bed, felt Li P'ing-erh's body with her hands, and announced, "Her time has come." She then went on to ask, "First Lady, do you have on hand the swaddling clothes and absorbent grass paper that will be needed?"

"I do," replied Yüeh-niang, who then instructed Hsiao-yü, "Quickly now, go to my room and fetch them."

To resume our story, when Meng Yü-lou saw that the midwife had arrived, she said to Chin-lien, "Midwife Ts'ai has come. Why don't we go into the room and see what's going on?"

Chin-lien, on the one hand, refused to budge, and on the other, said, "If you want to watch, go ahead; but, as for me, I don't want to see it. She's the sister with a child, so she's in favor. Why shouldn't people want to see her?"

"A while ago, when I made the mistake of remarking that it seemed to me her child wasn't due this month, and probably wouldn't be until the eighth month, I got publicly chastised for it by Elder Sister. It seems to me that I really didn't deserve anything like that, and it's been bothering me ever since."

"I, too, thought it would be a sixth-month child," said Yü-lou.

"Now you're talking nonsense, too," said Chin-lien. "Let me work it out for you. She came here in the eighth month of last year. And she wasn't any:

Chaste chrysanthemum of a virgin,³⁸

either. The child could have been:

Conceived at an earlier time,

Only to be born in our house.

As a remarried wife, there's no knowing how many men she may have been involved with. Moreover, it takes a month or two for the fetus to develop. Even if you assume it to be a child belonging to our family, and that I spoke incorrectly; if it had been an eighth-month child, there might have been a semblance of our family in it. But if it is a sixth-month child, it's a case of:

Stepping on a low stool to paste up an effigy of
the Spirit of the Perilous Paths;

You'll end up falling a hat's-height too short.³⁹

Once it has strayed out of familiar territory,

Where can you go to look for the missing calf?"⁴⁰

As they were talking, whom should they see but Hsiao-yü, carrying the absorbent grass paper, swaddling clothes, and a little sleeping mat out from the rear compound.

Meng Yü-lou said, "These are things that Elder Sister has prepared for her own use when she is brought to bed with a child, sooner or later, herself. She is letting them be used today in response to the emergency."

"One of them is the legitimate wife," said Chin-lien, "and the other is merely a concubine. But it seems that, in the future, so long as it's a childbearing competition they're engaged in, though neither one should produce a satisfactory baby, any piecemeal excuse for one will do. Even if my case should be like that of:

The purchased hen who doesn't lay eggs;

do you mean to say he'll simply kill me?"

"In any case," she went on to say, "No matter whether:

Things land right side up or upside down,⁴¹

one oughtn't to make the mistake of:

The dog who bites the inflated bladder;

Only to find his excitement deflated."⁴²

"What kind of talk is that, Fifth Sister?" said Meng Yü-lou.

After that, whenever she saw that Chin-lien was blurting things out:

Without any consideration for the consequences,

she simply lowered her head, fiddled with her skirt, and declined to say anything in reply.

P'an Chin-lien leaned against the courtyard pillar with one hand, and stood with her foot resting on the raised threshold, cracking melon seeds with her teeth.

What should they see at this point but Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound, who had heard that Li P'ing-erh was in the process of bearing a child and had come running up in a state of obvious agitation:

Stumbling at every step,⁴³

to see what was happening. Carelessly, in the dark shadow of the doorway, she tripped over the edge of the stylobate and nearly came a cropper.

Chin-lien, on seeing this, said to Yü-lou, "Just look at that ingratiating slavey of a concubine! You'd better take it easy! What are you in such a hurry to risk your life for? If you had really come a cropper by tripping up in the shadow there and had broken a tooth, it would cost a pretty penny. Sister, you're like:

The radish peddler who tags along after the salt vendor:

forever horning in where you don't belong."⁴⁴

If you ever bear a child yourself, I suppose they'll reward you, concubine that you are, with the silk hat of an official."

After some time, from inside the room they heard:

The sound of a gurgling cry,⁴⁵

and knew that the baby had been born.

"Tell the head of the household," announced Midwife Ts'ai, "to prepare an appropriate gratuity. She has given birth to a boy."

When Wu Yüeh-niang reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he hastily washed his hands:

Lit a full burner of incense,⁴⁶

and made a vow, before Heaven and Earth and the tablets of his ancestors, to sponsor an elaborate performance, of one hundred and twenty degrees, of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, in order to pray for:

The safety of mother and child,

A fortunate parturition,⁴⁷ and

An untroubled accouchement.⁴⁸

Now P'an Chin-lien, realizing that the birth of the child was resulting in the:

Jollification of the entire family,

who were:

All of a heap with excitement,

only became angrier than ever. Taking herself off to her own room, she closed the door, lay down on her bed, and wept.

At the time it was the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the sixth year of the Cheng-ho reign period.⁴⁹ Truly:

One may find things less than satisfactory

eight or nine times out of ten;

But it is seldom wise to tell anyone about

even two or three of them.

Midwife Ts'ai took charge of the baby, biting off its umbilical cord, and burying the placenta. She then decocted a "heart stabilizing potion"⁵⁰ for Li P'ing-erh to take and saw to it that the baby was comfortable. Yüeh-niang invited the midwife into the rear compound and entertained her with food and wine. When she was about to leave, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a single ingot of silver weighing five taels and also promised her a bolt of satin if she would come and preside at the third-day lustration ceremony. Midwife Ts'ai went out the gate with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand

expressions of gratitude.

That day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came into the room and first saw the armful of baby flesh, with its very fair complexion, he was as pleased as could be. The whole household was delighted. That night he slept in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, in the room that had the bed in it, and constantly came over to the room with the k'ang, where the mother and child were, in order to see the baby.

The next day, before daylight, he got up early and sent off page boys to deliver ten square boxes of celebratory noodles to his relatives, neighbors, and friends. When Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta heard that a son had been born to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and that he had sent celebratory noodles to them, they hastened:

Covering two steps with every one,⁵¹

to come and offer their congratulations. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to have some noodles with him in the summerhouse.

He had no sooner seen them on their way and was busy in the reception hall, about to send a page boy for a go-between in order to locate a wet nurse to suckle the child, when Auntie Hsüeh suddenly showed up with a wet nurse in tow.

It so happened that she was a wife, of humble social origin, twenty-nine years old, who had just lost a child, less than a month before. Her husband was a soldier and couldn't make a go of it. Fearing that if he went on campaign there would be no one to support her, he had decided to sell her and was only asking six taels of silver.

When Yüeh-niang saw that she seemed well-favored enough, she talked it over with Hsi-men Ch'ing, weighed out six taels of silver, and retained her services. She gave her the name Ju-i, or As You Like It, and assigned her the task of caring for the baby and suckling him, early and late.

Old Mother Feng was also sent for, to look after the needs of the lying-in room, while Li P'ing-erh recuperated from childbirth. She was given five mace of silver per month to take care of the laundry.

The household had been in an uproar all day, when P'ing-an suddenly announced that Lai-pao and Manager Wu had returned from the Eastern Capital and were now dismounting at the front gate. Before long, the two of them came inside and, on seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing, congratulated him.

"What is there to be congratulated about?"⁵²

asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The two men then gave a full account, from beginning to end, of how they had arrived in the Eastern Capital, obtained an interview with Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, and presented the gifts to him.

"When His Honor saw the gifts, he was very pleased," reported Lai-pao. "He said, 'I have repeatedly been the recipient of your master's munificence:

Without having any means of repaying him.'

He then asked if your ancestors had held any appointments, and I said, 'He is but:

A humble villager,

who doesn't hold a commission of any kind.'

"His Honor the grand preceptor then said that the emperor had consigned several blank orders of appointment to him, and that he would assign one of them to you. So he filled in your name, designating you as a battalion vice-commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, and appointing you to the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, in order to fill the vacancy left by the promotion of Assistant Judicial Commissioner Ho Chin. He then appointed your servant to the post of commandant of the Iron Bell Guard, to serve on the staff of the Prince of Yün, and appointed Manager Wu to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station."

Thereupon, he took out the three uniformly signed and sealed orders of appointment, together with the authorizing credentials from the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War, and the patent of nobility for his wife, and placed them on the table for Hsi-men Ch'ing to see.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that these documents were stamped with numerous seals, indicating imperial authorization according to precedent,⁵³ and that he really had been appointed to the position of battalion vice-commander, before he knew it:

Joy manifested itself about his temples
and between his brows;
Delight spread itself across his cheeks
and smiling face.

Picking up the imperial decrees in his hand, and taking them back to the rear compound to show to Wu Yüeh-niang and the other members of the family, he said, "His Honor the grand preceptor has favored me with an appointment to the position of battalion vice-commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, which carries with it the title of grand master of the fifth rank. This entitles you to receive a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, to ride in a carriage embellished with seven aromatic spices, and to be addressed by the honorific title of lady. He also concurrently appointed Manager Wu to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station, and Lai-pao to the post of commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün.

"When Immortal Wu physiognomized me he concluded that I would 'not fail to wear the silk hat of an official,' and would enjoy 'an ascent to the clouds from the level ground,' and today those predictions have come true. In hardly half a month both of these happy events have come to pass."

Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "This baby boy that Sister Li has just borne is certainly starting out on a firm footing. At the lustration ceremony on the third day, when we choose a name for him, let's call him Kuan-ko, or Official Son, in commemoration of the occasion."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished showing the documents to Yüeh-niang, Lai-pao came in, kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and the rest, and talked to them for a while.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Begets a Son and Gains an Office

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Tomorrow morning, take the documents to the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission to show to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and have Manager Wu deliver his documents to the district yamen."

Lai-pao then took his leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing and went home.

The following day, by the time the third-day lustration ceremony was completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing's relatives, neighbors, and friends all knew that his Sixth Lady had given birth to a boy, and that, before three days were out, he had had the good fortune to see:

Officialdom and emolument descend upon his gate,
in the form of an appointment, out of the blue, to the post of battalion vice-commander. Nor did anyone fail to try his

best to curry favor with him by bearing gifts and offering congratulations.

People come and people go,⁵⁴
All day long, without ceasing.⁵⁵

As the saying goes:

When fortune comes, who does not come;
When fortune does not come, who comes?

Truly:

When fortune comes, even the crudest iron
looks shiny;
When luck recedes, even the truest gold
lacks luster.⁵⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 31

CH'IN-T'UNG CONCEALS A FLAGON AFTER SPYING ON YÜ-HSIAO; HSI-MEN CH'ING HOLDS A FEAST AND DRINKS CELEBRATORY WINE

TO THE TUNE "Moon on the West River":

If his family be rich, the person will be distinguished;
When others meet him they are sure to yield him precedence.
Poor officials presume on the indulgence of their superiors;
Each of them acknowledging the deference due to money.

In marriage alliances he looks only for social prestige;
In business transactions he seeks merely to gain influence.
Not knowing that success and failure reside in the heart,
He relies only on what he can see before his eyes.

The story goes that the next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Lai-pao to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and to the district yamen to deliver his credentials.

At the same time he commissioned someone to make an official hat for him and summoned Tailor Chao to come to his home with four or five other tailors to take charge of measuring and cutting the fabric in order to provide him with a set of official garments. He also called in a contingent of artisans to manufacture seven or eight four-finger-wide official girdles for him, with decorative plaques made of carved openwork, mica, rhinoceros horn, "crane's crest red,"¹ tortoiseshell, fishbone, and aloeswood.² We will say no more, for the moment, about the goings on in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.

To resume our story, that same day Wu Tien-en paid a visit to Ying Po-chüeh's house and repeatedly besought his aid in asking Hsi-men Ch'ing for a loan of silver to expend, both high and low, in connection with his appointment as station master.

"If I am successful in borrowing the silver," he promised Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll set aside ten taels in order to buy you a present as an expression of my gratitude, Elder Brother."

As he spoke, he got down on his knees, which threw Ying Po-chüeh into such consternation that he helped him up with one hand, saying, "This is a case of:

Helping someone to accomplish his legitimate desires.³

The fact that His Honor saw fit to send you on this mission to the Eastern Capital, which made it possible for you to benefit by the windfall of this position, is no ordinary event."

He then went on to ask, "How much will you need for present purposes?"

"There is no reason to deceive you, Elder Brother," Wu Tien-en replied.

"The situation of my household is such that I haven't a candareen to my name. In the days to come the costs of assuming office, calling upon my superiors, supplying:

The customary presentation gifts,⁴

hosting a banquet, and providing myself with appropriate clothing, horse and saddle, etc., at the very least, will come to seventy or eighty taels of silver. How am I to cope with it? Now I have drafted a promissory note but have not yet presumed to write in the amount. I hope that whatever happens, Elder Brother, you will consent to help me out by putting in a good word from the side. If I am successful:

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

Ying Po-chüeh looked over the promissory note and then said, "Brother Wu, this seventy or eighty taels of silver that you propose to borrow will not be sufficient for your needs. If you take my advice, you'll pick up a brush and write in the sum of a round hundred taels. More likely than not, out of consideration for me, he won't demand any interest from you, and you'll have enough to cover your expenses. It won't be too late to pay him back, a little at a time, in the future, after you've assumed office. As the common saying aptly puts it:

Borrowed rice will go into your pot;

Begged rice will not go into your pot.⁵

As long as you can stall him off:

Every day is another morning and afternoon.⁶

How much the more should this be true since you've done business on his behalf. These few taels of silver for you are hardly anything likely to weigh on his mind."

When Wu Tien-en heard these words, he thanked him again and again and proceeded, on the spot, to write in the sum of a hundred taels on the promissory note. Thereupon, having finished their tea, they got up together and made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate.

Ying Po-chüeh asked the gatekeeper, P'ing-an, "Is your father up yet, or not?"

"Father's already up," replied P'ing-an. "He's in the summerhouse watching the artisans who are making up official girdles for him. I'll go tell him you're here."

Thereupon, he went straight in and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ying the Second and Uncle Wu the Second are here."

"Ask them to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long the two of them found themselves inside, where they saw that there were a considerable number of tailors and artisans working away, hugger-mugger, at their tasks. Hsi-men Ch'ing, wearing an informal skullcap and a brocade robe, was sitting in the veranda with Ch'en Ching-chi, looking on as the latter wrote out his curriculum vitae in an accordion-bound album for presentation to his official superiors. When he saw the two of them, he bowed and offered them a seat.

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh asked, "have you presented your curriculum vitae and your order of appointment yet?"

"This morning," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "I sent a servant to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission to deliver my order of appointment. I'm getting my curriculum vitae ready now, but I haven't sent it to Tung-p'ing prefecture or the district yamen yet."

When he had finished speaking, the page boy, Hua-t'ung, served them with tea. After they were done with the tea, Ying Po-chüeh said nothing about Manager Wu's business but stepped down from the veranda to take a look at the artisans as they worked on the manufacture of the official girdles.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him pick up a girdle to examine it, he played directly to the gallery, saying, "Take a good look. What do you think of these girdles I've managed to procure for myself?"

Ying Po-chüeh:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,⁷

praised them, saying, "Who else but you, Brother, would know where to find the like? Each of them is a finer girdle than the last. They are rarely to be seen as wide and capacious as this. Regarding the rest of them, enough said; but as for this girdle with its decorative plaque of rhinoceros horn, and this one of 'crane's crest red,' you couldn't find the like in the entire metropolis, though you had the money in hand.

I am not flattering you to your face.⁸

They say that Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital, though he may possess girdles of jade and girdles of gold, does not have anything to compare to this rhinoceros horn girdle. This is the horn of the water rhinoceros, not the horn of the dry land rhinoceros. The latter is not worth anything. The horn of the water rhinoceros is called 'Heaven penetrating rhinoceros horn.'⁹ If you don't believe me, bring a bowl of water, put the rhinoceros horn in it, and it will divide the water in two. This is:

A priceless treasure.¹⁰

Moreover, if you ignite it at night it will illuminate an area of a thousand li, and the flame will not be extinguished all night."

"Brother," he went on to ask, "how much silver did it cost you to obtain this rarity?"

"You two try to guess the price," Hsi-men Ch'ing said.

"There's no market rate for things like this," said Ying Po-chüeh. "How could we ever guess correctly?"

"I'll tell you then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This girdle comes from the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang on Main Street. Yesterday evening someone heard that I was in the market for girdles and came particularly to tell me about it. I sent Pen the Fourth back and forth several times with seventy taels of silver to try to buy this girdle from them, but they insisted on holding out for a hundred taels."

"It would be hard to find one as wide and handsome as this," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Brother, when you put it on and go forth in days to come you'll cut quite a figure. Even your colleagues will covet it when they see it."

Thereupon, after fulsomely praising it for a while, he sat down.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Manager Wu and asked him, "Have you delivered your credentials or not?"

"Brother Wu has not yet delivered his credentials," Ying Po-chüeh responded. "Today he has made a point of begging me to trouble you on his behalf. Although he has benefited from your patronage in sending him to the Eastern Capital to escort the consignment of birthday presents, as a result of which he has received this appointment from the grand preceptor, so that it is just as if you had uplifted him yourself, it is also his personal good fortune. As the saying goes:

From the first rank to the ninth rank,¹¹

All are the subjects of the emperor.

However, at the present time he doesn't have any money available at home. So he has besought my aid, saying, 'At present the costs of assuming office, calling upon my superiors, hosting a banquet, and providing myself with appropriate clothing, and the like, will amount to a sizable sum of silver.

One guest does not trouble two hosts.

Where am I to go to come up with it?’

“Brother, there’s no help for it. Out of consideration for me, if you have any silver to spare, lend a few taels to him in order to sustain him in this exigency. If you help him out in this matter, in the future, when he has assumed his official post, he will:

Carry rings and knot grass,¹²
never daring to forget that you are his great benefactor. Aside from the fact that he is an old employee in your establishment, who is accustomed to come and go as your protegee, from first to last, who knows how many officials and functionaries in:

Other cities and other prefectures,
you have helped out in similar circumstances. If you were not to do so, where would you have him go to take care of this matter?”

“Brother Wu,” he went on to say, “bring out that promissory note of yours and let His Honor see it.”

Wu Tien-en hastily pulled it out of his pocket and gave it to Hsi-men Ch’ing to examine. When he saw that it was made out for a loan of a hundred taels of silver, that Ying Po-chüeh was the guarantor, and that it promised to pay interest of five percent per month, Hsi-men Ch’ing took up a brush and crossed out the interest.

“Since Brother Ying the Second is acting as guarantor,” he said, “it will suffice if you repay me the principal of one hundred taels in the future. I imagine you will need a sum of silver like this to negotiate things, both high and low, satisfactorily.”

Thereupon, he put away the promissory note.

Just as he was about to send to the rear compound for the silver, all of a sudden, a card was delivered from Judicial Commissioner Hsia of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, who had also sent along a professional scribe for his benefit. The three categories of functionaries in the yamen had also sent copies of their curricula vitae and deputed twelve orderlies to be placed at his service. They wanted to know the date on which he intended to assume office and what his courtesy name and style were, so that his colleagues in the yamen could prepare the customary gifts when they came to offer their congratulations.

Hsi-men Ch’ing consulted Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, who determined that the stem-branch combination designating the second day of the seventh month ended with the branch *tzü*, which is governed by the god Green Dragon, making it an auspicious day, and that the hour *ch’en* (8:00 A.M.), which is governed by the god Metal-bound Casket, would be an appropriate time at which to assume office.¹³ He therefore sent a calling card with this information to Judicial Commissioner Hsia and rewarded the scribe with five mace of silver, but there is no need to describe this in further detail.

Ying Po-chüeh and Wu Tien-en were still sitting in the summerhouse when what should they see but Ch’en Ching-chi emerging from the rear compound with the sum of a hundred taels of silver in hand.

Hsi-men Ch’ing directed him to give it to Manager Wu, saying, “Brother Wu, in the future if you merely return me the capital that will suffice.”

Wu Tien-en accepted the silver, on the one hand, and then kowtowed in gratitude.

Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “I won’t keep you any longer. Go take care of your business at home. But Brother Ying, here, I’ll retain a while. There’s something I want to talk to you about.”

Wu Tien-en, holding the silver in hand, went out the gate as happy as could be.

Gentle reader take note: Later on, after the death of Hsi-men Ch’ing, the state of the family was such that:

Its fortunes collapsed and its influence declined.

Wu Yüeh-niang preserved a chaste widowhood and gave her maidservant Hsiao-yü to Tai-an as his wife. The household page boy P’ing-an absconded with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop and squandered it on a pair of prostitutes in the Southern Entertainment Quarter. When he was apprehended and brought before Station Master Wu, the latter subjected him to severe finger-squeezing and flogging, coercing him into false testimony that Yüeh-niang had been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an, in order to force her to appear in court, thereby:

Requiting kindness with enmity.

But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it. Truly:

Flowers that do not bear seeds

should not be planted;

People that lack righteousness

should not be cultivated.¹⁴

At this juncture, Pen the Fourth, who had been sent to Tung-p’ing prefecture and the district yamen to deliver copies of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s curriculum vitae, came back to report on his mission, and Hsi-men Ch’ing invited him to join Ying Po-chüeh and himself in keeping company with Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, for a meal.

Just as they were eating their meal, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch’ing’s brother-in-law, Wu K’ai, who had come to pay his respects. Master Hsü then got up to leave and, after a while, Ying Po-chüeh also bade his host farewell, went out the gate, and headed straight for the home of Manager Wu.

Wu Tien-en had already set aside and sealed up ten taels of silver as a guarantor’s fee, which he proffered to Ying Po-chüeh with both hands and then proceeded to kowtow.

Ying Po-chüeh said, “If it hadn’t been for the clever way I broached the subject with him, no matter what you had

done, he could never have been induced to make this loan to you. As for this hundred taels of silver he's given you, no matter how you expend it, both high and low, you won't have any need to spend it all, so you can keep half of it to defray your household expenses."

Wu Tien-en, having duly rewarded Ying Po-chüeh, provided himself with an official girdle and appropriate clothing and selected a propitious day on which to report to his superiors and assume office. But no more of this.

At the same time, the presiding magistrate of the district, Li Ta-t'ien, together with his three principal colleagues, the vice-magistrate, assistant magistrate, and docket officer, sent someone to deliver the traditional congratulatory gifts of mutton and wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Magistrate Li also sent him, along with his card, a young man to wait upon him. He was just seventeen years old and was a native of Ch'ang-shu district in Su-chou prefecture. His nickname was Little Chang Sung,¹⁵ and he had begun his career as a "gate-boy" in the district yamen.¹⁶ He had a naturally clear-cut appearance:

His face looked as though it were powdered,¹⁷

His teeth were white and his lips were red.¹⁸

Moreover:

He knew how to read and write,
and was good at:

Singing southern-style songs.

He was wearing a long gown of black chiffon, sandals, and white socks.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how accomplished the young man appeared to be, he was utterly delighted. He sent a card expressing his appreciation to Magistrate Li, agreed to retain the young man in his service, and changed his name to Shu-t'ung, or Book Boy. He had a complete outfit of clothes made for him, including new boots and a new hat, and did not have him accompany him when he went out on horseback, but put him in charge of his studio, where he was responsible for his social correspondence, and gave him custody of the key to the garden gate.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's crony, Chu Jih-nien, also recommended a fifteen-year-old page boy to wait on him. His name was changed to Ch'i-t'ung, or Chess Boy.¹⁹ Every day he and Ch'in-t'ung were deputed to carry his letter case and card case and accompany him when he went out on horseback.

On the day that he assumed office, Hsi-men Ch'ing hosted a lavish banquet in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Summonses were issued mandating the attendance of musicians from the licensed quarter, together with their file leaders and appearance monitors, to:

Play wind and percussion instruments and sing,
for the entertainment of the guests. The party in the rear hall of the yamen continued until sunset before breaking up.

Every day Hsi-men Ch'ing paraded through the streets riding on a large white horse, wearing on his head the black silk hat of an official, dressed in a round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square of variegated embroidery featuring a lion with a ruffled mane,²⁰ a four-finger-wide girdle with a decorative plaque of gilded aloeswood, and white-soled black boots, escorted by not less than ten orderlies who shouted to clear the way, holding aloft a large black flabellum to protect him from the sun:

Clamoring in front and crowding behind.²¹

When he came home after formally assuming office, he first went to pay his respects to his fellow officials in the prefectural and district yamens, the Regional Military Command, the office of the local military director-in-chief, and the left and right battalions of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, and only after that, to his relatives, friends, and neighbors. His public proceedings were on a gloriously lavish scale, while at home he:

Accepted presents and received cards,

All day long, without ceasing.

Truly:

On a white horse with bloodred trappings

he is newly caparisoned;²²

Even those with no claim to relationship

insist on being related.²³

When fortune comes, even the crudest iron

looks shiny;

When luck recedes, even the truest gold

lacks luster.

From the time that he assumed office, every day Hsi-men Ch'ing officiated in the local yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where he took his place on the bench, held roll call, and tried the cases that came before him.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly.

Before anyone knew it, the full-month celebration²⁴ of Li P'ing-erh's accouchement rolled around. Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and many other female relatives and neighbors all sent presents in honor of Kuan-ko's full-month celebration. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter, on learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing had been appointed to the post of assistant judicial commissioner in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and had concurrently fathered a son, also sent lavish presents

and engaged sedan chairs to come and offer their congratulations.

On that day Hsi-men Ch'ing provided a feast in the great reception hall in the front compound for the entertainment of the female guests. Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all dressed up to befit the occasion and joined Yüeh-niang in the banquet area to pour the wine and hold the flagons for the female guests.

It so happens that every day when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen, on arriving at the reception hall in the front compound he would take off his formal clothes and have Shu-t'ung fold them up for him and put them in his studio, wearing only his official hat as he proceeded into the rear compound. When he got up the next morning, he would send a maidservant to the studio to get them for him.

Recently he had fixed up an antechamber on the west side of the courtyard housing the great reception hall as his studio and furnished it with a bed, desk, table, chairs, a standing screen, brushes, inkstones, a zither, books, and the like. At night Shu-t'ung would place his bedding on the footboard of the bed and sleep there. The next morning, before Hsi-men Ch'ing had appeared, he would straighten things up, sweep the studio clean, and be prepared to wait on him. Whoever's quarters Hsi-men Ch'ing might choose to spend the night in, in the morning a maidservant from those quarters would be sent out to the front compound to fetch his formal clothes for him.

What with all this:

Coming to fetch and taking away,
who would have thought that this young man who, in the first place, had begun his career as a "gate-boy" and was a likely looking lad with a naturally clear-cut appearance, and, in the second place, was given the opportunity of:

Engaging in badinage and repartee,
with the maidservants from all the quarters, should have ended up becoming familiar with them. Thereupon, he secretly struck up a flirtation with Yü-hsiao from the master suite.

One day it was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

The young man had just gotten up, ignited a stick of incense on the surface of the bed in the studio, set his dressing mirror on the windowsill to do his hair, and was engaged in binding it with a red silk ribbon, when, unexpectedly, Yü-hsiao from the master suite pushed open the door and came in.

When she saw what he was doing, she said, "You lousy jailbird! Late as it is, you're still:

Painting your brows and making up your eyes.

Father will be right out as soon as he's finished eating his congee."

Shu-t'ung paid no attention but continued binding up his topknot.

"Father's clothes have been folded up," said Yü-hsiao. "Where did you put them?"

"They're lying right there at the southern end of the bed," Shu-t'ung said.

"He's not wearing that outfit today," said Yü-hsiao. "He told me to tell you that he wants to wear that jet²⁵ brocade round-collared robe emblazoned with a gold lame mandarin square, and the jade-colored undergown."

"That outfit is in the clothes cabinet," said Shu-t'ung. "I put it away only yesterday, and today he wants to wear it again. Sister, open up the door of the cabinet and take it out yourself."

Yü-hsiao, however, did not proceed to get the clothes, but came right up to him and watched him binding his hair.

"You crazy louse of a jailbird!" she teased him. "You're binding your hair with red ribbon just like a woman, and affecting such a bouffant hairdo over your temples too."

Then, noticing that on his undershirt of bleached Hsiang-yang ramie there were suspended a pink silk scent bag and a green silk scent bag, she asked him for one of them, saying, "Give me this pink one."

"Even someone else's prized possession you want for yourself," said Shu-t'ung.

"It's inappropriate for a boy like you to wear a pink one," said Yü-hsiao. "But it would be just right for me."

"It's a good thing that's all you want," said Shu-t'ung. "If it were a man in question, you'd hanker after him too, I suppose."

Yü-hsiao deliberately gave him a pinch on the shoulder, saying, "You lousy jailbird, you're like someone:

Reduced to peddling his effigies of the Gate Gods²⁶

in a narrow passageway:

Who knows what sort of rubbish you'll come up with."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,
she took hold of the two scent bags and, without bothering to untie them, tore them loose from the cords by which they were fastened, and tucked them into her sleeve.

"You're certainly no respecter of persons," protested Shu-t'ung. "You've managed to rip my girdle apart."

Yü-hsiao gave him a playful blow with her fist, which provoked Shu-t'ung into responding, "Sister, stop pestering me. Wait until I've finished binding up my hair."

"Let me ask you," said Yü-hsiao, "since I haven't heard. Where's Father off to today?"

"Today," Shu-t'ung replied, "Father's going to see off the third officer in the district yamen, Assistant Magistrate Hua Ho-lu. There's to be a party hosted by Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the local imperial estates. He should get home early. This afternoon, I understand, he's arranged to meet with Uncle Ying the Second in order to pay out the silver for the purchase price of the Ch'iao family's property across the street. They'll be having a drink over there."

"You wait right here. Don't go anywhere else," said Yü-hsiao. When I come back, I'll have something to say to you."

"I understand," said Shu-t'ung.

Thereupon, having reached an understanding with him, Yü-hsiao took the clothes and went straight back to the rear compound.

In a little while, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, called for Shu-t'ung, and instructed him, "You stay at home. Don't go anywhere else. First off, I want you to write out twelve invitations, on scarlet paper, with sealed envelopes. Tomorrow, on the twenty-eighth, I'm inviting some official guests to a party to celebrate the birth of Kuan-ko. Tell Lai-hsing to purchase the provisions, engage the necessary cooks and waiters, and see that all the place settings are properly prepared. Send Tai-an with two orderlies to deliver the invitations and engage the singing girls. Let Ch'in-t'ung stay here to look after the wine for the female guests."

When he had finished with his instructions, Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and set off for his farewell party.

By this time the female guests invited by Wu Yüeh-niang and her sorority of concubines had all arrived. At first they were served tea in the summerhouse, and only after that did they take their seats in the great reception hall, where:

Screens display their peacocks' tails, and

Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.²⁷

Four singing girls had been engaged to play and sing for the entertainment of the company.

Sure enough, Hsi-men Ch'ing did return home in the early afternoon, where a table setting of wine and delicacies had been set aside for him. After inviting Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'en Ching-chi to join him, he set out with seven hundred taels of silver in hand for the closing on his purchase of the Ch'iao family property across the street.

While the female guests were in the midst of drinking their wine, lo and behold, Yü-hsiao secreted a silver flagon of wine, along with four pears and a tangerine and headed straight for the antechamber to give them to Shu-t'ung to enjoy. When she pushed open the door, to her surprise, Shu-t'ung was not there. Fearing lest someone should see what she was doing, she set her burden down, flagon and all, and took herself off.

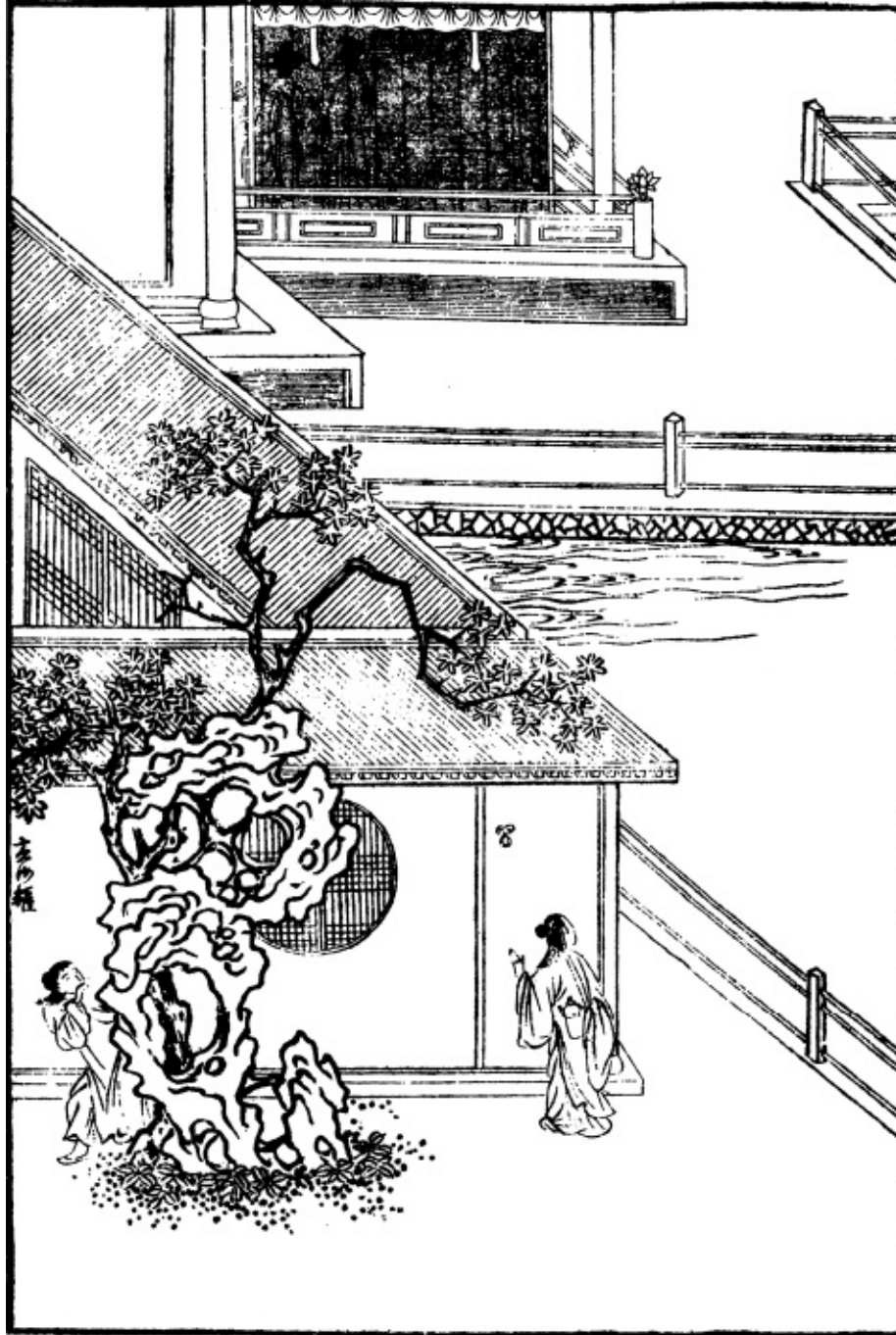
Strange as it may seem,

Ch'in-t'ung, who was tending to the wine up in the reception hall, happened to look out with a sardonic eye and catch sight of Yü-hsiao going into the studio, and then, after a while, coming out again. Assuming that Shu-t'ung was inside, without anyone's knowing it, he slipped into the room himself to see what was up.

Who could have anticipated that Shu-t'ung had gone out and not yet returned, but the flagon of warm wine and the fruit were still sitting there under the bed. Ch'in-t'ung hastily hid the fruit in his sleeve and then, concealing the flagon of wine behind his body, carried it straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Ying-ch'un and her mistress were both in the reception hall and had not yet come back from the party. Only the wet nurse, Ju-i, and Hsiu-ch'un were in the room looking after Kuan-ko.

"Where is Elder Sister?" Ch'in-t'ung asked as soon as he came in the door.

"She's up in the reception hall," replied Hsiu-ch'un, "pouring wine for the mistress. Why do you ask?"



Ch'in-t'ung Conceals a Flagon after Spying on Yü-hsiao

"I've got hold of something good that I want her to keep for me," said Ch'in-t'ung.

"What is it?" asked Hsiu-ch'un, but he refused to produce it.

As they were talking, Ying-ch'un came in from the reception hall, carrying a plate of roast goose and a saucerful of steamed corn flour pastries with rose-flavored stuffings for the wet nurse to eat.

When she caught sight of Ch'in-t'ung, she said, "You lousy jailbird! What are you laughing at here instead of being up in the reception hall tending to the wine?"

Only then did Ch'in-t'ung pull the flagon out from underneath his clothes, and say, "Sister Ying-ch'un, keep this for me."

"This is one of the flagons used for pouring wine in the reception hall," said Ying-ch'un. "Why have you bothered to bring it here for no reason at all?"

"Sister," said Ch'in-t'ung, "don't you worry about that. This is a case of Yü-hsiao from the master suite:

Playing at sevens and eights,
with that page boy Shu-t'ung. She purloined this flagon of wine, along with a tangerine and some pears, and brought them to the studio for him to enjoy. When I saw that no one was looking, I lifted them off him for myself. You just keep them good and safe for me. No matter who comes looking for them, if you don't trot them out, I'll have picked up something for nothing."

Thereupon he pulled out the pears and the tangerine for Ying-ch'un to see and said, "This is perfect for me, since, after I finish tending to the wine, it's my turn to spend the night at the house on Lion Street."

"In a little while," said Ying-ch'un, "if they turn the place upside down looking for the flagon, you'll take responsibility for it, I suppose?"

"After all, I'm not the one that stole their flagon," said Ch'in-t'ung. "It's true for everyone that while:

Those actually involved may be disturbed,
Those removed from the scene are relaxed.
What's it got to do with me?"

When he had finished speaking, he went nonchalantly off without more ado. Ying-ch'un put the flagon out of sight on a table in the inner room, but no more of this.

That evening, when the party broke up, the utensils were checked, and a flagon was found to be missing. Yü-hsiao went to the studio to look for it but came up empty-handed, for it was nowhere to be found.

When she asked Shu-t'ung about it, he said, "I was out on an errand and don't know anything about it."

Yü-hsiao then proceeded to panic and tried her best to blame it all on Hsiao-yü.

"You must have been screwed silly, you whore!" Hsiao-yü cursed at her. "I was in the rear compound seeing to the tea, while you were holding the flagon in order to pour wine for Mother at the party. And now that the flagon has disappeared, you try to blame it on me."

A thorough search was conducted, but it did not turn up.

After some time, Li P'ing-erh returned to her quarters, where Ying-ch'un reported, thus and so, to her, "Ch'in-t'ung brought one in here and asked me to keep it safe for him."

"That jailbird!" Li P'ing-erh exclaimed. "What did he bring that flagon of theirs in here for? In the rear compound, all on account of this flagon, the place is really being turned upside down. Yü-hsiao is blaming it on Hsiao-yü. Hsiao-yü is blaming it on Yü-hsiao. That senior maidservant is so upset she's:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
while all she can do is cry. You'd better take it back there immediately. If there's any further delay, I promise you, it'll be you that ends up being blamed for it, you little whore!"

Only then did Ying-ch'un bring out the flagon and prepare to take it back to the rear compound.

Meanwhile, in the rear compound, Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü were still quarreling over the disappearance of the flagon, and the two of them carried their dispute to Yüeh-niang.

"You lousy little stinkers!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "What are you still presuming to make such a ruckus about? What were the two of you in charge of at the time the flagon disappeared?"

"I was in the reception hall helping Mother serve wine to the guests," declared Yü-hsiao, "while she was in charge of the silver utensils. Now that it's disappeared, she's trying to blame it on me."

"Mother's senior sister-in-law wanted some tea," protested Hsiao-yü, "so didn't I go back to the rear compound to fetch it? Since it was you who were holding the flagon, how did it come to disappear? I dare say:

The hole in your bottom's so big:
Your mind has dropped out,²⁸

or something of the sort."

"I fear there weren't any unfamiliar people at the party today," said Yüeh-niang, "so how could something just disappear like that? Let's wait a bit and see if this flagon won't turn up somewhere. If we wait until your master gets wind of it, and the flagon is still missing, I promise you there'll be a beating for each of you."

"If Father gives me a beating," expostulated Yü-hsiao, "and I ever let that whore off the hook, I might as well quit."

As they continued to wrangle, who should walk in from the outside but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who asked, "What's all the ruckus about?"

Yüeh-niang told him about the disappearance of the flagon.

"Just take your time and look for it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What's the point of making such a fuss about it, for no good reason?"

"If you lose a flagon like this every time you have a party," said P'an Chin-lien, "and don't make a fuss about it:

Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang;²⁹
When the first sample of vinegar is not sour,
The whole batch will turn out to be insipid."³⁰

Gentle reader take note: These words of Chin-lien's were intended to reflect satirically on the fact that though Li P'ing-erh was the first woman in the household to bear a child, something valuable had been lost on the occasion of its full-month celebration, which was an unlucky omen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing understood this clearly enough but did not utter a sound.

What should they see at this point but Ying-ch'un coming in to return the flagon.

"So the flagon is here after all!" exclaimed Yü-hsiao.

"Where did this flagon actually turn out to be?" Yüeh-niang asked Ying-ch'un.

Ying-ch'un explained all about it, saying, "Ch'in-t'ung brought it into my mistress's quarters from outside somewhere and asked me to keep it for him. I don't know where it came from."

Yüeh-niang then asked, "Where is that slave, Ch'in-t'ung, right now?"

"It's his turn today to spend the night in the house on Lion Street," said Tai-an.

Chin-lien, who was standing to one side, couldn't help snickering at this.

"Just what are you laughing at?" Hsi-men Ch'ing then demanded to know.

"Ch'in-t'ung is *her* servant, after all," said Chin-lien. "And he stashed the flagon in *her* quarters. He must have had some reason for wanting to conceal the whereabouts of the flagon. If it were up to me, I'd send a page boy after that slave right now and subject him to a real beating, in order to get to the bottom of this. Otherwise, those two maidservants will have been falsely accused. Truly, that would be to:

Let the guardian deity escape while
indicting the Buddha."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became enraged, opened his eyes wide, looked directly at Chin-lien, and said, "From the way you put it, no doubt Sister Li was so enamored of this flagon that she appropriated it herself! Just let well enough alone, why don't you? What reason do you have to make such a fuss about it?"

Chin-lien's face turned crimson with embarrassment, and she said, "I certainly never meant to imply that Sister Li doesn't have enough money of her own."

When she had finished speaking, she withdrew to one side in a huff.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was then invited away by Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in, saying, "Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, has sent someone to deliver a gift. You'd better go up front to see him."

Chin-lien, who was standing to one side with Meng Yü-lou, started to curse, saying, "You'll come to a bad end, you lousy ruffian, sorting people so differentially into:

Three classes and nine categories.³¹

The last few days, the way you've been carrying on, you'd think you could defy death itself. Ever since she gave birth to this seedling, you've been treating her just as though she'd produced the crown prince. But when you run into the rest of us, you're like the incarnation of a baleful deity and haven't so much as a good word to say for us. Whatever we do, you open wide those two cunt-hole eyes of yours and start yelling at us. Who doesn't know that Sister Li's got money? In the future, I suppose, when her page boys and maidservants have been allowed to get away with their fornication and thievery till they've screwed everyone in sight, you'll still refuse to crack down on them."

As she was speaking, they noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing, after sitting a while longer, got up and went out to the front compound.

"Aren't you going, too?" Meng Yü-lou asked. "He's sure to be headed for your place."

"As he said himself," Chin-lien retorted, "it's more lively when there's a child in the place. The quarters of people like us, who don't have any children, are forlorn."

As they were speaking, what should they see but Ch'un-mei coming in from the outside.

"I told you he was headed for your place," said Meng Yü-lou, "and you wouldn't believe it. Now Ch'un-mei has come to fetch you."

She then called Ch'un-mei over to ask her.

"I've come to ask Yü-hsiao for my handkerchief," said Ch'un-mei. "She borrowed my handkerchief to wear today."

"Where is your father?" asked Yü-lou.

"Father has gone to the Sixth Lady's place," Ch'un-mei replied.

When Chin-lien heard this, it was just as though a torch had been applied to her heart, and she started to curse, saying, "That lousy ruffian! In the future:

For a thousand years or all eternity,

I'd rather see him break his leg than try to come into my room. If he so much as sets foot on the threshold, that incorrigible jailbird, may he break his anklebone!"

"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "why are you denouncing him so venomously today?"

"That's not it at all," said Chin-lien. "It's just that that lousy three-inch good-for-nothing of a ruffian has a:

Rat-stomach chicken-gut,³²

heart with a capacity of no more than three inches. We're all your wives after all. Only because she's produced this piddling bladder's spawn of hers, do you mean to say you're going to carry on like this? What do you mean by:

Raising one person up, and

Putting another down,³³

only to:

Trample them into the mud?"³⁴

Truly:

Whenever a great wind blows down

the phoenix tree,
There are sure to be bystanders
to comment on it.³⁵

Chin-lien continued to make a show of her temper. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the front compound, he found that Eunuch Director Hsüeh had sent a servant to deliver a jar of wine from the imperial palace, a sheep, two bolts of satin brocade, a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, and four rare delicacies; in the first place, to wish him a happy birthday; and in the second place, to offer his congratulations. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave the messenger a generous tip and sent him on his way.

When he returned to the rear compound, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh were preparing to take their leave and go home.

"The two of you ought to stay over another day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow, the twenty-eighth, I've invited His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, His Honor Hsia Yen-ling of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, His Honor Ching Chung, the military director-in-chief, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the imperial estates, and Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, to a birthday party. There will be a troupe of tumblers and actors from the licensed quarter, so all the two of you will have to do is serve the wine."

"If you're going to keep us here," said Kuei-chieh, "I'd better send someone home to let Mother know, so she'll be less inclined to worry."

Thereupon, the sedan chairs of the two of them were sent on their way. But no more of this.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the great reception hall prepared by:

Arraying brocaded screens, and
Spreading out silken tablecloths,

for the party for official guests, the invitations to which had already been issued in advance. Because, the previous day, he had met Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, while he was being entertained at the imperial estates, and that dignitary had joined with Eunuch Director Hsüeh in sending him gifts for the occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had also sent an invitation to him. He had also invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to help keep his guests company. By lunchtime, having dressed themselves to befit the occasion, the two of them had already arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had ushered them into the summerhouse, where they were served tea.

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "what particular guests have you invited to the party today?"

"There are the two Eunuch Directors, Liu and Hsüeh," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, my colleague Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, and my brothers-in-law, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second. My old neighbor, Ch'iao Hung, just sent someone over today to say that he couldn't make it. Together with the two of you, that's all the guests there are."

No sooner had he finished speaking than Wu K'ai and Wu the Second arrived, bowed in greeting, and sat down with them. The attendants set up a table and served something to eat.

When they had finished eating, Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "At the full-month celebration yesterday, was your son brought out and shown to the company?"

"The assembled female guests did want to see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but my wife said not to bring him out lest he catch a cold. His wet nurse said it didn't matter. So she told the wet nurse to wrap him in a quilt and bring him out to the master suite so everyone could have a glimpse of him in honor of the day, after which she took him back to his mother's room."

"Sister-in-law also invited my wife that day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and she wanted very much to come. But in the midst of all the goings on, that old ailment of hers broke out again, and she was unable to get up from her k'ang. She was as upset as could be about it. Right now, before the other guests have come, why don't you say the word and have your son brought out so we can have a look at him?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then gave the directions, "Have Kuan-ko carefully brought out from the rear compound, but don't do anything to frighten him. Tell your mistress that my elder brother-in-law and second brother-in-law are here, along with Ying the Second and Mr. Hsieh, who would like to take a look at him."

Yüeh-ning told the wet nurse, Ju-i, to wrap him tightly in a little red satin quilt and take him as far as the postern gate leading to the summerhouse, where she could turn him over to Tai-an to carry the rest of the way.

The company opened their eyes wide and took a good look at him. Kuan-ko was wearing an undershirt of scarlet silk:

His face was white and his lips were red,
and he had quite an affluent appearance. Everyone sang his praises and paid him exaggerated compliments without end.

Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta each pulled out of his sleeve a satin brocade waistband with a small silver pendant attached, but Po-chüeh also presented a skein of variegated threads on which there were strung ten or more "longevity coins."

Turning these gifts over to Tai-an, Ying Po-chüeh said, "See that you carry him carefully back to his room. Don't do anything to frighten the baby."

He then continued by saying, "His features are regular. He's the natural-born embryo of someone fated to wear the silk hat of an official."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted, bowed, and thanked the two of them for their generous presents.

"Don't embarrass us, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. "These are no more than tokens of our esteem."

As they were speaking, it was suddenly announced that Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to don his formal clothes and went out to the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard to greet them. The two eunuchs arrived riding in sedan chairs borne by four bearers each, wearing python robes on which the body of the python extended around their shoulders,³⁶ and escorted by a contingent of soldiers with tasseled spears who shouted to clear the way.

Hsi-men Ch'ing first ushered them into the great reception hall, where he paid his respects, ran through the customary social amenities, and saw that they were served with tea.

After that, in no time at all, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and the other military officials, dressed in clothing of figured brocade, escorted by soldiers holding rattan rods and large flabella who shouted to clear the way, and accompanied by their subordinates, all arrived at the front gate. The whole area was rendered black by the number of their servitors, while inside:

Drums and music resound to the heavens,³⁷

Pipes and flutes are alternately heard.

As they were about to take their seats preparatory to the serving of the wine, they were introduced to the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh. There were twelve tables arranged along the upper end of the hall. On all of them:

Valances are fastened with brocade ribbons,

Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.

On each table were arrayed:

Cone-shaped piles of fruit and ingot-shaped cakes.

On the floor were spread:

Brocade carpets and embroidered rugs.

Hsi-men Ch'ing started off by urging his guests, with flagon in hand, to take their seats, but the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, repeatedly declined to take the seats of honor, saying, "What about these other distinguished gentlemen?"



Hsi-men Ch'ing Holds a Feast and Drinks Celebratory Wine

"The two senior eunuch directors," said Commandant Chou:

"Are exalted in both age and virtue.

As the saying goes:

Those who have served as palace eunuchs for three years,

Take precedence over princes and dukes.

Of course they are entitled to the seats of honor.

What need is there for further discussion?"

After they had dickered politely for a while, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "Brother Liu, since the distinguished gentlemen are unwilling to precede us, we are making things difficult for our host. Let's take our seats and be done with it."

Thereupon, after bowing all the way around to salute the company, first Eunuch Liu on the left and then Eunuch Hsüeh on the right, having first had handkerchiefs placed on their seats, and accompanied by two page boys to fan them, finally took their places. Only after that did Commandant Chou, Military Director-in-chief Ching, and the rest do likewise.

Before long, from beneath the steps, they heard:

The strains of a classic melody,³⁸

as the musicians began to play. What were the revels like that day? Behold:

Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,

Fruits were provided just in season.

Before long:

Five rounds of wine had been consumed, and

Three courses of soup had been served.

The chef then came out and carved the minor entree of roast goose, after which Eunuch Liu, occupying as he did the seat of honor, rewarded him with five mace of silver.

The file leader from the Music Office then knelt down and proffered him a scarlet paper, accordion-bound album listing the program of pieces they were prepared to perform, after which, in the courtyard below the steps, the actors put on a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen.³⁹

First the *wai* (*supernumerary male role*), playing the Adjutant, comes on and recites the opening verse:

wai:

When laws are just Heaven's attitude is favorable;

When officials are honest the populace is content.

When the wife is worthy the husband's mishaps are few;

When children are filial the father's mind is relieved.⁴⁰

It's not as though I were anyone else. I'm the Adjutant of this troupe, with many a star performer among the strolling players at my disposal. Yesterday in the marketplace I bought a standing screen on which there was inscribed a poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion.⁴¹ I asked someone about it, and he said that it was composed by Wang Po⁴² of the Tang dynasty, who won success in the Palace Examination, though he was not quite three feet tall.⁴³ He also said that this person could:

Create a composition with a flourish of the brush;⁴⁴

and that he was:

Extensively possessed of knowledge and erudition;

in short, a man of talent. Now I might as well call for the *fu-mo* (*supporting male role*) to go looking for him and invite him over so I can make his acquaintance; why not? Where's the *fu-mo*?

fu-mo:

From in the hall a single call;

Below the steps a hundred yeps.⁴⁵

At your service, Adjutant. What is your command?"

wai:

Yesterday I observed that the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion inscribed on that standing screen is very well written. I've heard that it was composed by Wang Po of the T'ang dynasty, who won success in the Palace Examination, though he was not quite three feet tall. Now here's a yardstick to measure him by. I want you to go looking for him immediately, and invite him over. If you are successful, I'll reward you with a mace of silver. If you are unsuccessful, you'll get twenty lashes with a hempen rope. I'll beat you for certain and not let you off.

fu-mo:

I understand, (*mimes exiting*) This Adjutant is a fool! As for that Palace Graduate Wang Po, from the T'ang period to the present time is not less than a thousand years or more. Where would he have me go to look for him? All I can do is:

Come this way and go that way,
until I arrive at the gate of the Confucian Temple. In the distance, there, I see an erudite-looking scholar coming this way. What else can I do but ask him. "Sir, are you, by any chance, the Palace Graduate Wang Po who composed the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion and are not quite three feet tall?"

ching (*comic-villain role, playing a scholar; aside, laughing*):

The Palace Graduate Wang Po was a man of the T'ang dynasty. Where would one find him today? I'll just play him along and see what happens, (*addresses him*) Yes, I am the Palace Graduate Wang Po, and it was I who composed the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion. I'll recite a few lines from the preface to convince you.

The city of Nan-ch'ang in the old Yü-chang commandery,
Is now the metropolis of the new Hung-chou prefecture.
It accords celestially with the mansions I and Chen ...⁴⁶
The effulgence of its dragon swords shoots
up to the Herd Boy and the Dipper.⁴⁷
Its men are superlative and its territory is numinous;
The worthiness of Hsü Chih induced Ch'en Fan
to lower his suspended cot.⁴⁸

fu-mo:

The Adjutant gave me this yardstick and said he only wanted someone who is three feet tall, and if he should be off by so much as a finger's-width, not to invite him. With that body of yours, how could you ever pass muster?

ching:

That doesn't matter.

The Way is what man makes of it.⁴⁹

Look over there. Another Palace Graduate Wang Po is coming this way. (*mimes adopting the posture of a dwarf*)

fu-mo:

I'll measure him with this yardstick.

ching:

I'll shrink myself a little further.

fu-mo: (*laughing*)

You'll pass muster, I guess.

ching:

There's just one thing. When I see this Adjutant of yours, be sure to remember; whatever happens, I've simply got to have a low stool to rest on. Now we:

Come this way and go that way,
until we arrive at the Adjutant's gate.

fu-mo: (*orders the ching*)

You wait outside.

ching:

I've simply got to have a low stool to rest on.

fu-mo: (goes inside to report to the Adjutant)

wai:

Have you been successful in inviting that Palace Graduate Wang Po?

fu-mo:

He's waiting outside the gate this very moment.

wai:

Tell him I'm waiting to meet him inside the ceremonial gate that leads into the second courtyard. I'll regale him with tea flavored with hazelnuts and pine seeds, sliced roast meat, and congee, (*they mime greeting each other*)

wai:

This really is none other than the Palace Graduate Wang Po.

Were one but to see your distinguished features,
Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.⁵⁰

Pray accept my kowtow.

ching: (miming consternation)

Where is that low stool?

wai: (continues)

From ancient times until the present day,
Such good fortune is not easily met with.⁵¹

Though I have:

Heard of your name without having seen your face,
today I find:

Seeing your face is better than hearing your name.⁵²

Allow me to kowtow again.

ching: (miming consternation)

Where is that low stool?

fu-mo: (mimes running off stage)

wai:

I have heard that you possess:

Broad erudition and an extensive memory,
and that:

Your brush engenders dragons and serpents.⁵³

Truly, you must be a man of talent. Your servant is:
Like a thirsty person longing for drink;
Like a parched person longing for coolness.⁵⁴
Allow me to kowtow to you twice more.

ching: (urgently breaking in)

Is your father well? Is your mother well? Are your elder and your younger sister, and the other members of your household all well?

wai:

They're all well.

ching:

Why you mother-fucking dog! If the members of your household, both high and low, are all in such good shape; (*straightening himself up*) I shouldn't have to stay bent out of shape any longer.
Truly: (*recites the closing verse*)

A hundred jewels adorn her girdle,
Pearls entwine her leather sleevelets.
A smile moves dimples near her eyes,
Dance done, brocade enwraps her head.⁵⁵

Another round of wine was served at the feast, and the audience of officials all laughed. Eunuch Director Hsüeh was delighted. He called up the head of the troupe and rewarded him with a tael of silver, after which the man kowtowed to express his thanks.

Before long, Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy actors, came before them to play and sing. One of them accompanied himself on the psaltery and the other on the *p'i-p'a*.

Commandant Chou first raised his hand and deferred to the two eunuchs, saying, "The senior eunuch directors should condescend to instruct these two as to what song suites they should perform."

"You distinguished gentlemen go first," said Eunuch Liu.

"Senior Eunuch Directors," said Commandant Chou:

"It is a self-evident principle;⁵⁶

There is no need for discussion."

Eunuch Director Liu then said, "Let the two boys perform the song suite that begins with the line:

Alas! This floating life of ours
is like a dream."⁵⁷

"Senior Eunuch Director," said Commandant Chou, "That is a piece about the life of retirement and disillusion with the world. Today we are celebrating His Honor Hsi-men's happy event, and it is also his birthday. It wouldn't do to sing that."

Eunuch Director Liu tried again, asking, "Can you sing the song suite that begins with the lines:

Though I am not one of the eight ministers
entitled to wear the purple sash;
I command the denizens of the six palaces
with their golden hairpins.⁵⁸

"That is from the tsa-chü drama *Ch'en Lin Pao chuang-ho* (Ch'en Lin carrying the dressing-case)," said Commandant Chou. "Today is a celebratory occasion. It wouldn't do to sing that."

"Have those two come up here," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh. "Let me tell them what to do. You know that set of songs to the tune 'Plucking the Cassia'⁵⁹ that begins with the line:

It seems that in this life the hardest thing
to bear is separation.⁶⁰

Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling laughed out loud at this, saying, "Senior Eunuch Director, that piece is on the subject of separation. It's even more inappropriate for this occasion."

"Our responsibilities as eunuchs are such," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "that all we know how to do is to wait upon the pleasure of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years. We have no taste for the subtleties of lyrics or songs. Let them sing

whatever they want.”

Judicial Commissioner Hsia, after all, held a substantive appointment in the Imperial Insignia Guard and was able to rely on his status as an officer in the legal system, so, when one of the musicians came up, he instructed him, “You sing the song suite entitled ‘Thirty Melodies.’⁶¹ Today we are celebrating His Honor Hsi-men’s:

Appointment to office and augmented emolument.

And it is also his birthday. And, in addition he has had:

The joy of giving his son a jade scepter to play with.⁶²

That is the appropriate suite to sing.”

“What is all this about:

The joy of giving his son a jade scepter to play with?”

Eunuch Director Hsüeh asked.

“My two senior eunuch directors,” said Commandant Chou. “Today is also the full-month celebration for the birth of His Honor Hsi-men’s young scion. We colleagues of his have all brought meager gifts in honor of the occasion.”

Eunuch Director Hsüeh started to say, “We,” and then, turning to Eunuch Director Liu, said, “Brother Liu, I guess we’ll have to make restitution by bringing our congratulatory gifts tomorrow.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing expressed his gratitude, saying, “The fact that your pupil has been able to sire a shoat or a whelp:

Is not worthy of congratulation.

There is really no need for the senior eunuch directors to go to so much trouble.”

When he had finished speaking, he summoned Tai-an and told him to call Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh out from the rear compound to serve a round of wine at the feast. The two singing girls made themselves up and came outside, then:

Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,

facing the company:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

Just as though inserting tapers in their holders,

they kowtowed four times. After which, they stood up, took flagons in hand, and respectfully offered a serving of wine to each person present. The two musicians then proceeded to sing a new set of song lyrics:

The sound of their singing is melodious;

truly possessing:

A timbre that lingers around the rafters.⁶³

That evening the company was entertained:

First with singing and then with dancing,

Amid clinging brocade and clustering blossoms.⁶⁴

The drinking continued until after the first watch of the night before Eunuch Director Hsüeh stood up and said, “Your pupils, in the first place, have already benefited excessively from your lavish hospitality; and in the second place, because it has been such an occasion for rejoicing, have been insensibly enticed into drinking too deeply, and disturbing you to the fullest possible extent. We beg to take our leave.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing replied, “In response to my:

Humble invitation for a cup of tea,

You have condescended to pay a visit,

thereby abruptly:

Enhancing the glory of my humble abode.⁶⁵

I hope you will relax and stay a little longer,

In order to exhaust your remaining pleasure.”

All the guests then got up from their places and said, “Your pupils have put you to a great deal of trouble.

The effects of the drink are more than we can handle.”

Each of them then:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance,⁶⁶

as an expression of gratitude. Hsi-men Ch’ing repeatedly urged them to stay, but to no avail. All he could do was to accompany them to the main gate, along with his eldest brother-in-law, Wu K’ai, and Wu the Second. There, as the strains of:

Drums and music resound to the heavens,

while on either side:

Lanterns and torches flare resplendently,⁶⁷

With crowds of escorts in front and behind,⁶⁸

setting up a shout to clear the way, they made their departure.

Truly, it is a case of:

When happy one dislikes the shortness of the day,⁶⁹

Deliberately burning high candles to illuminate

the red makeup of the crab apples.⁷⁰

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 32

LI KUEI-CHIEH ADOPTS A MOTHER AND IS ACCEPTED AS A DAUGHTER; YING PO-CHÜEH CRACKS JOKES AND DANCES ATTENDANCE ON SUCCESS

As the saying goes, "Riches constitute the
foundation of distinction";
When "wealth" is "flourishing" it begets "the official"
as everybody knows.
To get a leg up on the road to officialdom
one must rely on patronage;
Only by means of truckling to the powerful
can one hope for promotion.
Marriage alliances with factional malefactors
will make everyone fear you;
If one relies on the influence of the prominent
who will dare to defy you?
It were better to forgo the blaze of success
in favor of tranquility;
How can human effort hope to contend
with the decree of fate?¹

THE STORY GOES that when the party for the group of officials broke up that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing urged his elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to stay a little longer.

He arranged for the musicians and other performers to be provided with wine and food and, when they had finished, instructed them, "You must come back again and do another stint tomorrow. I have invited the four principal officers from the district yamen to a party, so be sure that you are properly attired for the occasion. When it's all over, I'll compensate you for both days' work at the same time."

"We will, of course, do our best," responded the musicians. "Tomorrow we'll report for work in brand new regulation costumes."

As soon as they had finished consuming their wine and food, they left.

After a while, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh came out with their hair done up in kerchiefs and said, with an ingratiating smile, "Father, we fear it's getting late. Our sedan chairs have come for us. We'd better be off."

"My children," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're certainly having an easy time of it. The two old gentlemen are still here, but rather than offering to sing a song for our senior brother-in-law, you just want to take off, do you?"

"If you hadn't spoken up," said Li Kuei-chieh, "you might have been written off as a dog who couldn't bark. We haven't been home for two days now. Who knows how anxious Mother may be to see me?"

"What's she so anxious to see?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Have you pinched a jade yellow "imperial damson"² for her, or what?"

"That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. Let the two of them go. After all, they've been exerting themselves for two days in a row. I'll get Li Ming and Wu Hui to sing us a song."

"Have you had anything to eat?" he then went on to ask.

"Just now, the First Lady gave us something to eat in the master suite," said Li Kuei-chieh.

Thereupon, they both prostrated themselves and kowtowed as though inserting tapers in their holders.

"The two of you must come again day after tomorrow," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed them, "and also engage another two singing girls on my behalf. It doesn't matter who you get. Cheng Ai-hsiang would do, and Han Chin-ch'uan would do also. I'm throwing a party for my relatives and friends."

"What a piece of luck for the little whores," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you have them engage the singing girls for you, they'll collect the commission to spend on themselves."

"You're not a 'cribber'³ yourself," exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "How do you come to know so much about it?"

After saying which, they departed, laughing as they went.

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, "who are you going to invite the day after tomorrow?"

"That day," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I plan to invite my old neighbor, Ch'iao Hung, my two senior brothers-in-law, Hua the Elder, Mr. Shen, the husband of my wife's elder sister, and all the sworn brothers from our club. We'll make a day of it."

"It goes without saying," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that we have imposed too much on you as it is. The day after tomorrow, the two of us ought to come early so we can help you out by serving as assistant hosts."

"That would be only too kind of you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When they had finished speaking, Li Ming and Wu Hui came up with their instruments and sang a song suite for them. Only after that did elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, and the rest of the guests get up to go. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited the four principal officers from the district yamen to a party, and they sent gifts beforehand to congratulate him on having just sired a son. That day Eunuch Director Hsüeh arrived early, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse and served him with tea.

Eunuch Director Hsüeh then asked, "Eunuch Liu hasn't sent his gift yet, has he?"

"Eunuch Director Liu has already sent a gift," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied.

After some time, Eunuch Hsüeh said, "Might I request that your son be brought out so that I can have a look at him and wish him a long life?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to refuse this request and could only instruct Tai-an, "Go back to the rear compound and tell them to have the baby brought out."

Before long, the wet nurse brought Kuan-ko out as far as the postern gate leading into the garden, where she turned him over to Tai-an to carry the rest of the way.

When Eunuch Hsüeh saw the baby, all he could do was to sing his praises, exclaiming, "What a wonderful little brother!"

He then called out, "Where are my page boys?"

In no time at all, two servants clad in black produced a pair of square lacquer gift boxes decorated with inlaid gilt designs, containing a bolt of red government-quality shot silk, four gold-plated silver coins bearing the characters for:

Good fortune, long life, health, and tranquility,⁴
a toy clapper-drum⁵ decorated with a varicolored, gold-flecked portrait of the God of Longevity, and two tael's worth of silver trinkets in the shape of the "eight treasures."

"I am but a poor eunuch," he said, "with nothing fit to offer. I only hope your son will find these insignificant gifts amusing."

Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed and thanked him, saying, "I am much indebted to Your Excellency for your consideration."

When they had finished looking at the presents, Kuan-ko was carried back to his room. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company as he drank his tea, after which an Eight Immortals table⁶ was set out and refreshments provided in the form of twelve bowls of assorted appetizers and fresh new rice.

No sooner had they finished eating than the gatekeeper came in to announce that the four principal officers of the district yamen had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily adjusted his attire and went out to the gate that led into the second courtyard to greet them. They were District Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien, Vice-Magistrate Ch'ien Ch'eng, Assistant Magistrate Jen T'ing-kuei,⁷ and Docket Officer Hsia Kung-chi.

Each of them first presented his calling card and then performed the rituals of greeting in the reception hall. Only after this did Eunuch Hsüeh come out to meet them. The assembled officials all insisted that Eunuch Hsüeh take the seat of honor. Among those present was the provincial graduate Shang Hsiao-t'ang, who also came out to greet them. After they had taken the seats appropriate for guests and host, a round of tea was served.

In a little while, from beneath the steps:

Drums and music begin to sound,
Pipes and voices rise in concert.

Wine was served, and someone from the Music Office presented the program, from which Eunuch Hsüeh picked the four scenes of the tsa-chü drama entitled *Han Hsiang-tzu sheng-hsien chi* (Han Hsiang-tzu induces Ch'en Pan-chieh to ascend to the realm of the immortals).⁸ A number of ensemble dance pieces were also presented, performed with superb execution. Eunuch Hsüeh was delighted by this and called on his attendants for two strings of cash with which to reward the performers. We will say no more about how the group of officials continued their drinking until evening before the party broke up.

To resume our story, when Li Kuei-chieh arrived home, in recognition of the fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing had become a judicial commissioner, she and the old procuress:

Laid plans and hatched a scheme.

The next day, she bought a box of stuffed pastries, a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two bottles of wine, and a pair of women's shoes, consigned the load of gifts to a servant to carry, and set out in a sedan chair, first thing in the morning, in order to make obeisance to Wu Yüeh-niang as her godmother, and get herself accepted as an adopted daughter.

When she came in, before doing anything else, she faced Yüeh-niang with an ingratiating smile and proceeded:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
to perform:

Four brace makes eight kowtows.⁹

Only after that did she kowtow to her aunt and to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

This had the effect of so cozening Yüeh-niang that she was utterly delighted and said, "The other day we received a

lavish present from your mother, and today you have put yourself to the trouble of buying all these gifts."

Kuei-chieh laughed, saying, "Mother says that since Father has now become an official, it's not like it used to be when he could frequent the licensed quarter all the time. I'd be more than willing to settle for the status of your adopted daughter, so we could come and go as relatives, and I could visit in your home."

This flustered Yüeh-niang to such an extent that she hastily told her to take off her outside clothes and sit down.



Li Kuei-chieh Adopts a Mother and Is Accepted as a Daughter

After her things had been put away, Yüeh-niang went on to ask Kuei-chieh, "What of Wu Yin-erh and those other two; how come they haven't arrived yet?"

"I arranged everything with Wu Yin-erh yesterday," replied Kuei-chieh. "I don't know why she hasn't come yet. The

day before yesterday, Father instructed us to engage Cheng Ai-hsiang and Han Chin-ch'uan for him, and when I set out, their sedan chairs were already waiting at the door for them. They should be here any minute now."

She had not yet finished speaking, when whom should they see but Wu Yin-erh and Cheng Ai-hsiang, along with another young painted face wearing a gown of scarlet silk, come in the door, carrying their garment bags. Before doing anything else, they faced Yüeh-niang and kowtowed to her:

Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,

Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying.

When Wu Yin-erh saw that Li Kuei-chieh had already taken off her outer clothing and was seated on the k'ang, she said, "A fine person you are, Kuei-chieh! Without waiting for the rest of us, you just came ahead by yourself."

"I was waiting for you," protested Kuei-chieh, "but when Mother saw that my sedan chair was at the door, she said, 'I fear Yin-erh must have gone ahead. You'd better be on your way.' Who could have anticipated that you'd get here even later?"

Yüeh-niang laughed, saying, "It's not late. Take your seats and we can all have tea together."

"And what is the name of this other girl?" she then went on to ask.

"She is Han Chin-ch'uan's younger sister, Yü-ch'uan," Wu Yin-erh replied.

Before long, Hsiao-yü brought in a table and set out eight saucers of assorted delicacies and two of sweetmeats for the refreshment of the four singing girls. Li Kuei-chieh, making a show of her status as Yüeh-niang's adopted daughter, sat on Yüeh-niang's k'ang and joined Yü-hsiao in cracking nuts and putting the kernels into serving boxes, while Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-hsiang, and Han Yü-ch'uan sat below on a row of stools to one side.

Li Kuei-chieh forthwith plucked up her spirits, calling out, on one occasion, "Sister Yü-hsiao, might I trouble you, if there is any tea, to pour a cup for me?" and, on another occasion, "Sister Hsiao-yü, if there's any water handy, bring some here so I can rinse these hands of mine."

Hsiao-yü actually did dip up a pewter basinful of water for her to rinse her hands in. Wu Yin-erh and the others looked on with wide-open eyes but did not dare say anything.

Li Kuei-chieh then said, "Yin-erh, why don't the three of you get out your instruments and entertain Mother with a song. I've sung for her already."

Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh were sitting right across from her, so when Wu Yin-erh heard these words of Kuei-chieh's she had no alternative but to do as she was told.

Thereupon, with Cheng Ai-hsiang playing the psaltery, Wu Yin-erh playing the *p'i-p'a*, and Han Yü-ch'uan singing along with them, they sang the song suite beginning with the tune "Eight Beats of a Kan-chou Song," the first line of which is:

Concealed amid clusters of turquoise hair ornaments.¹⁰

In no time at all, they finished singing and put down their musical instruments, after which Wu Yin-erh started off by asking Yüeh-niang, "Which official guests has Father invited to the party today?"

"The guests your father has invited today are all relatives and friends," Yüeh-niang replied.

"Are those two eunuchs not going to be here today?" asked Kuei-chieh.

"Eunuch Hsüeh was the only one who showed up yesterday," said Yüeh-niang. "The one named Liu didn't come."

"Eunuch Liu is all right," said Kuei-chieh, "but that Eunuch Hsüeh is given to mischief. He pinches you until you think you'll go out of your mind."

"After all, he's only a eunuch," said Yüeh-niang, "so what does it matter? You might as well let him have a little fun."

"That's a fine thing to say," complained Kuei-chieh. "He's enough to drive a person crazy."

As they were talking, who should they see but Tai-an, who came in to pick up the serving boxes of nuts they had been preparing.

When he saw the four singing girls sitting in the room, he said, "Half the guests have already arrived, and they're just about to take their seats. Hadn't you better get yourselves together and go up to the reception hall?"

Yüeh-niang then asked, "Who all have arrived up front?"

"Old Mr. Ch'iao, Hua the Elder, Wu the Elder, Wu the Second, and Mr. Hsieh have all been here for some time," reported Tai-an.

"Are that beggar, Ying the Second, and Pockmarked Chu going to be here today?" asked Kuei-chieh.

"Of the ten members of the club," said Tai-an, "not one of them will be absent today. Ying the Second showed up at 8:00 A.M. and Father sent him off on an errand, but he said he'd be right back."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Kuei-chieh. "Every time it's those same chunks of knife-bait. Who knows how long they'll keep on pestering us? I won't go out there today. I'd rather stay here in her room and sing for Mother's benefit."

"You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it," said Tai-an as he picked up the boxes of nuts and went his way.

"Mother, you just don't know how it is," said Kuei-chieh. "That Pockmarked Chu, when he's at a party, keeps his two lips going so incessantly that all you can hear is the sound of his talking. No matter how people take him to task for it, he doesn't pay any attention. He and that Blabbermouth Sun are nothing but a pair of slobber-pusses."

"That Pockmarked Chu," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "the one who constantly runs around with Ying the Second, showed up at our place the other day with Little Chang the Second, who produced ten taels of silver and wanted to engage my

younger sister Ai-yüeh. Mother told him, 'She has just been deflowered by a Southerner, not more than a month ago, and the "Southerner has not yet left town, so how can I agree to retain you as her customer?' She explained all this to him, but he repeatedly refused to accept it and made such a nuisance of himself that in her botheration she locked herself in and refused to come out and see him.

"That Little Chang the Second has really got money to burn. He rides around on a large white horse with four or five page boys to accompany him. He just sat there in our reception hall that day and refused to budge, which got Pockmarked Chu so flustered that he knelt down in the courtyard, so his torso looked as though it were sticking out of the ground like a post, and begged us, saying 'Whatever happens, ask your mother to come out and accept this money of his. If Sister Ai-yüeh will do no more than come out to see him and serve him a cup of tea, we'll leave.' It really made us laugh. He was just like someone abasing himself to plead for flood relief, the slobber-pussed good-for-nothing!"

"I thought Little Chang the Second was keeping Tung the Cat," said Wu Yin-erh.

"Because, in the course of his devotions, he burnt incense in two places on her tiger's mouth,"¹¹ said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "their affair has been 'a-nail-eighted'¹² for some time. Right now they're running loose."

Then, turning to Kuei-chieh, she said, "The other day while attending a wake on a country estate outside the gate, I ran into Chou Hsiao-erh, who asked me to give you his best. He said that the day before yesterday he went to your place with Nieh Yüeh, but you weren't at home."

Kuei-chieh tipped her a wink, saying, "I was here at Father's place that day. It's my elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, that he's interested in."

"If you haven't had anything to do with Chang¹³ in the past," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "why are you carrying on with him now?"

"Why that fucking Liu the Ninth!"¹⁴ Kuei-chieh exclaimed. "As though I'd take him as a customer! What sort of a good-for-nothing is that? He'd only have given me the creeps. After he got out of that affair he was implicated in, people I ran into said that he was angry at me for refusing to see him. Mother told him, 'If you were to stick to our place, we might be willing to lay out a little something to entertain you; what would it matter? But if you insist on carrying on with someone else, we're not stupid enough to countenance you any further.' Truly:

If you put on fake crystals to contemplate

that southern exposure;

It'll only look more repulsive."¹⁵

Everyone laughed at what was being said, but Yüeh-ning, sitting on her k'ang listening to the conversation, protested, "You've been talking all this while, and I haven't understood a word of it. I don't know what sort of lingo you're talking."

Let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it. To resume our story, in the front compound all of the guests had arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, supervised the serving of the wine. The company insisted that Ch'iao Hung should take precedence, and he was the first to offer a toast to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Just at this juncture, the three singing girls came out from the rear compound. Behold:

On their heads:

Pearl-decked caps are all aquiver;

From their bodies:

The scent of orchid and musk reeks.

No sooner did Ying Po-chüeh spot them than he started to joke, saying, "Where did these three sweethearts of yours come from? Stop them. Don't let them come in."

"Mr. Host," he then went on to ask, "why didn't Li Kuei-chieh come out with the rest of them?"

"I have no idea," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

To start off with, Cheng Ai-hsiang played the psaltery, Wu Yin-erh the *p'i-p'a*, and Han Yu-ch'uan the mandola as they:

Opened their ruby lips,

Exposed their white teeth,

and sang the set of songs to the tune "The Water Nymphs," beginning with the one the first line of which is:

With his tiger-head tally minted out of
horse-hoof gold.¹⁶

After some time had elapsed and everyone had been provided with wine, Ch'iao Hung took the seat of honor, followed in order of precedence by Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua the Elder, Brother-in-law Shen, Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, Welsher Yün, Cadger Ch'ang, Scrounger Pai, Manager Fu, and Scurry-about Pen, making a party of fourteen. There were eight tables in all, and Hsi-men Ch'ing presided as host at the lower end of the seating arrangement.

Words are inadequate to describe the scene:

The sound of their singing is melodious,

The style of their dancing is fastidious;

The wine flows as copiously as waves,

The viands are piled as high as hills.¹⁷

When they reached the point at which:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and

Three suites of songs had been performed, Ying Po-chüeh began to hold forth, saying, "Mr. host, there's no need to have them sing anymore. Whether you look at it this way or that, one way or the other, it's always the same couple of suites, as monotonous as a dog scratching at the door. Who wants to listen to it? It would be better to get your servant to set another three places for them and let them serve the company with wine rather than continuing to sing."

"Just let them show their respects to the guest of honor and the rest of the company with a couple more suites of songs," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You dog! You're always ready to:

Disturb the feast and break up the party."¹⁸

"Beggar Ying," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you're the type who:

Lets off fireworks behind the gate:

Unable to wait for evening."¹⁹

Ying Po-chüeh got up from his place and cursed, saying, "You crazy little whore! I care about as much whether it's evening or not as your mother's cunt!"

Then, instructing Tai-an, "Come over here, and take their instruments away from them," he took one of them by each hand and forcibly dragged them up to where the company was seated and told them to serve the wine.

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" protested Cheng Ai-hsiang. "You're dragging me so fast:

My limbs can hardly touch the ground."²⁰

"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "The truth of the matter is that:

Time is running out.

At any moment:

The 'blue-bladed horse' may 'come.'²¹

Serve the wine. I can't hold out any longer."

"What do you mean by the 'blue-bladed horse'?" asked Hsieh Hsi-ta.

"When you wind up with a 'shiver like a cold crow,' " said Ying Po-chüeh, "the 'blue-bladed horse' always 'comes.' "

Everyone laughed at this sally.

Thereupon, Wu Yin-erh served Ch'iao Hung, Cheng Ai-hsiang served Wu K'ai, Han Yü-ch'uan served Wu the Second, and they then proceeded to work their way, one at a time, down the two sides of the seating arrangement.

When Wu Yin-erh finally arrived in front of Ying Po-chüeh, he asked her, "Why didn't Li Kuei-chieh come out with the rest of you?"

"Master Two," said Wu Yin-erh, "you mean you still don't know about it? Li Kuei-chieh has now been acknowledged by the First Lady as her adopted daughter. Whatever I tell you about this, keep it to yourself. Talk about premeditated schemes! Day before yesterday, when the party broke up here at Father's place, we all went home together and agreed that we would meet early this morning in order to come over here together. I got myself all ready at my place and was just waiting for her, while who could have known that, all the time, she had intended to buy presents in advance and set out ahead of me, leaving me to wait for her all this time.

"I sent a maidservant to your place to see what was up, and she reported that you had already left, which earned me a real scolding from Mother. So I hastened, along with the other two, to catch up with you. If you were going to get yourself acknowledged as an adopted daughter by Father and Mother, what difference would it have made to tell me about it? It's not as though I wanted to take your place or anything like that, so you would feel justified in doing things behind my back.

"No wonder she was sitting there on the First Lady's k'ang just now, making a show of the fact that she was Mother's adopted daughter, cracking nuts and putting the kernels into serving boxes:

Picking up this and then picking up that, and spurning the rest of us under her feet.

"I hadn't known about it until the Sixth Lady surreptitiously told me, just now, in the rear compound. She made a pair of shoes for the First Lady, bought a box of stuffed pastries, two ducks, a set of pig's trotters, and two bottles of wine, and came here in a sedan chair before any of the rest of us."

She gave a full account of the affair, from beginning to end.

When Ying Po-chüeh had heard her out, he said, "If she's here today but won't come out to entertain us, it doesn't matter; but I'd really like to show that lousy little whore a thing or two. Let me tell you, she must have planned all this together with the madam of her place. On seeing that His Honor has become an official, and moreover that he holds a judicial appointment, in the first place, they were afraid of his power and influence; and, in the second place, they feared that he would visit the licensed quarter less often; so they took advantage of this scheme to get her acknowledged as an adopted daughter to ensure that their relationship would continue and not be broken off. Have I got it right, or not?

"I'll tell you what to do. She got the First Lady to accept her as an adopted daughter. Now you, too, should buy some presents and get the Sixth Lady to acknowledge you as an adopted daughter. After all, you and she have both been:

Traveling companions on the same road, along with the late Hua Tzu-hsü.

Everyone must do the best he can for himself."²²

Is what I say right, or not? There's no reason for you to get upset with her."

"What you say is right," responded Wu Yin-erh. "When I get home, I'll speak to Mother about it."

When she had finished speaking, she served him with wine and then moved on.

The next person to serve him with wine was Han Yü-ch'uan.

"Sister Han," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble. Don't bother to perform a proper obeisance. What's your elder sister up to at home these days?"

"Someone is maintaining my elder sister at home," replied Han Yü-ch'uan. "She hasn't come out to sing for some time now."

"I remember visiting your place in the fifth month last," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and not seeing anything of your sister."

"On that occasion," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "why didn't you stick around a little longer, instead of running off so soon?"

"I would have stayed longer that day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but there were two people there that I don't get along with, and your father here also wanted me to join him, so I left early."

When Han Yü-ch'uan saw that he had drunk his cup of wine, she poured out another cup.

"That's enough," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Take it easy. I can't drink any more."

"Master Two," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "take your time about it, and when you're finished I'll sing a song for you."

"Sister mine," said Ying Po-chüeh, "whoever told you? That's the surest way to my heart. As the saying goes:

You don't raise a child in the hope it will

shit gold and piss silver;

All you can hope for is that it will

respond empathetically to you.

You're a true denizen of the Verdant Spring Bordello.²³ In the future, you needn't worry about not having anything to eat. You're certainly superior to that lousy little splay-legged whore from the Cheng place. Slippery as she is, she never consents to sing."

"Beggar Ying the Second," exclaimed Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you're delirious again. What a thing to say!

"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just a while ago, you were objecting to their singing, and now you're giving her a hard time about it."

"That was a while ago," responded Ying Po-chüeh. "Now that they've served the wine, should we not have a song? As long as I've got three mace of silver to my name, I can afford to:

Make a ghost at the millstone,²⁴
out of that little whore."

Han Yü-ch'uan had no alternative but to pick up her *p'i-p'a* and sing four songs for the amusement of the company.

Ying Po-chüeh then enquired of Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How come you didn't have Li Kuei-chieh come out to entertain us today?"

"She's not here today," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I heard her singing, a while ago, in the rear compound," said Ying po-chüeh, "and now you're telling lies on her behalf."

Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "Whatever happens, go into the rear compound and tell her to come out, and be quick about it."

Tai-an refused to budge, saying, "Master Two, you haven't heard right. It's the blind professional singer Big Sister Yü that's singing for the ladies."

"You lousy little oily mouth!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "do you think you can fool me? Wait till I go back there myself to fetch her."

Sticky Chu then said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, it doesn't really matter, but why not just ask Li Kuei-chieh to come out and serve a round of drinks to your distinguished relatives? If she doesn't sing, it doesn't matter. I know that she is here for personal reasons today."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to withstand the pestering of his cronies and felt compelled to send Tai-an back to the rear compound and ask Li Kuei-chieh to come and join them.

Li Kuei-chieh was in the master suite, playing her *p'i-p'a* and singing for the entertainment of Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and company.

When she saw Tai-an come in to call for her, she asked, "Who sent you here?"

"Father told me to come," replied Tai-an, "and ask you to go out to the reception hall and serve a round of drinks."

"Mother," said Li Kuei-chieh, "Father's not making any sense. I said, just now, that I wasn't going to go out, and now he's calling for me anyway."

"It was only because Father was unable to withstand the pestering of the company," said Tai-an, "that he sent me back here for you."

"It doesn't matter," said Yüeh-niang. Just go out, serve a round of drinks, and come back as quickly as you can, that's all."

"Was it really Father who sent for me?" Kuei-chieh again asked Tai-an. "If it was, then I'll go. But if it was Beggar Ying the Second, I wouldn't care if he called me for an age, I'd never go."

Thereupon, she availed herself of Yüeh-niang's mirror stand to retouch her makeup and adjust her attire and then went out to the reception hall.

When the company looked up, they saw that on her head she wore:

A chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree,
fastened in place all round with:
Gold filigree pins and combs,
on which:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles.
Above, she wore:

A blouse of pale lavender silk;
below, she wore:

A skirt of turquoise satin,
revealing:

The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses,
Decorated with a pair of red phoenixes.
On her painted face she wore:

Three turquoise beauty patches;
From her body:

A gust of exotic fragrance²⁵ assailed the nostrils.
Facing the seat of honor:

Neither correctly nor precisely,
she performed but a single kowtow, after which:
Hiding her face behind her gold-flecked fan,
While coyly adjusting her hair ornaments,
she took her stand in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an to set out a brocade-covered stool for her at the head of the seating arrangement so she could offer wine to the guest of honor, Ch'iao Hung.

Ch'iao Hung, however, hastily bowed to her, saying, "There's no need for you to trouble yourself on my behalf. What about these other distinguished relatives?"

"Start off with Master Ch'iao," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Li Kuei-chieh, thereupon:
Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Raised high the golden flagon,
and offered Ch'iao Hung some wine.

"Distinguished sir," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh from one side, "Please resume your seat and let her serve you. For these painted faces from the Verdant Spring Bordello, providing entertainment and serving wine are their professional responsibilities. You mustn't be overindulgent with them."

"Master Two," responded Ch'iao Hung, "This young lady is the sweetheart of our distinguished host. How could I possibly presume to put her to any trouble? It would make me:

Ill at ease either sitting or standing."

"You can relax on that score," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She is no longer playing the role of a strumpet. On seeing that His Honor has become an official, she has volunteered herself for acceptance as an adopted daughter."

Li Kuei-chieh's face turned red, and she said, "You're delirious! Whoever said such a ridiculous thing?"

"Really," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta.

"Can such things be?"

We didn't know anything about it. We ought to take advantage of this occasion, when all of you gentlemen are here, not one of us being absent, to contribute five candareens of silver apiece as a gift to our brother here, in celebration of his acquisition of this adopted daughter."

Ying Po-chüeh picked up where Hsieh Hsi-ta had left off, saying, "It's a good thing Brother has become an official. It has always been true that:

There is less need to fear officials,
Than there is to fear the officious."²⁶

Now that you've acquired an adopted daughter to boot, in the future, if you sprinkle a little water on her, barren as she is, she may end up producing a juicy little niece or nephew for me."²⁷

"You lousy dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing railed at him. "All you ever do is resort to outlandish irony over nothing."

"Even foreign iron can be forged into a cutting instrument," retorted Ying Po-chüeh.

"Beggar Ying the Second," interjected Cheng Ai-hsiang, who was serving wine to Mr. Shen, "If Li Kuei-chieh can be his goddaughter, maybe you can become his godson, which, if you scramble the letters a bit, would make you a gone sod."²⁸

"You lousy little whore!" railed Ying Po-chüeh. "You're nothing but a dead duck. I'll stop giving you a hard time about as soon as you start reciting Buddha's name."

"Sister Ai-hsiang," said Li Kuei-chieh, "Why don't you tell off this beggar for me?"

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Cheng Ai-hsiang. "To cite a few familiar phrases, he's just a:

'Cock' a doodle doo,

'Hold' onto your hat;
who's:

A 'dollar,' a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar,
Yes,' my darling daughter."²⁹

"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You may abuse me all you want with that highfalutin lingo of yours. Needless to say, if I were really as infamous as you make out, I'd have ripped off your mother's pant strings a long time ago. Don't worry about it. In the future, if I don't give you something to remember me by, you'll refuse to acknowledge the General of the Five Ways as a god."

"We'd better not bother him any further," said Li Kuei-chieh. "He's showing all the symptoms of desperation."

"This Beggar Ying the Second," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "is worse than ever today."

He puts his 'ugly' 'niece' on a pushcart:
the better to parade his 'ugliness.'³⁰

Like the flowers of the wax gourd:
he stinks in and out of season.

It so happens that, he's really a 'son of a nun.' "

"This little splay-legged whore!" protested Ying Po-chüeh. "Nobody else will have her. I'm the only one willing to make the best of it."

"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "What a clean mouth you've got! You're knocking the tartar right off her teeth. Father, why don't you give him a slap or two? Just look at the way he's carrying on."

"You crazy clod of a dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing berated him. "You were the one who wanted them to serve the wine in the first place, so what are you teasing them for?"

Going up to his place at the table, he gave him a slap.

"You lousy little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You think that as long as you've got your lover's influence behind you, I'll be afraid of you. Just listen to how sweetly she pronounces the word 'Father.' "

"But don't have her serve any more wine," he went on to say. "That's letting her off too easily. Bring on the instruments, and let her sing a suite of songs for us, or she'll slip back to the rear compound. She's been giving us the slip enough as it is."

"Master Two," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "you're like:

The intendant of the Ts'ao-chou Military Defense Circuit:
The area of your jurisdiction is broad."³¹

There in the front reception hall:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
they continued to drink wine and enjoy themselves. But no more of this.

Let us now return to the story of P'an Chin-lien. Ever since Li P'ing-erh had borne a child, she noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing constantly chose to spend the night in her quarters. Thereupon, she:

Constantly harbored jealous thoughts,³² and
Frequently nurtured dissatisfied ideas.

Knowing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was entertaining in the front reception hall, she approached her mirror stand:

Deftly painted her moth eyebrows,
Retouched her cicada-shaped coiffure,
Lightly rouged her ruby lips,

adjusted her attire, and emerged from her room.

On hearing the baby crying in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she walked right in and asked, "Since his mother isn't even here, why is he crying so?"

"His mother has gone to the rear compound," the wet nurse Ju-i replied. "He's crying this way because he wants his mother."

Affecting an ingratiating smile, P'an Chin-lien stepped up and started to play with the baby, saying, "You've hardly been here any time at all, you're just a newborn sprout, and yet you already know enough to look for your mother. Let me carry you back to the rear compound, and we'll see if I can't find your mother for you."

She was about to loosen her blouse and pick the child up, when the wet nurse Ju-i said to her, "Don't pick the baby up, Fifth Lady. I fear he might go wee-wee on you."

"You crazy little stinker!" said Chin-lien. "What is there to worry about? If I hold him on a diaper-cloth, there won't be any problem."

She then took Kuan-ko into her arms, embraced him, and set off straight for the rear compound. As she went through the ceremonial gate leading into the rear courtyard, she raised the child up as high as she could hold him.

Who could have anticipated that Wu Yüeh-niang would be standing in the loggia outside the master suite, overseeing some servants' wives, who were busy replenishing dishes of savories for the party, while Li P'ing-erh and Yü-hsiao were just inside the door, making butterfat "abalone shell" sweets.³³

P'an Chin-lien, with an ingratiating smile, looked at the child and said, as though in his voice, " 'What are you doing, First Mother?' Now say, Your little Kuan-ko has come looking for his mother.' "

Yüeh-niang, abruptly lifting up her head to see who it was, said, "Fifth Lady, what are you saying? It's a good thing his

mother isn't here. Late as it is, what are you doing carrying him back here for no good reason? And lifting him so high up, to boot? I'm afraid you may frighten him. His mother has her hands full just inside the door there."

She then called out, "Sister Li, come outside. Your son has come looking for you."

When Li P'ing-erh hastily came outside and saw Chin-lien holding her baby, she said, "Little Kuan-ko, I left you, perfectly content, in my room, in the arms of the wet nurse. Why have you come looking for me, for no good reason? See that you don't go wee-wee on your fifth mother's clothes."

"He was in your room," said Chin-lien, "crying like anything for you. So I thought I'd bring him out with me for a walk."

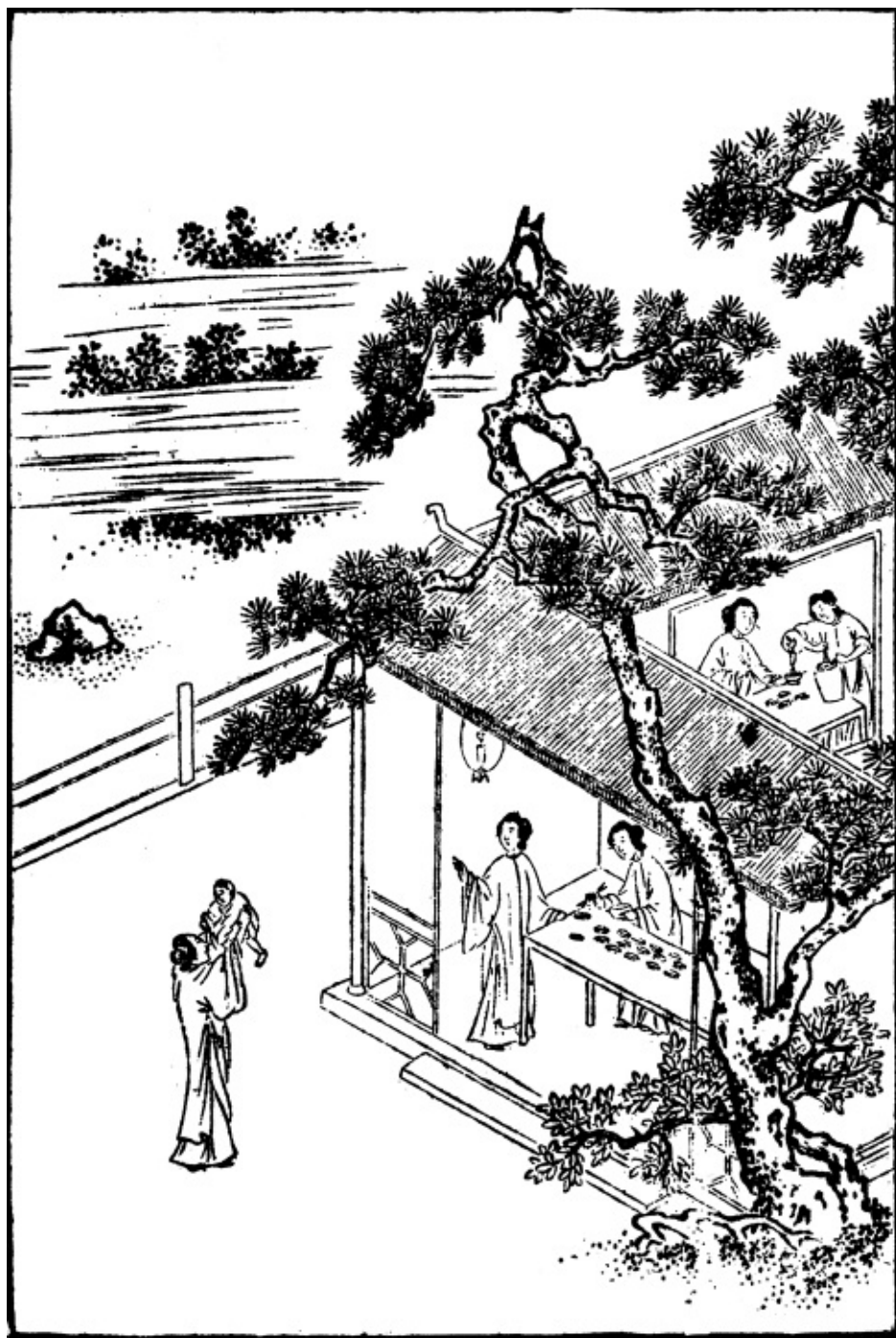
Li P'ing-erh hastily loosened her blouse and took possession of her child.

Yüeh-niang playfully teased the baby for a while and then said, "Carry him carefully back to your quarters, and try not to frighten him."

When Li P'ing-erh got back to her quarters in the front compound, she said quietly, "Wet nurse, if he starts to cry, you should take your time and try to comfort him until I get back. Why did you let the Fifth Lady take him back to the rear compound looking for me?"

"That's just what I told her," said Ju-i, "but the Fifth Lady insisted on carrying him off."

Li P'ing-erh took the time to watch as Ju-i breastfed the baby and then put him to bed. Who could have anticipated that, not long after he had fallen asleep, the child started to cry as though something had frightened him in a dream. In the middle of the night, he started to suffer from alternating chills and fever. The wet nurse tried to breast-feed him, but he rejected the milk and continued to cry. Li P'ing-erh became alarmed.



P'an Chin-lien Raises Kuan-ko as High as She Can Hold Him

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's party in the front compound broke up, he sent the four singing girls home. Yüeh-niang gave Li Kuei-chieh a set of heavy chiffon velvet brocade clothing and two taels of silver, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Late that evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see his child, he saw that it was crying and asked what had happened.

Li P'ing-erh did not bring up the fact that P'an Chin-lien had carried him off to the rear compound, merely saying, "I don't know why, but after falling asleep, he woke up and has been crying like this ever since. He also rejects his milk."

"Do your best to pet him back to sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Then he upbraided Ju-i, saying, "Why didn't you look after Kuan-ko properly? What were you doing to frighten him

like that?"

Returning to the rear compound, he told Yüeh-niang about it. Yüeh-niang, although she knew that it was Chin-lien's taking him out that had frightened him, did not mention a word about it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, merely saying, "Tomorrow I'll send for Dame Liu to have a look at him."

"Don't have that old whore come and subject him to her:

Bogus acupuncture and quack moxabustion,"³⁴

said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get a licensed pediatrician to treat the child."

Yüeh-niang did not accede to his suggestion, saying, "For a baby who's barely a month old, what need is there for any such thing as a licensed pediatrician?"

Early the next day, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing off to work at the yamen, she sent a page boy to ask Dame Liu to come and take a look at him. She said that he was suffering from a fright, and she was given three mace of silver for her pains. Only after the baby had been made to swallow some of the medicine she prescribed did he start to sleep soundly and stop rejecting his milk, which enabled Li P'ing-erh to feel as though:

The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.

Truly:

A whole breastful of intimate concerns,
Resides in what is not expressed in words.³⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 33

CH'EN CHING-CHI LOSES HIS KEYS AND IS DISTRAINED TO SING; HAN TAO-KUO LIBERATES HIS WIFE TO COMPETE FOR ADMIRATION

In this life, although we are not
 endowed with foreknowledge,¹
Wealth and distinction, success and fame,
 are not won by exertion.
It is vain to take riches and silk
 as one's foundation;
How can human effort hope to contend
 with the decree of fate?²
The customs of the age, heat and cold,
 vainly beguile the eye;
Worldly cares, separation and reunion,
 are better quite forgotten.
The superior man proceeds or halts
 as he is used or discarded;³
If you do not unknit your brow and laugh,
 what are you waiting for?⁴

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the yamen, he had no sooner come in the door than he asked Wu Yüeh-niang, "Is the child any better? Have you sent a page boy after the doctor?"

"I've already had Dame Liu here," replied Yüeh-niang, "and he's been taking the medication she prescribed. The child is no longer rejecting his milk and has been sleeping soundly for some time. He seems to be somewhat better."

"How can you trust that old whore, with her:

 Bogus acupuncture and quack moxabustion?"

said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The right thing to do would have been to engage the services of a licensed pediatrician. If he's better, so much for that. If he's not any better, I'll have her taken to the yamen and give the old whore's fingers a good squeezing for her pains."

"You and your:

 Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,

abuse!" complained Yüeh-niang. "Your child is currently taking the medication she prescribed and has gotten better. Yet you persist in sticking your mouth out and cursing people!"

When she had finished speaking, a maidservant brought in something to eat.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had scarcely done eating when who should he see but Tai-an, who came in to announce, "Master Ying the Second has come."

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed the page boy, "Take some tea out and ask Master Ying the Second to have a seat in the summerhouse."

Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "Leave the dishes that I've been eating from just as they are and have a page boy take them out, together with some rice, and ask our son-in-law to join him for a snack. I'll be there momentarily."

"Where did you send him off to yesterday morning," asked Yüeh-niang, "that he should be so late getting back?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained to her, "Brother Ying the Second is acquainted with a merchant from Hu-chou, a certain Magnate Ho, who has five hundred taels worth of spun silk in storage at his inn outside the South Gate that he is anxious to dispose of so he can start on his way home. He has let me know that his friend is willing to unload it at a discount. I only agreed to pay four hundred fifty taels of silver. Yesterday I sent him, along with Lai-pao, to take two large silver ingots as samples of the quality of my silver. The deal has already been struck, and we have arranged to pay over the silver today."

"My thinking is that since the house on Lion Street is empty, I might as well open two rooms on the street front there, have them fixed up to serve as a silk goods shop, and engage a manager to take care of it. Moreover, since Lai-pao is now nominally on the staff of the Prince of Yün, which entitles him to a government salary, he can continue to stay there, along with the manager, to look after the house, on the one hand, and take charge of the business, on the other."

"There's no getting around the need to find another manager," said Yüeh-niang.

"Brother Ying the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has told me that he has an acquaintance named Han who was originally in the silk goods trade but is currently out of capital and sitting idle at home. He says that he is proficient at

writing and arithmetic, and that:

His conduct is upright and correct,
and has repeatedly offered to stand as a guarantor for him. One of these days he's going to bring him to meet me and we'll arrange the terms of a contract."

When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing weighed out four hundred fifty taels of silver and told Lai-pao to take charge of it. Ch'en Ching-chi had already finished eating with Ying Po-chüeh in the summerhouse. The latter had waited until he was:

Burning with impatience,
but when he saw the silver brought out, he was:

Delighted in his heart.⁵

Bowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "After imposing on your hospitality yesterday, I got home late, and it was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."

"I've weighed out four hundred and fifty taels of silver here," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll have Lai-pao fetch a bag and pack it while we both look on. Today is an auspicious day for such a proceeding, so we'll hire a pushcart to transport the goods, and lock them up for the time being in the house over there. That ought to take care of it."

"What you propose makes sense, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. Where these Southerners are concerned:

If you delay things you'll only give them ideas.⁶
Have the goods carted in and the business will be completed."

Thereupon, he and Lai-pao mounted their horses and, taking the silver with them, went straight out to the inn outside the South Gate and completed the transaction. Who could have known that Ying Po-chüeh had colluded with Magnate Ho on a price of only four hundred twenty taels of silver, so that he profited by a kickback of thirty taels? For public consumption, when the deal was closed a commission of only nine taels of silver was forthcoming, which Ying Po-chüeh and Lai-pao divided equally between them. They then proceeded to hire a pushcart and have the goods transported into the city that very day, stored them in an empty room in the house on Lion Street, locked the door, and came back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ying Po-chüeh to pick an auspicious day and bring Manager Han to see him. He turned out to be short of stature and twenty-nine-years-old.

His speech was voluble,
His appearance was imposing,
His face was blithe as the spring breeze,⁷
His manner was congenial.

That very day Hsi-men Ch'ing signed a contract with him, by the terms of which he and Lai-pao were to receive the capital from him to hire workers to dye silk, open up a storefront⁸ in the house on Lion Street, and offer a complete line of silk goods for sale. Every day they sold several tens of taels worth of merchandise. But no more of this.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly;
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

Before anyone knew it, it was the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Wu Yüeh-niang's birthday. A group of female guests was invited to a party to celebrate the event, and her elder brother Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, and Aunt Yang were asked to stay overnight so they could listen to the two Buddhist nuns recite sacred texts and sing Buddhist songs for them. On such occasions they often stayed up until the second or third watch before going to bed.

On this particular night, because his sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was staying in the master suite and it would be inconvenient for him to be there, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound to have a look at Kuan-ko and intended to sleep in Li P'ing-erh's room.

"The child is only now a little better," said Li P'ing-erh, "and I'm not in the mood for it. Why don't you go spend the night in the Fifth Lady's room?"

"I won't bother you then," Hsi-men Ch'ing said with a laugh.

Thereupon he went over to P'an Chin-lien's place. When Chin-lien heard her husband come into her quarters, she felt just as though she had:

Discovered a piece of gold or a precious stone,
and lost no time in bundling Old Mrs. P'an off to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's place.

In her bedroom she then proceeded to:

Ignite the highly placed silver lamp,
Deftly unroll the embroidered quilt,
Light incense and wash her private parts,

so that she could sleep together with Hsi-men Ch'ing that night.

The feelings expressed by the pillow side,
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.

Her every endeavor was designed to ensnare her lover's heart so that he would not stray into anyone else's room. Truly:

Drumming its antennae, the roving bee,
Finding the tender corolla half open,
beguiles away the spring;

Sipping fragrance, the powdered butterfly,
Resting deep in the womb of the flower,
disports itself by night.⁹

When Li P'ing-erh saw Old Mrs. P'an come over to her place, she hastily offered her a seat on the k'ang and ordered Ying-ch'ün to serve wine and bake some wheat cakes so they could enjoy an evening chat. The night was half over before they went to sleep.

The next day she gave Old Mrs. P'an a pale green satin jacket, two pairs of satin shoe uppers, and two hundred candareens, which pleased the old lady so much she was ready to:

Fart ferociously and pee in her pants.

Returning to her daughter's quarters, she showed these things to Chin-lien, saying, "These were all given to me by your sister over there."

When Chin-lien saw them, however, she criticized her mother, saying, "How can you be so:

Mean-spirited and covetous?"¹⁰

What's so great about these things that you should be taking handouts from her?"

"A fine one to talk you are!" said Old Mrs. P'an. "When someone has been considerate enough to give me something, you start talking like that. What did *you* ever give me to wear?"

"I can't be compared to those sisters who have money of their own," said Chin-lien. "I don't have anything to wear myself. What would I give to you? And now, for no good reason, you've accepted favors at someone else's hands. In a little while, we'll simply have to get together a few dishes of something, pour out a flagon of wine, and go over to her place to return the favor. Otherwise, in the future, someone is sure to:

Engage in idle tittle-tattle.

I've had enough of that, thank you."

She then directed Ch'un-mei to prepare eight dishes of food, four boxes of delicacies, and a pewter flagon of wine. Having ascertained that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, she told Ch'iu-chü to put the things in square boxes and carry them over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she was to say, "Mother and Grandmother would like to come over, if you are free, and share a cup of wine with you."

"I've put your mother to trouble again," said Li P'ing-erh.

In a little while, Chin-lien and Old Mrs. P'an came over, and the three of them sat down together for a drink. Ch'un-mei stood in attendance upon them, and poured the wine.

As they were talking, who should they see but Ch'iu-chü, who had come to call Ch'un-mei, saying, "Son-in-law Ch'en is over at our place looking for some clothes that have been pawned. He wants you to go open the outer door to the second floor for him."

"Tell our son-in-law," instructed Chin-lien, "that after he has retrieved the clothes, he should come over here and have a goblet of wine before going on with his business."

Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi found the several sets of clothes he was looking for and headed out toward the front of the compound.

Ch'un-mei came in and reported, "He won't come in."

"Whatever it takes, drag him in if necessary," said Chin-lien, and she sent Hsiu-ch'ün out, who succeeded in inviting him in.

Old Mrs. P'an was sitting on the k'ang beside a small table, arrayed with various dishes and delicacies, while Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh kept her company in drinking wine. Ch'en Ching-chi hastily made them a bow.

"I told you to come have a drink with the best of intentions," said Chin-lien. Why have you made excuses and refused to come? At this rate you'll be out of luck before you know it."

Making a meaningful moue, she instructed Ch'un-mei, "Fetch a capacious cup and fill it for our son-in-law to drink."

Ch'en Ching-chi put the clothes he had come for down on the k'ang and sat down. Ch'un-mei, who was a practiced hand at the routine, fetched a tea bowl, filled it to the brim, and handed it to him.

"It's very gracious of you, Fifth Lady," Ching-chi exclaimed in consternation, "but I'd rather drink two small cups, if you don't mind. There are a lot of people out in the shop waiting for their clothes."

"Let them wait," said Chin-lien. "I insist upon your drinking this big cup. Who has the patience to bother with those piddling little cups?"

"Let the young man go after this one cup," said Old Mrs. P'an. "I fear his business is pressing."

"Don't you believe it," said Chin-lien. "What's he got to be busy about? He can manage no small quantity of wine. In fact:

On a gold-varnished wine bucket,
He can drink down as far as the second hoop."

Ching-chi laughed at this and addressed himself to the wine.

He had barely swallowed two mouthfuls, when Old Mrs. P'an said to Ch'un-mei, "Sister, give him a pair of chopsticks. Don't have him drink on an empty stomach."

Ch'un-mei did not provide him with a pair of chopsticks but, in the endeavor to bedevil him further, picked two walnuts out of a partitioned box and offered them to him.

Ching-chi took them from her, saying, "No doubt you expect to get a laugh at my expense if I'm unable to crack them."

Thereupon, putting them between his teeth, he broke them into pieces with a single bite and downed them along with his wine.

"He's still a youngster," said Old Mrs. P'an, "with a good set of teeth in his mouth. For an old body like myself, if things are at all hard, I just can't eat them."

"There are only two things in this world," boasted Ching-chi, "that I am unable to eat. Pebbles and water buffalo horns."

When Chin-lien saw that he had downed the cup of wine, she told Ch'un-mei to refill it, saying, "That first cup was for me. But are not my mother and the Sixth Lady as worthy of the honor as myself? I wouldn't want you to drink too much. Just down these three cups and I'll let you off."

"Fifth Lady," pled Ching-chi, "take pity on your son. I can't drink any more. With just this one cup, I fear my face must be red, and Father may take it amiss."

"So you're afraid of your father-in-law are you," said Chin-lien. "I thought you weren't afraid of him. Where is he going to go out drinking today?"

"This afternoon he's going to Station Master Wu Tien-en's place for a drink," reported Ching-chi. "Right now he's across the street at Ch'iao Hung's house, supervising the alterations."

"Mr. Ch'iao's family moved out yesterday," said Chin-lien. "Shouldn't we have sent them a present of tea today?"

"The present of tea was sent off this morning," said Ching-chi.

"Where have they moved to?" asked Li P'ing-erh.

"They've spent one thousand two hundred taels of silver," said Ching-chi, "to buy a great big place on East Main Street, not very different from our own. It's got a forty-two-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis."

As they were talking, Ching-chi managed by holding his nose to swallow a second cup of wine, after which, as soon as he thought no one was looking, he grabbed up the clothes and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Mother," Ying-ch'un then remarked, "look at that. Your son-in-law has forgotten to take his keys with him."

Chin-lien proceeded to pick them up and then sit down on top of them, saying to Li P'ing-erh, "When he comes looking for them, don't any of you give the game away. Let me have a little fun with him before returning them."

"My child," said Old Mrs. P'an, "you really ought to return them. What do you want to fool around with him for?"

When Ch'en Ching-chi returned to the pawn shop and groped in his sleeve, he couldn't find the keys and headed straight back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to look for them.

"Whoever saw any keys of yours?" Chin-lien said. "You must have had the keys in your hand while doing something else and left them there without realizing it."

"I fear you may have left them locked in the second floor storage area," said Ch'un-mei. "I didn't notice your having them with you just now."

"I remember bringing them out with me," said Ching-chi.

"What a child!" said Chin-lien. "I dare say:

The hole in your bottom's so big:

Your mind has dropped out.

Who knows who it could be, either at home or abroad, who's got such a hold on you that:

You possess a soul but lack perception;

Your heart is no longer over your liver."

"There are customers waiting to redeem their clothes," said Ching-chi. "What am I to do? Before Father comes back, I'll have to call in a tinker to get the second-floor door open and see if they're there or not."

Li P'ing-erh could no longer contain herself and started to giggle.

"Sixth Lady," exclaimed Ching-chi, "if you have picked them up, give them to me."

"I've never seen anything like it," said Chin-lien. "I don't know what Sister Li is laughing at him about, as though we'd taken his keys or something."

Ching-chi was so anxious all he could do was:

Turn round and round like a millstone,¹¹

until his roving eye caught sight of the ribbon attached to the keys, which was sticking out from underneath Chin-lien's body.

"Aren't those the keys there," he exclaimed.

Just as he was about to reach for them with his hand, Chin-lien slipped them into her sleeve and refused to give them to him, saying, "How could any keys of yours have fallen into my hands?"

This so flustered the youngster that all he could do was to kneel down on the ground before her:

Dragging his knees like a chicken

on the chopping block.

"They say you can sing a pretty song," said Chin-lien, "but you perform only for the benefit of the page boys in the shop out front. Why don't you sing me a song? Take advantage of the fact that your grandmother and the Sixth Lady are here today. If you select good ones, that we haven't heard before, and sing four of them for us, I'll let you have those keys. Otherwise, though you should:

Jump as high as the top of the White Pagoda,¹²

the keys will not be forthcoming.”

“This Fifth Lady,” exclaimed Ching-chi, “is enough to give one a case of heartburn. Whoever told you I could sing?”

“Still up to your tricks, are you?” said Chin-lien.

“Just as Nanking has its Shen Wan-san,¹³

Peking has its withered willows;¹⁴

Just as a man has his reputation,

A tree has its shadow.”¹⁵

The young scamp, unable to withstand her teasing any longer, said:

“It’s not going to kill me.”¹⁶

I’ll sing for you then. I’ve got a bellyful of songs. If I were to really:

Exercise my mind and poke up my liver;

should you demand a hundred, I’d come up with them.”

“Still shooting off your mouth, are you, you short-life!” Chin-lien berated him.

She personally poured a full measure of wine for everyone present and then said to him, “Have another cup to cover your stage fright as you sing.”

“I’ll sing first and then drink at my leisure,” said Ching-chi. “I’ll sing a couple of songs for you on the names of fruits and flowers¹⁷ to the tune ‘Sheep on the Mountain Slope.’ ”

When we first met, we “plighted our faith
in the Peach Orchard.”¹⁸

Once we were acquainted, I put you on a pedestal
like an “imperial damson.”

Everyone said that you were carousing amid the
turquoise blossoms in the green bowers;
Which upset me so much I scratched your apple cheeks
to smithereens.

You louse, you took after the barberry in being
“solid without but hollow within”;

Which upset me so much the pearly tears fell from
my plum-shaped eyes.

I sent a pair of slave-catching peaches¹⁹
to track you down.

They caught you dating under the wild persimmon tree,
so I knew you had left me;

Which upset me so much I looked like a
“crane’s crest red” litchi,

And was reduced to cutting off a hank of
my black plum-thread hair.

You’re as smooth as any mandarin, yet
you say I don’t make sense.

“Go, mango! You’re as stubborn as an ox!”
I curse the ruffian.

“If you press me too hard, I’ll just hang myself
from a drooping branch,

And look to see, next autumn, whom you’ve got to
depend on in my place.”

I heard the golden sparrow (caragana) warbling
before my eyes;

But he abandoned me as lightly as a goose feather
(chrysanthemum),

Leaving me to cry my heart out underneath
the speckled bamboo blind.

When a pair of auspicious magpies announced
the good news,²⁰

I wondered who it might be;
Never expecting the cassia, for whom I had
been “Gazing toward the Southland.”

I had not yet finished redoing my coiffure
under the smartweed blossoms,

When the dog-teat (foxglove) ran to the door
to bite my visitor.

I surreptitiously sent my maid, Jasmine Blossom,

to look everywhere for you.
You leaned on the seven sisters trellis,
Stuck out your clove-shaped tongue,
And called me your plantain lily.
The Chinese lantern plant, acting as my Hung-niang,²¹
slowly led you into my quarters.
Under the blossoms of the verdant peach trees,²²
we compared botanical specimens a while.
Then you had your way with me; I dropped the
marigold in my hand,
And we became entangled with each other
amid the passionflowers.
I ended up calling you my handsome
pomegranate blossom.
But if you suffer my maid, Chrysanthemum,
To tell the tale to my seven sisters,
What sort of picture would that convey?
It would only make a laughing stock of me.

When he had finished singing he asked Chin-lien for the keys, saying, "Fifth Lady, give them to me right away. The manager in the shop has been waiting for me for ever so long. I'm afraid Father might show up at any moment."

"You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it," said Chin-lien. "And you put it so cleverly. If your father should ask me, I'll just say you were out drinking somewhere, lost the keys, and came into my room looking for them."

"Ai-ya!" Ching-chi exclaimed. "Fifth Lady, you're really:

An executioner who likes to play with his victims."

Li P'ing-erh and Old Mrs. P'an repeatedly chimed in from the sidelines, saying, "Sister, let him have them so he can go about his business."

"If it weren't for the good offices of my mother and the Sixth Lady," said Chin-lien, "I'd certainly make you sing until the day is done. At the outset you boasted that you could come up with a hundred or two hundred. And now, after singing only two songs, you want to take flight. I'm not going to let you get away with it."

"I've still got a couple of specialty numbers up my sleeve," said Ching-chi. They're a pair of songs on the terminology of silver and coinage²³ to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope,' which I might as well offer for your delectation."

Thereupon:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
he sang:

Dear enemy! Your absence has made a mopus²⁴ of me
for lo this whole month;
Leaving me to pound my breast in vain, quite unable
to sycee²⁵ things up.
I sent that little nugget, Lion-head, with a yellow
chit to summon you;
But you were in Ministry of War Hollow,²⁶ having a merry
night of it at the Silver Ingot.
I'm willing to put up with your brass, verdigris
and all, to avoid abandonment;
You're imprinted in my heart like stamped silver;
there's no way I can do without you.
If I call out for you, you turn away your obverse
side and pay me no heed;
Even when I use blowpipes to heat up your crucible,
you make me wait half the night.
The bamboo pattern stamped on my face turns sallow,
and I gnash my silver teeth;
Invoking the Goddess of Legal Tender,²⁷ I bolt fast
the door to my room.
That defaced brockage²⁸ of a man may hammer in vain,
I'll pay him no heed.
I curse him for a remelted, thrice-cast, specimen of
a two-timing crooked louse.
I've poured the molten metal of my heart into your mint,
only to be rejected as too hot-blooded.

Sister! When you were at K'ai-yüan's²⁹ place the two of us
 burned incense and swore oaths together.³⁰
 I spent jingling cash³¹ and shiny-edged coins in order to
 be one of those who danced attendance on you.
 But you claimed your furnace³² was out of order, and I
 couldn't take the goose-eyes³³ of your madam.
 It may be said of you that "elm-pod cash³⁴ are lightweight,
 and brush-handles are hollow."



Ch'en Ching-chi Loses His Keys and Is Distrained to Sing

Sister! Like an antique cash; your body's shrunk and your
 hole's too big, no longer of any use;

Unless you let some bare stick,³⁵ with a worn legend,
play up to you with his oily mouth.
Baring your shiny tail, milled rim,³⁶ and baked lacquer³⁷ hue,
he'd debase you into utter compliance,
And then leave you so topsy-turvy you wouldn't be worth
so much as a single black sand-plate.³⁸
"Sister!" I call out. "You two-faced androgynous mule!"³⁹
Just you try and listen to what I say.
It would be a pity if this shiny gold-back⁴⁰ were paired with
such a wrinkle-faced, mis-struck ingot."

Ching-chi having finished his song, Chin-lien was about to have Ch'un-mei pour out more wine for him, when Wu Yüeh-niang suddenly showed up from the rear compound.

Noticing that the wet nurse Ju-i was sitting on the stone stylobate outside the door, holding Kuan-ko on her lap, she said to her, "The child is just recovering, you bitch! And here you are, holding him out here and exposing him to the wind. Why don't you take him inside?"

"Who is that speaking?" asked Chin-lien.

"The First Lady is here," Hsiu-ch'un replied.

Ching-chi hastily grabbed his keys and fled outside, as fast as he could go, while the rest of them came down the steps to welcome Yüeh-niang.

"What is our son-in-law doing here?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"Sister Li has prepared a snack and asked my mother over for a visit," said Chin-lien. "When our son-in-law came looking for some clothes, she invited him in for a drink. Sister, please have a seat. It's good sweet wine. Won't you have a cup?"

"I won't have any," said Yüeh-niang. "My elder brother's wife and Aunt Yang are in the rear compound, about to go home. I was concerned about the child and came straight over to see how he is. Sister Li, you're not paying adequate attention. You've let the wet nurse take him outside and sit down where he's exposed to the wind. The other day Dame Liu said he had caught a chill. You really ought to look after him more carefully."

"We were just having a drink with Old Mrs. P'an," Li P'ing-erh said. "Who could have known that lousy little stinker would carry him outside without anyone's knowing it."

Yüeh-niang sat down for a bit and then returned to the rear compound.

A little while later, she sent Hsiao-yü to invite Old Mrs. P'an, the Fifth Lady, and the Sixth Lady to come back to the rear compound for a visit. P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh put their makeup to rights and accompanied Old Mrs. P'an to the rear compound to join the other ladies for a drink with Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law and Aunt Yang. At sundown they all went out with Yüeh-niang to see their visitors off outside the front gate, where they got into their sedan chairs and departed.

As they were standing in the gateway, Meng Yü-lou started things off, saying, "Elder Sister. Since Father's not at home today, having gone to station master Wu's place for a drink, why don't we take advantage of the opportunity to go take a look at the former Ch'iao family's house across the street?"

Yüeh-niang asked the page boy P'ing-an, who was in charge of the gate, "Who's got the keys to the place over there?"

"If you ladies want to go over and have a look," said P'ing-an, "the door's open. Lai-hsing is supervising two laborers who are at work on the place."

"Go tell them to get out of the way while we take a look," Yüeh-niang instructed him.

"You ladies go ahead and have your look," said P'ing-an, "it won't be any problem. They're all at work:

Mixing lime and sifting sand,
in the big empty structure four courtyards back from the street. I'll just go and call them out."

Thereupon, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh were carried, one at a time, in a sedan chair, for the short haul to the house across the street, by the two laborers, who acted as bearers. On entering the ceremonial gate, they found an eighteen-foot-wide reception hall, beyond which, in the second courtyard, there was a two-story structure.

Yüeh-niang started to go up to the second floor, but:

Strange as it may seem,
before she was halfway up the stairs, which were unexpectedly steep, she was heard to utter a gasp, and one of her feet slipped out from under her. Fortunately, she was able to grab hold of the banisters to either side of the stairway, while Yü-lou, exclaiming in consternation, "What is it, Sister?" hastily gripped her by the arm and was able to prevent her from falling.

Yüeh-niang had been taken by surprise and refused to proceed any further. By the time her companions had helped her down to the foot of the stairs, the shock of the unexpected occurrence had turned her face as sallow as wax.

"Sister," asked Yü-lou, "what happened? Your foot must have slipped on the way up. Have you hurt yourself anywhere?"

"I may have managed to escape a fall," said Yüeh-niang, "but I've twisted my waist, and the shock has made:

My heart jump into my mouth.

The stairs are steep, and I made the mistake of assuming they were just like the ones we have at home. My foot slipped on the way up. It's lucky I was able to grab hold of the banisters. Otherwise, who knows what might have happened."

"On top of everything else," said Yü-lou, "you're feeling poorly in your present condition. It would have been better not to climb the stairs in the first place."

Thereupon, the group of sisters escorted Yüeh-niang back home, but no sooner did they arrive there than, as if in response to a call, she began to suffer from abdominal cramps. Unable to withstand the pain, Yüeh-niang took advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence to send a page boy after Dame Liu to come and treat her.

"You've already ceased menstruating," said Dame Liu, "and now you've hurt yourself. I'm afraid it's all over."

"I've been pregnant for more than five months," said Yüeh-niang, "and now I've wrenched myself going up the stairs."

"You'd better take a dose of my medicine," said Dame Liu. "If you can't carry it to term, you might as well abort it."

"All right, I'll abort it then," Yüeh-niang replied.

Dame Liu thereupon left behind two doses of medicine, in the form of large black pills, and told Yüeh-niang to take them along with a decoction of artemisia-flavored wine. Before the night was half over, she evacuated the fetus, and when they lit a candle to examine the contents of the commode, it turned out to be that of a male child that had already assumed recognizable shape. Truly:

Before the embryo was able to emerge
into the fullness of life,
Its true soul first made the journey
to the Realm of the Shades.

Fortunately, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home that day, he did not sleep in the master suite but spent the night in Meng Yu-lou's quarters instead. The next day, Yü-lou paid a visit to the master suite in the morning, to ask Yüeh-niang how she was feeling.

"Sure enough," Yüeh-niang reported, "in the middle of the night, I was unable to retain it and suffered a miscarriage. And it turned out to have been a boy."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Yü-lou. "Does Father not know about it?"

"Father had been drinking when he got home," explained Yüeh-niang. "He came into my room and started to take off his clothes, but I said to him, 'You go to someone else's quarters tonight. I'm feeling out of sorts.' It was only then that he went over to your place. I didn't tell him anything about it. Even now I'm still suffering from vague pains in the abdomen."

"I fear there may be some remaining blood that you still haven't voided," said Yü-lou. "If you drink some wine suffused with pot soot,⁴¹ that should take care of it."

"Sister," she went on to say, "you really ought to look after yourself for a few days. Stay in your room and don't go out. The consequences of a miscarriage can be even harder to treat than those of a regular childbirth. If you were to catch cold under these circumstances, it would be hard on your system."

"That goes without saying," Yüeh-niang responded. "But I don't want it bruited about till everybody hears of it. They'll make a big fuss for no good reason, and say I'm brooding over an empty nest, or something like that. It will only cause tongues to wag."

For this reason, Hsi-men Ch'ing was never told what had happened. Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, the manager that Hsi-men Ch'ing had just engaged to take charge of his new silk goods shop was not the sort to abide by his lot. His surname was Han, his given name was Tao-kuo, and his courtesy name was Hsi-yao. He was the son of a decadent man-about-town named Baldy Han but had now fallen on hard times. He had succeeded to his grandfather's hereditary position as a commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün. At present he resided on Oxhide Lane, off East Street.

Frivolous and flighty by nature,
His words overstate the facts.⁴²
Possessed of a clever tongue,
He is a glib conversationalist.
Those to whom he promises money, end up
Catching at shadows and clutching the wind;⁴³
But bilking others of their due, he finds
As easy as groping for something in a bag.⁴⁴

For these reasons, the people in his neighborhood, observing how meretricious he was, casually referred to him as Posturer Han.

Now that he had begun to do business for Hsi-men Ch'ing and felt flush with the money and silk at his disposal, he invested in a brand new outfit of "dung beetle skins,"⁴⁵ in which he swaggered about the neighborhood, hunching up his shoulders and putting on the dog. When people saw him, they did not refer to him by his courtesy name as Han Hsi-yao, but as Han I-yao, or Swaggery Han.

His wife was a younger sister of Butcher Wang, who slaughtered cattle for a living. She was called Wang Liu-erh, or Wang the Sixth, because she was the sixth sibling in her generation. She was tall of stature, had a face shaped like a melon seed, and a rosewood complexion, and was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. She had given birth to a

daughter, so there were three of them living together in the family.

Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, was nicknamed Trickster Han. He was a gambler and "knockabout" and lived apart from his brother's family. He and his sister-in-law were engaged in a long-standing illicit affair. Whenever he felt like it, he would take advantage of Han Tao-kuo's absence, on the days he had to spend the night at the shop, to drop in and have a drink with the woman; and, when it became late, if he was on the make, he would refuse to leave.

Who could have anticipated that there were a number of dissolute young scamps in the neighborhood who took note of the way in which the woman was given to:

Putting on rouge and applying powder,⁴⁶

and making a spectacle of herself by standing in the doorway at all hours in order to ogle the passersby. Yet if anyone rose to the bait by making a suggestive remark to her, she would respond by being:

Both hard and smelly,

and showering him with vituperation.

For this reason, these young scamps in the neighborhood were something less than well disposed toward her.

Gathering together in twos and threes,

they surreptitiously discussed her conduct and determined to find out if she were engaged in hanky-panky with anyone behind her husband's back. It took them less than half a month to ascertain the fact that she was, indeed, carrying on with her brother-in-law, Han the Second.

It so happens that the house in which Han Tao-kuo resided on Oxhide Lane had an eighteen-foot-wide frontage, was bounded by the houses of neighbors to either side, and had a rear gate that opened onto the embankment of a reservoir. Whenever this group of young scamps saw Han the Second go inside, they would engage the services of an old woman to intrude by offering to sprinkle the courtyard; or, at night, they would climb onto the hind wall to keep an eye on things; or, by day, send a little monkey onto the rear embankment, pretending to chase after moths; their one endeavor being to catch them in the act.

Who could have anticipated that, one day, Han the Second, having ascertained that his elder brother was not at home, brought some wine with him, got drunk with the woman in broad daylight, locked the door on the inside, and fell to it with her in the bedroom. Unbeknownst to them, the group of young scamps, having got wind of this, sent a little monkey to climb over the wall and open the rear gate, on which the whole bunch of them rushed in together and contrived to jerk open the door to the room. Han the Second tried to bolt out the gate, but one of the youths managed to:

Knock him over with one blow,

and he was taken captive. The woman was still on the k'ang, trying desperately to get into her clothes, when one of them came in and prevented this by grabbing her pants in his hand.

The two of them were trussed together with a single length of rope and taken outside, where, in no time at all, a crowd had gathered around the gateway and followed them to the township subprecinct station on Oxhide Lane. As a result of this, the entire street was in an uproar.



Han Tao-kuo Liberates His Wife to Compete for Admiration

This one came to ask,
That one came to see.

Everyone said that Han Tao-kuo's wife had been caught in an illicit affair with her brother-in-law.

A certain oldster among them, on seeing the man and the woman trussed up together, asked the people standing around, "What's this affair all about?"

A busybody next to him replied, "You mean you haven't heard about it, sir? This is a case of a brother-in-law engaging in illicit intercourse with his elder brother's wife."

The oldster nodded his head, saying, "How reprehensible! It so happens that when a brother messes around with his

sister-in-law, if they should be convicted of violating the statute governing illicit relations between brother and sister-in-law, both of them would be condemned to strangulation.”⁴⁷

The busybody by his side recognized the oldster to be the notorious Crud-crawler T’ao, who was known to have “crawled in the crud” successively with all three of his daughters-in-law.⁴⁸

For this reason he intruded himself further by saying, “You appear to be well versed in the law, sir. Since this case of a brother-in-law having sexual relations with his elder brother’s wife is a crime entailing the punishment of strangulation, if a father-in-law were to do the same with his daughter-in-law, of what crime do you think he would be guilty?”⁴⁹

The oldster, noting the untoward turn the conversation was taking, lowered his head, without saying another word, and beat a hasty retreat. Truly:

Every person should sweep the snow
in front of his own eaves;
Without bothering about the frost
upon his neighbor’s roof.⁵⁰

We will say no more for the moment about how Han the Second and his paramour were caught in the act but return to the story of Han Tao-kuo.

That day was not one of those on which he had to spend the night at the shop, so he was able to leave for home early. It was the middle decade of the eighth month. Sporting an outfit of light silk and soft damask, a newly blocked hat, a pair of fancy hairnet rings, jet satin shoes, and pure velveteen socks, and fanning himself as he went, he swaggered along the street:

Cutting a wide swath with his exaggerated strides.

Whenever he chanced to meet anyone, he made an occasion of it, either sitting or standing, while:

His words flowed like a cataract,⁵¹
Billowing out without interruption.⁵²

Among those he encountered were two acquaintances, Chang the Second, the proprietor of a paper shop, and Pai the Fourth, who was a silversmith, to whom he hastened to make an obeisance and raise his hand in greeting.

“Brother Han,” responded Chang, whose nickname was Chang the Importunate, “Long time no see. I hear that you are to be congratulated for going into business in the shop that His Honor Hsi-men Ch’ing has just opened on his premises. We are lacking in courtesy not to have offered our felicitations before this. I hope you won’t take it amiss.”

As he spoke, he offered him a seat.

Adopting a lofty expression and flaunting the fan in his hand, Han Tao-kuo sat down on a bench, and said, “Though your pupil is devoid of talent, thanks to the diffracted radiance shed by you gentlemen, I have been enabled to become a manager in the employ of my gracious master, His Honor Hsi-men Ch’ing. We split the profits on a 30 to 70 percent ratio, I have enormous sums at my disposal and am in charge of shops at several locations. Indeed, I am treated with such respect as to set me apart from others.”

A certain Hsieh Ju-huang, whose nickname was What a Whopper, responded, “From what I hear, Brother Han, all he has seen fit to charge you with is the management of his silk goods shop.”

“There are things of which you two gentlemen are ignorant,” pronounced Han Tao-kuo with a laugh. “The matter of the silk goods business is no more than an empty title. Nowadays, which one of the accounts of the various enterprises of his establishment, both great and small, are not in my hands?

He listens to my words and follows my advice,⁵³
Fortune and misfortune are shared between us.

Without me, he couldn’t get along for so much as an hour.

“Every day, when he comes home from the yamen, he invites me to share his meal with him. Without me, he wouldn’t even have the appetite to eat anything. The two of us while away the time in his little studio, eating delicacies and chatting with each other; often sitting there until the night is half over before he goes back to the rear compound.

“The other day, on his First Lady’s birthday, my wife went in a sedan chair to pay her respects, and his lady kept her so long at the party that she didn’t get home until the second watch.

Our two families are so intimate,
There are no restraints between us.⁵⁴

I probably oughtn’t to tell you this, but even the most private events in his bedchamber are among the topics on which he often consults with me.

“To begin with:

My conduct is upright and correct,
My heart opposed to all compromise.

On behalf of my wealthy patron, I am able to:

Promote profit and prevent loss,⁵⁵
Rescuing him from water or fire.⁵⁶

In all cases, I am:

Scrupulous where money is concerned,⁵⁷
Acquiring it only by legitimate means.

Even Manager Fu the Second stands somewhat in awe of me. It’s not that I’m boasting about myself, the fact is that His

Honor values me precisely for this quality.”

Just as his tongue was in full spate, all of a sudden, someone came running up in a state of obvious agitation, saying, “Brother Han, what are you still jabbering here for? I wasn’t able to find you at the shop.”

Drawing him aside to a secluded spot, he told him, “At your house:

Thus and thus, and

So and so,

your wife and your younger brother have been caught in the act by the neighbors, who have trussed them up and taken them to the subprecinct station. Tomorrow morning they’ll be escorted to the district yamen to appear before the magistrate. You’d better bestir yourself to pull whatever strings you can, if you want to take care of this matter.”

When Han Tao-kuo heard this, he:

Turned pale with consternation,⁵⁸

Licking his lips, above, and

Stamping his feet, below,

in his haste to take flight.

At this point, Chang the Importunate called out to him, “Brother Han, you haven’t finished your story. Why are you so anxious to get away?”

Han Tao-kuo raised his hand in acknowledgment, saying, “Your pupil has an insignificant matter to attend to at home, which prevents me from keeping you company any longer.” After which, he made a hasty departure. Truly:

Even if one could draw off all the water

of the West River,

It would hardly suffice to wash away

this day’s shame.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 34

SHU-T'UNG RELIES UPON HIS FAVOR TO BROKER AFFAIRS; P'ING-AN HARBORS RESENTMENT AND WAGS HIS TONGUE

In relying upon one's official prestige in order to
do as one pleases;
One ought not to let joy or anger confuse the spheres
of public and private.
Coveting wealth, he pays no heed whatever to
the violation of ethical norms;
Given to lust, he shows total disregard for
breaches of propriety and reason.
His hangers-on avail themselves of his name
to seek personal advantage;
His wanton slaves employ ingratiating gestures
to effect surreptitious ends.
If you wish to know the principles that govern
subsequent success or failure;
The doings of the day provide all one needs to
extrapolate them by analogy.

THE STORY GOES that when Han Tao-kuo arrived home and found that his wife and his brother, Han the Second, had been trussed up and taken to the subprecinct station, he hastened back to the shop on Lion Street to consult with Lai-pao.

"You'd better go directly to Uncle Ying the Second," said Lai-pao, "and ask him to intercede with your master. If he sends a note about it to Magistrate Li in the district yamen, no matter how important a matter it might be, that ought to take care of it."

Han Tao-kuo went straight to Ying Po-chüeh's house, but his wife sent out a maidservant who reported, "He's not at home. Who knows where he may have gotten to. More likely than not, he's at His Honor Hsi-men's place."

"If he's not at home," said Han Tao-kuo, "let me speak to Ying Pao." But it turned out that he had gone out with his father.

This threw Han Tao-kuo into a panic, and he went looking for him in the licensed quarter.

It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh had been invited for a drink by Ho Liang-feng, the younger brother of Magnate Ho from Hu-chou, in the establishment of the singing girl, Ho Chin-ch'an, on Fourth Street. When Han Tao-kuo succeeded in tracking him down, he invited him to come outside and have a word with him.

Ying Po-chüeh had been drinking until his face became bright red and was sporting a toothpick in the brim of his hat. Han Tao-kuo bowed to him and then, drawing him aside to a secluded spot, told him, thus and so, what had happened.

"Since such an event has occurred," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I cannot do otherwise than go with you."

Thereupon, he said goodbye to Ho Liang-feng and accompanied Han Tao-kuo to his home, where he interrogated him about the details of the affair.

Han Tao-kuo beseeched him, saying, "My only hope is that you will go to His Honor's residence and ask him to write a note on my behalf. I anticipate that tomorrow morning when they are taken to the district yamen the case will be adjudicated by Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien. If he could only request him to:

Look upon the matter with favorable eyes,¹
so that my wife is not required to come before the bench, when the affair is over, I will see that you are richly rewarded, and even kowtow to you."

As he spoke, he knelt down on the ground, but Ying Po-chüeh pulled him up by the hand, saying, "Worthy friend, in such a trifling affair as this, I could scarcely fail to intervene on your behalf. Get a sheet of paper and write out an explanatory note. I'll accompany you to His Honor's residence right now and speak to him about it. You should dispense with any idle chatter. Just say, 'I am frequently away from home, and in my absence this bunch of "bare sticks" from the neighborhood are constantly:

Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,
in order to insult my wife.' Because your younger brother, Han the Second, couldn't get over his resentment at this, he got into a brawl with them, only to find himself surrounded by this bunch who dragged him to the ground and started kicking and beating him. As a result, he and your wife now find themselves trussed up together in the subprecinct station. Ask His Honor to write a note to Magistrate Li explaining the situation and urging that your wife not be required to come

before the bench. You can be sure that he will prove responsive to such a request and that will be the end of it."

Han Tao-kuo fetched brush and inkstone, promptly wrote out an explanatory note, and tucked it into his sleeve. Ying Po-chüeh then led him straight to the door of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and asked the gatekeeper, "Is your master at home?"

"The master is in his studio in the flower garden," P'ing-an replied. "Master Second and Uncle Han, please go right in."

Ying Po-chüeh was such a regular visitor that even the dog did not attempt to bite him. With Han Tao-kuo in tow, he proceeded through the ceremonial gate, around the main reception hall, and through the vaulted right angle turn in the gallery connecting the gable of the reception hall to the anterooms on the side of the courtyard, straight to the postern gate leading into the garden. Skirting the juniper hedge that ran along either side of the banksia rose arbor, they came to the small three-roomed summerhouse on the other side of the hedge called the Kingfisher Pavilion. This was the place where Hsi-men Ch'ing sought to cool off during the summer months.

In front and behind,
Screens and lattices set each other off;
On all four sides,
Flowers and bamboos are thick and shady.
All the way round are displayed,
Rare birds and exotic animals,²
Ultramundane plants and amaranthine blossoms,³
Each a perfect specimen of its kind.

The studio consisted of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor, and two less well-lighted inner rooms.

The page boy, Hua-t'ung, who was sweeping the ground outside, announced, "Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han are here."

The two of them lifted aside the blind and stepped into the parlor, where they found Shu-t'ung on duty in the study within.

When he saw that it was Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han, he said, "Please have a seat. Father has just gone back to the rear compound." He then told Hua-t'ung to go and ask him to come out again.

Ying Po-chüeh observed that facing each other on the upper and lower ends of the room were ranged two rows of six low-slung, bow-back, folding armchairs of the type called Tung-p'o chairs,⁴ embellished with Yunnan agateware lacquer, gilt nails, and wickerwork rattan seats. On the two side walls were hung four landscape paintings by well-known artists, mounted on ultramarine patterned damask with white satin borders. On one hand there stood a side table, the cabriole legs of which were carved in the shape of a protruding "mantis belly"⁵ that tapered down into "dragonfly feet,"⁶ and the top of which was inlaid with an oblong, letter-shaped, slab of marble, chosen for its pictorial quality.⁷ On this table there was displayed an antique bronze incense burner in the shape of a gilded crane. In the center of the back wall there hung a plaque emblazoned with the three characters for Kingfisher Pavilion, with a pair of framed hanging scrolls suspended to its left and right, on the coated paper of which was inscribed the couplet:

The breeze is tranquil, shadows of locust trees
purify the courtyard;
The day is long, fragrance from an incense burner
suffuses the latticework.

Thereupon, Ying Po-chüeh took a seat in one of the chairs facing the entrance, Han Tao-kuo pulled over a chair and sat down at right angles to him, while Hua-t'ung went back to the rear compound to find Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After some time had passed, Ying Po-chüeh wandered into the inner study, where he found standing on the floor a black lacquer summer bedstead with incised gold ornamentation and a decorative marble panel, and fitted with bed curtains of blue silk. To either side of this there were painted lacquer bookcases adorned with gold tracery, which were filled with the conventional presentation gifts of privately printed books with brocade wrappers and bolts of fabric. There was also a desk, piled high with writing implements and books. Under the green gauze window there stood a black lacquer zither stand and a solitary folding chair inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A letter case was also visible containing Hsi-men Ch'ing's social correspondence, calling cards, and lists of people with whom Mid-autumn Festival gifts had been exchanged.

Picking up the first list, Ying Po-chüeh opened and perused it. He found inscribed there the names of His Honor Ts'ai Ching, His Excellency Ts'ai Yu, Defender-in-chief Chu Mien, Defender-in-chief T'ung Kuan, His Honor Privy Councilor Ts'ai the Fourth,⁸ His Honor Commandant Ts'ai the Fifth,⁹ as well as the names of the four principal officers from both the local district and prefectural yamens. The second list contained the names of Commandant Chou Hsiu, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the two Eunuch Directors Liu and Hsüeh. The items indicated were bolts of satin brocade, preserved pork, wine, gold-colored pastries, preserved shad, salted seafood, chicken, goose, and other gifts appropriate for major occasions, each graded differentially according to the status of the recipient.

The two of them continued to wait for their host. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hua-t'ung went back as far as Chin-lien's quarters and asked, "Sister Ch'un-mei, is Father here?"

"You lousy little slave! You've been seeing things," Ch'un-mei railed at him. "Father's next door at the Sixth Lady's place, isn't he? Why insist on running over here to ask after him?"

Hua-t'ung then went over to the other side, where he found Hsiu-ch'un sitting on the stone stylobate, and asked her in

a low voice, "Is Father here? Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han have come and are waiting in the studio to have a word with him."

"Father is here," replied Hsiu-ch'un. "He's watching Mother make some clothes for the baby."

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come up with two bolts of material, one of scarlet silk, and one of parrot-green Lu-chou pongee, out of which he had told Li P'ing-erh to make undershirts, cloaks, vests, skullcaps, and the like for Kuan-ko. On the gold-flecked k'ang frame a scarlet strip of felt had been laid down to create a working space for this purpose. The wet nurse was holding the baby on one side, and Ying-ch'un was standing by with an iron in her hand. Whom should they see at this juncture but Hsiu-ch'un, who came in and surreptitiously gave a tug at Ying-ch'un.

"What are you tugging at me for?" demanded Ying-ch'un. "If you're not careful, you'll knock some of the coals from the iron onto the strip of felt."

Li P'ing-erh then asked, "Why are you tugging at her for no good reason?"

"Hua-t'ung says that Master Ying the Second has come," said Hsiu-ch'un, "and would like to have a word with Father."

"You little slave!" said Li P'ing-erh. "If Master Ying the Second has come, you should come in and explain the situation, that's all. Why insist on tugging at her?"

"Just ask Master Ying the Second to have a seat," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Hua-t'ung. "I'll be there in a minute."

Thereupon, he continued to watch the cutting out of the baby things until the task was completed and then went out to the studio in his informal clothes to see Ying Po-chüeh and his companion.

When they had bowed to each other and sat down, with Han Tao-kuo occupying a seat to one side, Hsi-men Ch'ing called Hua-t'ung and told him to bring them some tea. Before long he brought out three cups of tea flavored with candied kumquats in carved lacquer cups with silver teaspoons, and after they had drunk it, he took the cups and their raised saucers away again.

Ying Po-chüeh then started things off by saying, "Brother Han, if you've got anything to say, tell His Honor what it is."

"If you've got something to say, speak up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Han Tao-kuo was about to say, "There is a bunch of ruffians in my neighborhood, whose names are unknown to me," when he was interrupted by Ying Po-chüeh, who said, "Worthy friend, that's not the way to go about it. It won't do to.

Conceal the bones in your mouth and
merely expose the flesh.

In front of His Honor your employer here, you would do better to:

Open up the back door and speak right out.

Brother Han often has to spend the night at the shop, which means that there is no one left at home but his wife and their child. In his neighborhood there are a number of persons who are:

Neither fish nor fowl,

who, seeing that there is no man in the house, are constantly:

Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,

driving her crazy with their tricks and insults. His younger brother, Han the Second, being fed up with this behavior, gave them a piece of his mind when he came to visit, only to find himself set upon by this bunch of 'bare sticks' who:

Without permitting any further explanation,

surrounded him and beat him to a stinking pulp. Right now, his brother and his wife have both been trussed up and taken to the subprecinct station. Tomorrow morning they'll be escorted from there to the township station and the district yamen and brought before the presiding magistrate, His Honor Li Ta-t'ien.

"Weeping and wailing, he has come and respectfully begged me to ask you to write a note on his behalf, and send someone to speak to Magistrate Li about it, requesting that he:

Look upon the matter with favorable eyes.

If his brother has to be arraigned, that will not matter too much, so long as his wife is not required to appear before the bench."

He then went on to say, "Get out that explanatory note of yours, and show it to His Honor, so that he can send someone to take care of it for you."

Han Tao-kuo then reached into his sleeve, pulled out the note, and hastily getting down on his knees, said, "Unworthy as I am, your humble servant has been the recipient of your patronage. My only hope is that Your Honor, out of consideration for Uncle Ying the Second, will deign to show me some consideration in this matter. Should you do so, my entire family will be:

Unable to forget your kindness
as long as we live."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by this speech that he pulled him up by one hand, saying, "Please get up."

Thereupon, glancing at the note, which read, "Please look with favor on the female defendant, nee Wang, and exempt her from the obligation to appear before the bench," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "This note ought not to be worded this way. You should refer only to your younger brother, Han the Second, and leave it at that."

Then, turning to Ying Po-chüeh, he said, "Rather than my addressing a note to the district yamen, it would be better to instruct the local constable to alter his report so that tomorrow the case will be dealt with in my yamen instead."

"Brother Han," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "You should make an obeisance to His Honor. This way of handling it is better yet."

Han Tao-kuo once again knelt down and kowtowed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "You go outside immediately and call in one of the foremen on duty there."

Before long an adjutant in black livery was called in and stood to one side awaiting orders.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to step forward and instructed him, "You go to the residence of Manager Han on Oxhide Street, find the local constable of the relevant neighborhood subprecinct station, and have him speak to the neighborhood head of the relevant mutual security unit. You can say that it is my personal directive that he should release the defendant, nee Wang, immediately; ascertain the names of the 'bare sticks' involved; and alter the report so that tomorrow morning the case will be brought before my yamen, the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, for adjudication."

The adjutant assented to the orders he had received and went out the gate.

"Brother Han," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you might as well go along with him and take care of your business. I still have a few words to say to His Honor."

Han Tao-kuo took his leave, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

and accompanied the adjutant to Oxhide Street to convey his orders.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then sat down to keep Ying Po-chüeh company in the Kingfisher Pavilion. Ordering Tai-an to set up a table, he said to him, "Go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady to open and decant some of that osmanthus-flavored lotus blossom wine that Eunuch Director Liu of the Imperial Brickyard sent us the other day. I'd like to share it with Uncle Ying the Second. And have some of that preserved shad in fermented mash steamed for us as well."

Po-chüeh raised his hand at this point and said, "I still haven't thanked you, Brother, for the two fine shad that you were kind enough to send me the other day. I gave one of them to my elder brother and said to my wife, with regard to the other, 'Cut it in two with a cleaver, and send a piece to our daughter. As for what's left over, chop it into thin slices, marinate it in the red mash it came in, mix in a little sesame seed oil, and store it in a porcelain jar, so that, early or late, when we're having a meal, or if a guest should show up, we can steam a saucerful for our delectation, thereby not failing in our appreciation of Brother's lavish generosity.'"

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Eunuch Director Liu's younger brother, Company Commander Liu, because he has made a good thing for himself out of the management of the Imperial Reed Beds below the river, has recently bought himself an estate at Wu-li Tien and appropriated timber from the Imperial Lumber Depot to build a house on it. Recently this matter was brought before our yamen, and my colleague Hsia Yen-ling, despite having accepted a bribe of one hundred taels of silver, threatened to memorialize about the case and forward the records to the Ministry of Justice in the capital. This threw Eunuch Director Liu into such a panic that he came to me in person, with a hundred taels of silver in hand, and begged me repeatedly to do what I could to quash the case. There's no reason for me to deceive you. I make enough at my business concerns not to have to worry about getting by, so that sort of money means nothing to me. Moreover, Eunuch Director Liu is a long-standing friend of mine, from whom I have often received gifts, so I could scarcely afford to lose face over such a trifling affair. Thus I refused to accept anything from him, simply telling him to see that the house in question was torn down overnight. When the case came before the bench, I merely had Company Commander Liu's servant, Liu the Third, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and thereby disposed of the matter.

"When the affair was concluded, Eunuch Director Liu could not get over his feelings of gratitude at my consideration, so he slaughtered a pig and came in person to present it to me, along with a jug of homemade lotus blossom wine, two packages of preserved shad weighing forty catties, and two bolts of figured satin brocade.

It redounds to the credit of both of us,
that we were able to exchange favors this way. What need was there for money?"

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "Money may not mean anything to you, but His Honor Hsia Yen-ling started life in the ranks, so that from the time he:

Put down roots and stood up straight,
he's had to do without it. If he doesn't grab some for himself when the opportunity offers, what is he to live on? Brother, since taking office you must have heard quite a few cases with him."

"Great and small, I have heard quite a few cases with him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As for the rest, everything is fine enough; the only trouble is:

His greed and avarice know no bounds.

When cases come before him, without so much as enquiring into the:

Blue or red, black or white,
of the situation, if money comes into his hands, he frees the parties concerned. What sort of justice is that? I have consequently balked at his proposals more than once and refused to go along with him. After all, although we are both only military officials, we are charged with the administration of justice and ought to have some regard for appearances."

Before he had finished speaking, wine and delicacies were laid before them. First there were four saucers of hors d'oeuvres, after which another four dishes of cold appetizers were served to go with the wine, consisting of fresh red T'ai-chou duck eggs, crescent-shaped golden prawns from Liao-tung on a bed of julienned cucumber, fragrant deep-fried pork ribs, and plump dry-steamed pieces of split sun-dried chicken. The second course consisted of four more dishes of hot appetizers: a bowl of roast duck steamed in its own juice, a bowl of jellied pig's trotters, a bowl of braised pork, and a bowl of quick-fried pork kidneys. Only after that, on a porcelain platter decorated with a blue and white pattern both

inside and out, was there served up a whole red and savory steamed preserved shad, with a bewitching aroma.

It melted on entering the mouth,

Even its bones were fragrant.

Hsi-men Ch'ing poured the lotus blossom wine into gold cups in the shape of chrysanthemum blossoms and kept Ying Po-chüeh company as they enjoyed their repast. But we will say no more about how the two of them sat together and chatted for more than two hours before breaking up.

To resume our story, the bunch of young scamps concerned in the affair, on observing that an adjutant in black livery had shown up at the subprecinct station and effected the release of the woman, nee Wang, who was allowed to go home; had interrogated the neighborhood head of the relevant mutual security unit in order to ascertain the names of the parties involved; and had directed that the next morning they were all to be escorted to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission for a hearing; could only:

Gaze at each other in consternation.¹⁰

It dawned on them that Han Tao-kuo was a manager in the employ of Hsi-men Ch'ing and must have asked his master to put in the fix on his behalf, with the result that Han the Second was now the only person in custody at the subprecinct station.

With one voice they exclaimed, "This matter has taken a turn for the worse."

Han Tao-kuo had slipped five mace of silver to the adjutant, who promptly saw to it that the head of the relevant mutual security unit wrote down the names of the parties involved and sent them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, preparatory to their being haled into court the following morning.

The next day the two officials, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia, went to the yamen and took their places on the bench, while the local constable and the neighborhood head of the relevant mutual security unit delivered their charges to the court. The first party brought forward was Han the Second, who knelt down before the bench. Judicial Commissioner Hsia first perused the report, which read:

The resident of Oxhide Street and neighborhood head of the fourth neighborhood of the first subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho, Hsiao Ch'eng, reports a case of disturbance of the peace in the said neighborhood. The first party involved is called Han the Second; the second is Ch'e Tan, or Hogwash Ch'e; the third is Kuan Shih-k'uan, or Busybody Kuan; the fourth is Yu Shou, or Loafer Yu; and the fifth is Hao Hsien, or Idler Hao.

All of these persons were then called on to come forward and sign their names, after which the magistrate asked Han the Second, "What is this all about?"

"My elder brother is engaged in commerce," said Han the Second, "which often requires him to be away from home. He and his wife are a young couple and have consequently been taken advantage of during his absence by this bunch of 'bare sticks' from the neighborhood, who are constantly strumming guitars and ukuleles, gathering on her doorstep to sing:

Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,
pitching bricks over the wall at night, and insulting her in every way. I live apart from my brother's family, but when I came by his house and saw what was going on, I was unwilling to put up with it and gave them a piece of my mind, as a result of which this bunch of 'bare sticks,' like a pack of tigers:

Without permitting any further explanation,
dragged me down to the ground and started kicking and beating me. Now that I have been brought before Your Honor's bench, I hope Your Honor will look into the matter."

Addressing himself to the other parties in the case, Judicial Commissioner Hsia then asked, "And what is your story?"

As though with one voice, that group of individuals responded, "Your Honor, don't allow yourself to be taken in by his specious testimony. He's nothing but a gambler and trickster who has been taking advantage of his brother's absence from home to carry on an affair with his sister-in-law, nee Wang; while she, for her part, has displayed the brazen audacity to vilely abuse her neighbors. Yesterday we caught them in the act, and we have her underpants to present as evidence."

Judicial Commissioner Hsia then asked the neighborhood head, Hsiao Ch'eng, "Why is the woman, nee Wang, not here in court?"

Hsiao Ch'eng did not feel that it would be appropriate to say that the adjutant had released her, so he simply said, "Her feet are small, so she has trouble walking on the street. She'll be here soon enough."

Han the Second, from his position beneath the bench, merely fixed his two eyes on Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing inclined his body in Judicial Commissioner Hsia's direction and said, "My senior colleague, it seems unnecessary to arraign the woman, nee Wang. It is probable that she is rather good-looking, and that when she refused to respond to the propositions of these 'bare sticks,' they have retaliated by concocting this trap for her."

He then called for their leader, Ch'e Tan, to come forward and asked him, "Where was it that you apprehended this Han the Second?"

"It was yesterday, in her house, that we apprehended them," the group replied.

He then went on to ask Han the Second, "What is the woman nee Wang's relationship to you?"

The neighborhood head replied, "She is his sister-in-law."

He then continued to question the neighborhood head, saying, "And how did this bunch of people get into her house?" "They got in by climbing over the wall," the neighborhood head responded.

Hsi-men Ch'ing became very angry and upbraided them, saying, "What is to be done with a bunch of 'bare sticks' like you! Since he is her brother-in-law, the woman, nee Wang, falls within the scope of his five mourning relationships¹¹ as defined by law, so what objection can there be to his frequenting her home? As for the likes of this bunch of 'bare sticks,' what is your relationship to her? How dare you enter her house by climbing over the wall? Moreover, you did so while her husband was away from home, and she had only a young daughter in the house. Whatever you had in mind:

If it was not seduction, it must have been robbery."¹²

Then he shouted to the attendants, "Bring out the ankle-squeezers. Give each of them a squeezing and then administer twenty strokes of the heavy bamboo."

They were beaten until:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and

Fresh blood spurted out.¹³

Moreover, the four or five of them were all young scamps who:

From the time they left their mothers' wombs,

Had never undergone judicial punishment,

so that in every case, as a result of the beating:

Their cries shook the heavens, and

Their groans filled the courtroom.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, without waiting for Judicial Commissioner Hsia to open his mouth, ordered, "Han the Second is to leave the court and await the further disposition of the case. The other four are to be incarcerated until such time as their depositions can be taken and they can be escorted to a higher court to stand trial."

When the four of them found themselves in jail, they engaged in mutual recriminations, each of them feeling as though he were:

Carrying a spectral fetus.

The other prisoners in the jail further intimidated them by saying, "If the four of you are escorted to a higher court to stand trial, you will be sentenced to penal servitude, and if you are exiled to some faraway prefecture, subprefecture, or district it will be the death of you."

The whole bunch of them were in a state of panic, and as soon as the servants from their families showed up to deliver food to them, they each sent letters home instructing their fathers and elder brothers to spend money both high and low in order to pull whatever strings they could.

Among these there was one who approached Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, who responded, "The husband of this woman, nee Wang, is a manager employed by His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing. As long as he remains adamant about this matter, insisting that they be escorted to a higher court to stand trial, since he is a colleague of mine, there is not much I can do about it. You had better find some way of pulling strings with him if you want a favorable outcome."

There were also those who induced Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to intervene in the matter, but without result. Everyone was aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had money to spare, so they felt it would be futile to offer him anything directly.

At this point, the fathers and elder brothers of the four families involved were in a state of panic and held a conference together, at which one of them said, "There's no point in another approach to Battalion Commander Wu since he has already turned us down. But I've heard it said that Ying the Second, the Younger brother of that Ying the Elder who has a silk goods store on East Street, is thick with him. The best thing to do is for each of us to ante up some silver, enough to come to several tens of taels altogether, and then seal it up and offer it to Ying the Second. If he can be persuaded to intervene on our behalf, the outcome is bound to be auspicious."

Thereupon, the fathers and elder brothers of the families involved, with Ch'e Tan's father, Old Man Ch'e, the proprietor of a local wineshop, at their head, each came up with ten taels of silver, making the sum of forty taels in all. They then proceeded as a group to Ying Po-chüeh's house to beg him to intervene with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Ying Po-chüeh agreed to accept the money and sent them on their way.

His wife then said to him, "Since you've already come to the aid of Manager Han by helping to land this bunch of scamps in their present predicament, how can you now turn around and accept this money to speak up on their behalf without antagonizing Manager Han?"

"Of course, it's going to be an awkward business," said Ying Po-chüeh. "To start with, thus and so, I'll take fifteen taels of silver and surreptitiously present it to Shu-t'ung, the page boy in charge of his studio, asking him to exercise his ingenuity in broaching this matter with his master. You don't know the extent to which His Honor depends on him in matters great and small, taking everything he says seriously. I guarantee he'll:

Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow."

Thereupon, having weighed out fifteen taels worth of silver, wrapped it up, and tucked it into his sleeve, he headed straight for Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Hsi-men Ch'ing had not yet returned home. Ying Po-chüeh proceeded as far as the reception hall when he saw Shu-t'ung coming out of the studio on the west side of the courtyard. On his head he wore a "tile-ridge" hat, and the two tufts of his hair were bound into knots with jet satin ribbons and sported gold-headed pins in the shape of lotus blossoms. On his body he wore a long gown of Su-chou chiffon, a jade-colored silk tunic, sandals, and white socks.

"Master Second," he said, "please have a seat in the parlor."

He then ordered Hua-t'ung to go to the rear compound and fetch some tea, saying, "Page boy, I'm sending you to fetch some tea for Master Ying the Second, but instead of getting a move on, you're continuing to fool around. Just wait until Father comes home and see if I tell him about it or not."

Only then did the page boy set off to fetch the tea.

"It looks as though he's not back from the yamen yet, is he?" Ying Po-chüeh then asked.

"Just now one of his attendants came by," replied Shu-t'ung, "to say that the court session is already over, but that he and His Honor Hsia have gone outside the South Gate to pay a social call together. Master Second, what is it that you have to say to him?"

"It's nothing in particular," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"With regard to that matter concerning Manager Han that you spoke to him about the other day," said Shu-t'ung, "Father went to the yamen yesterday and had that bunch of scamps beaten and incarcerated. Tomorrow he is going to draft the necessary documents and have the defendants escorted to a higher court to stand trial."

Drawing him aside to a secluded spot, Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Right now a further complication has arisen. The relatives of that bunch of scamps, thus and so, on hearing the proposal that they be escorted to a higher court to stand trial, have all become fearful about the situation. Last night they came to my home, weeping and wailing, and begged me repeatedly, on bended knee, to speak to your master on their behalf. I thought to myself, 'since I have already spoken to him previously on Manager Han's behalf, how can I very well intervene on their side without antagonizing Manager Han?' I had no alternative but to tell the four families to come up with fifteen taels of silver and ask you to exercise your ingenuity in broaching the subject with your master, to see if there is any way he might see his way clear to letting them off the hook."

As he finished speaking, he reached into his sleeve, pulled out the silver, and handed it to Shu-t'ung.

Shu-t'ung unwrapped it, saw that it consisted of four ingots of varying sizes along with four smaller pieces, and said, "As long as it's for your sake, Master Second, you can tell them that if they come up with another five taels I will undertake to speak on their behalf, but I don't know whether Father will agree to their request or not. Last night his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, came in person to speak to him about this matter, and he refused to agree. As for me:

With the visage of a flea,

How much face have I got?¹⁴

To tell you the truth, Master Second, this silver must take care of more than myself. I'll have to spend a little something to enlist the services of the Sixth Lady, the one who has borne him a son. Only if I approach him in this roundabout way will there be any hope of success."

"If that's the way it is," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll explain the situation to them. Whatever you do, put your heart into it. They'll be coming for an answer later this afternoon."

"I don't know when Father will get home," said Shu-t'ung. "You'd better tell them to come back tomorrow morning."

When they had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh made his departure.

Shu-t'ung took the silver into the shop, chiseled off a piece worth one tael and five mace, and sent someone out to buy a jug of Chin-hua wine, two roast ducks, two chickens, one mace worth of fresh fish, a leg of pork, two mace worth of stuffed cream puff pastries, and one mace worth of fruit-flavored sweet rolls. Then he carried these ingredients to Lai-hsing's quarters and asked his wife, Hui-hsiu, to prepare them for him, so they would be ready to be served.

That particular day it so happened that P'an Chin-lien was not at home. Early in the morning she had taken a sedan chair to Old Mrs. P'an's place outside the South Gate in order to celebrate her mother's birthday. Shu-t'ung directed Hua-t'ung to put the delicacies he had provided into square boxes and deliver them to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Only after he had done so did he plan to pick up the jug of Chin-hua wine and go inside himself.

"Where did all this come from?" Li P'ing-erh asked.

"It's Brother Shu-t'ung's way of showing his respect for you," Hua-t'ung replied.

"The lousy jailbird!" laughed Li P'ing-erh. "Why should he be showing any respect to me?"

After a while, Shu-t'ung came in and saw Li P'ing-erh seated on the gilt lacquer frame of the k'ang, extending her jade wrists, the color of snowy lotus root and encircled by gilded bracelets, in the effort to induce a tortoiseshell cat to play with Kuan-ko.

"You lousy jailbird!" she said. "For whom have you provided all these goodies here?"

Shu-t'ung merely smiled.

"What do you mean," asked Li P'ing-erh, "by not saying a word and merely smiling that way?"

"To whom should I show respect," Shu-t'ung replied, "if not to you?"

"You lousy jailbird!" said Li P'ing-erh. "Why should you appear to go to such pains for no good reason only to show respect for me? Unless you explain yourself, I'll refuse to eat any of it. As the saying goes:

The superior man does not eat food of unknown origin."

Shu-t'ung opened the jug of wine, arrayed the delicacies on a small table, told Ying-ch'ün to decant the wine into a silver flagon, poured some of it into a cup, and offered it up to her with both hands.



Shu-t'ung Relies upon His Favor to Broker Affairs

Getting down on his knees, he said, "Only after you have drunk this cup will I explain things to you."

"What is this all about?" demanded Li P'ing-erh. "Only after you have explained it to me will I eat anything of yours. If you refuse to explain it, you can kneel to me for a hundred years and I still won't eat anything."

"You can stand up to explain it," she added.

Shu-t'ung then gave her a complete account from the beginning of Ying Po-chüeh's request on behalf of the four defendants.

"Since he had initially intervened on behalf of Manager Han," he explained, "he felt awkward about speaking up for the other side, so he asked me to present his petition to you first. If Father questions you about it, don't tell him I had anything to do with it. Just pretend that your brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu, sent someone to speak to you about it. I've

written out a note in the front studio, which I will say that you gave me, with instructions to show it to him. If you will just put in a good word while he's in your room, that ought to do it. Moreover, the other day, Father has already given them a taste of the bamboo for their sins. If he can be induced to settle the case by letting them go free, it would be a truly momentous good deed."

"So that's what it's all about," laughed Li P'ing-erh. It's no big deal. As soon as your father comes home I'll speak to him. That's all there is to it. What made you think you had to prepare all these goodies for no good reason?"

"You lousy jailbird!" she went on to say. "No doubt you made him pay dearly for your services."

"There's no reason for me to deceive you," said Shu-t'ung. "He gave me five taels of silver for my pains."

"You lousy jailbird!" said Li P'ing-erh. "You're becoming quite an expert at:

Setting people up and shaking them down."

Thereupon, instead of using small cups, she told Ying-ch'ün to fetch a pair of large goblets of chased silver. After drinking off two goblets herself, she poured another gobletful and presented it to Shu-t'ung.

"I don't dare drink anything," Shu-t'ung said, "or my face will get red, and Father will notice it."

"I'm bestowing it on you," said Li P'ing-erh. "What is there to be afraid of?"

Thereupon, he kowtowed to her, stood up, and drank it off with one gulp. Li P'ing-erh picked out a sampling of each of the delicacies and put them on a saucer for him to eat. The page boy kept her company by draining two large goblets in succession, after which, fearing that his face would turn red, he dared not drink any more but took his leave and went out to the shop at the front of the compound.

Half of the sweetmeats and delicacies he had bought were left over and he laid them out on the counter, along with two flagons of wine, and invited Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, Ch'en Ching-chi, Lai-hsing, and Tai-an to share them with him. The bunch of them fell to and polished everything off in no time, like:

A gust of wind sweeping away vestiges of clouds.¹⁵

But he forgot to invite P'ing-an to join them.

P'ing-an just sat at his post at the main gate, pouting with his lips. Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrive home from the social call he had been paying outside the South Gate early that afternoon. P'ing-an saw him coming but did not say anything to warn of his arrival. When Shu-t'ung heard the sound of his escorts shouting to clear the way, he was so flustered he did not have time to clear up the mess but raced to the reception hall in two or three strides in order to take charge of Hsi-men Ch'ing's formal clothes.

"Has anyone been here today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him.

"No one has been here," Shu-t'ung replied.

Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his formal clothes, doffed his official headgear, exchanging it for a cap and headband, and then went into the studio and sat down. Shu-t'ung fetched a cup of tea and served it to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing drank a mouthful and then set the teacup down again.

Noticing that his face was red, he asked him, "Where've you been drinking wine?"

Shu-t'ung then pulled out a note from under the inkstone on the table and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "This is a note that the Sixth Lady called me into her room to give me. It has something to do with Ch'e Tan and that bunch and was sent over here by her brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu. The Sixth Lady told me to take it with me in order to show to you. Because she bestowed a cup of wine on me, I guess my face must be red."

Hsi-men Ch'ing glanced at the note, which said, "Please look with favor on the four offenders Ch'e Tan and company"; and then, having read it, he handed it to Shu-t'ung and instructed him, "Put it in my letter case and have the officer on duty remind me about it in the yamen tomorrow."

Shu-t'ung put the note in the letter case and then came over and stood in attendance at his side. When Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that after a few drinks the colors red and white formed a pleasing contrast on his face and the fragrant redness of his lips revealed a mouthful of teeth as white as glutinous rice, how could he have been anything but captivated. Thereupon his:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Taking him onto his lap, the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues. The young man had a cinnamon-flavored breath-sweetening lozenge in his mouth, and his whole person exuded a pungent fragrance. Hsi-men Ch'ing hiked up his clothes with one hand, took down his flowered drawers, and began to fondle his buttocks.

As he did so, he enjoined him, "You shouldn't drink too much wine, or you'll spoil that face of yours."

"Your instructions are duly noted," said Shu-t'ung.

The two of them then continued to carry on with each other in the study.

To resume our story, a figure, clad in black and riding a horse, arrived at the main gate of the compound, leapt off his horse, and, bowing to P'ing-an, who was tending the gate, asked him, "Is this the residence of His Honor Hsi-men, the judicial commissioner?"

Now P'ing-an was still pouting over the fact that Shu-t'ung had failed to invite him to partake of his treat and was not in the best of moods, so he did not reply for some time.

The man continued to stand there and said, "I have been sent by Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command to deliver a circular announcement to His Honor Hsi-men. Tomorrow he is throwing a party at the Temple of Eternal Felicity in order to see off His Honor Hsü Nan-ch'i, who has been promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade. Their Honors Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and Militia

Commander Chang Kuan will also be there. Contributions of one tael apiece have already been received from them. I have come straight here to deliver this communication. Might I trouble you, as his gate tender, to pass it on to him? I will wait for an answer."

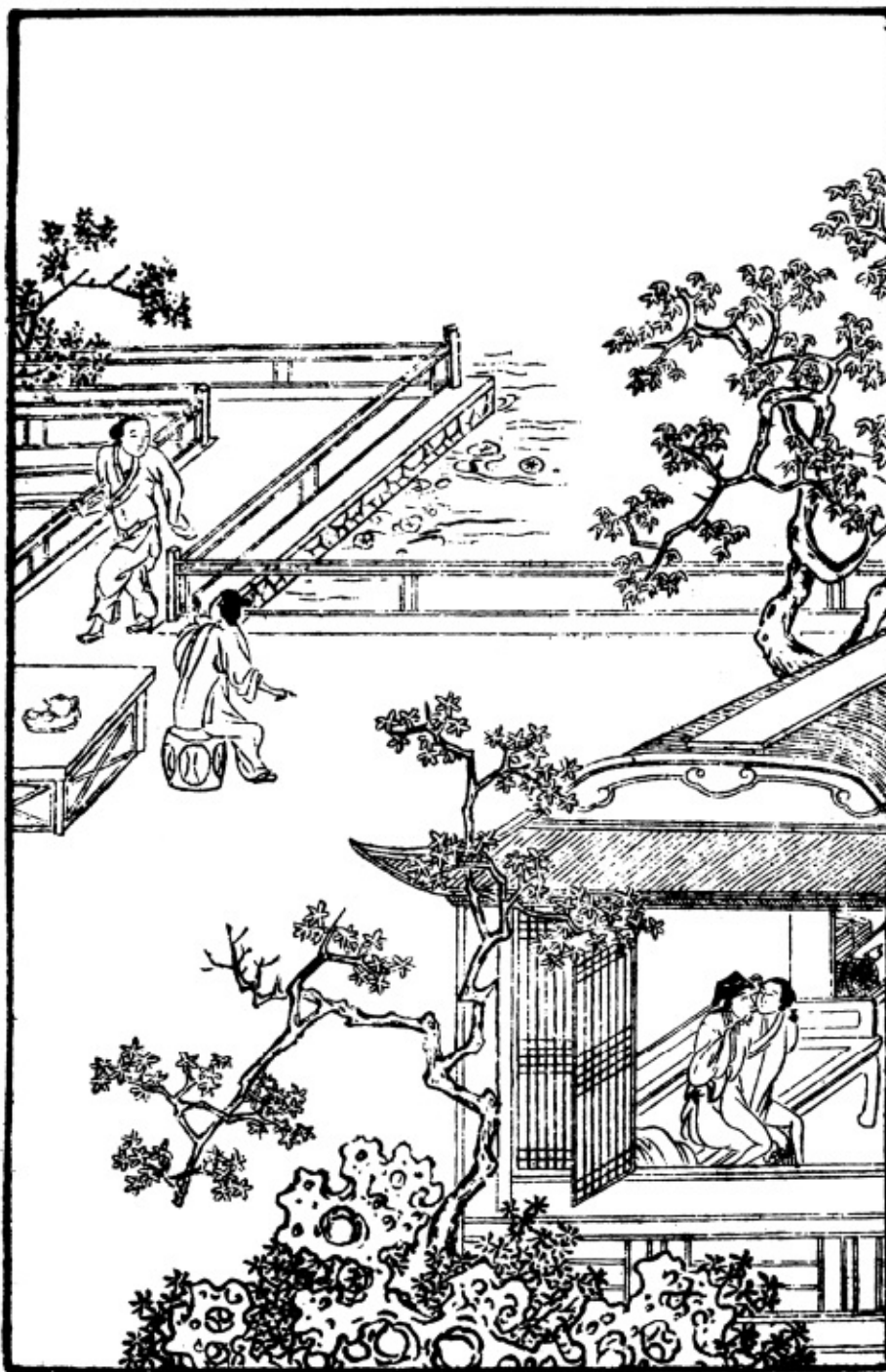
Only then did P'ing-an take the circular notice and go back to the rear compound, where he learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in his studio in the flower garden. Proceeding in that direction, he had just skirted the juniper hedge when he caught sight of Hua-t'ung, who was sitting on the stone stylobate outside the window. When the latter saw him, he gave a negative wave of his hand, and P'ing-an realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing must be engaged in some less than pressing business with Shu-t'ung. Silently approaching the window, he had been eavesdropping for some time when he heard the sound of heavy breathing coming from inside, accompanied by a creaking of the floorboards that was quite audible.

"My child," he overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing say, "hold your body straight, and don't move."

After that, some time elapsed without his hearing anything, when what should he see but Shu-t'ung coming out to fetch some water so Hsi-men Ch'ing could wash his hands. When he caught sight of P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung standing under the window, his face turned crimson with embarrassment, and he hurried off to the rear compound to complete his errand.

P'ing-an took the circular announcement and went inside, where Hsi-men Ch'ing read it, took up a brush, and wrote "noted" in the appropriate place; after which he instructed him, "Go to the rear compound and ask the Second Lady for a tael of silver. Then get my son-in-law to seal it up and give it to the messenger."

P'ing-an assented and went on his way.



Induced by a Bribe Shu-t'ung Uses His Charms to Make a Point

When Shu-t'ung came back with the water, Hsi-men Ch'ing washed his hands and then went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

"Would you like some wine?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I'll have a maidservant decant some for you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, noticing that there was a jug of Chin-hua wine under the table, asked, "Where did that come from?"

Li P'ing-erh did not feel comfortable explaining that Shu-t'ung had bought it in order to present to her, so she merely said, "I felt like having some wine a while ago and consequently sent a servant out onto the street to buy this jug of wine for me. After opening it, I only drank two cups before I had had enough."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've laid in plenty of wine in the front compound, and you go spending silver on

it. Just the other day, I purchased a consignment of forty jugs of Ho-ch'ing wine on credit from Ting the Southerner, which is sitting in an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard. If you want anything to drink, just send a servant after the key and have him go get some for you."

When he had finished speaking, Li P'ing-erh remembered that she still had a saucer of roast duck, a saucer of chicken meat, and a saucer of fresh fish that had not been touched left over from the earlier repast, so she instructed Ying-ch'un to make them into four saucers of appetizers, with the addition of a saucerful of sliced smoked pork, and set up a table in her room so she could have a drink with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not ask where these delicacies had come from. It is apparent that he was so accustomed to eating this kind of fare, whether enjoying it at home or entertaining guests, that he did not go a single day without it.

While he was drinking, Hsi-men Ch'ing bethought himself to ask Li P'ing-erh, "Was that note that Shu-t'ung handed me just now given to him by you?"

"It's from my brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu, from outside the gate," replied Li P'ing-erh. "He sent someone over with it to try to persuade you to be lenient with that bunch of scamps."

"Just the other day my brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, spoke to me about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I refused his suggestion. If it weren't for this, I would certainly have insisted on that bunch of 'bare sticks' being escorted to a higher court to stand trial. Out of consideration for your brother-in-law, however, when I go to the yamen tomorrow, I'll just have each of them given a beating and then let them go."

"What need is there to beat them again?" said Li P'ing-erh. "When people are beaten into:

Showing their teeth and making faces,
it's not a pleasant sight."

"Our yamen is that kind of yamen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It makes no difference to me whether people show their teeth or not, as persons more delicate and pampered than they have found out before now."

"The other day we heard a case in the yamen concerning the family of the deceased Vice Commissioner Ch'en from our district. Since Vice Commissioner Ch'en died, his wife has maintained her widowhood. She has a daughter, Miss Ch'en, who was standing at the front door to see the lanterns on the sixteenth of the first month when a young scamp named Juan the Third, who lived across the street from her, was setting off firecrackers and happened to notice how pretty she looked. This inspired him to flirt with her by strumming his guitar or *p'i-p'a*, and serenading her in song. When Miss Ch'en heard this, her forbidden desires were stirred and she sent her maidservant to surreptitiously summon him to her door, where the two of them exchanged a kiss. But after that there was no way for them to meet."

"Who could have anticipated that Juan the Third would become so lovesick that he was bedridden for five months. His father and mother lavished money widely on physicians to treat him, but he gradually approached the brink of death until he was expected to die at any moment."

"At this point, a friend of his named Chou the Second came up with a plan and said to him, 'Every year at the time of the Middle Primordial Festival¹⁶ on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the mother and daughter of the Ch'en household go to Nun Hsüeh's place at the Ksitigarbha Nunnery to burn incense during the Ullambana services. If you promise ten taels of silver to Nun Hsüeh, and she consents to conceal you in her monastic quarters so that you can have a tryst with the young lady, I am sure that it will cure you of what ails you.'

"Juan the Third was delighted by this and actually adopted his proposal. Nun Hsüeh accepted his ten taels of silver with the result that, as the young lady could scarcely have anticipated, while taking a noonday nap in the abbess's quarters, she ended up having illicit relations with Juan the Third. The latter had just arisen from his sickbed, however, where he had long been given to licentious thoughts, and when his desires were suddenly fulfilled in this way, he died on top of the young woman's body."

"This threw her mother into a panic, and she hurriedly took her daughter back home, but Juan the Third's parents were scarcely willing to leave it at that¹⁷ and lodged a complaint before the yamen, with the result that both Mrs. Ch'en and her daughter were taken into custody."

"Hsia Yen-ling, knowing that the Ch'en family was well-to-do, wanted to charge the daughter with the crime, but I refused to go along with him, saying, 'Although it is true that Miss Ch'en had illicit relations with Juan the Third, the latter had long been hankering after her without result and, moreover, had not fully recovered from his illness. Under the circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that such a sudden indulgence in illicit relations should have proven to be fatal. Nun Hsüeh falsely employed, as she should not have done, a Buddhist ceremony as a means of covering up an illicit assignation that resulted in the loss of life; and, moreover, she received a bribe for so doing.'

"She was, therefore, condemned as an accessory before the fact, stripped of her clothing, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and ordered to return to lay life. The girl's mother, nee Chang, took her daughter, as she should not have done, to a Buddhist temple to burn incense, which is detrimental to public morals. She and her daughter, therefore, were both subjected to the finger squeezers, which were struck twenty times, after which their depositions were taken and they were released. If it had not been handled in this way, and the case had been forwarded to Tung-p'ing prefecture, the girl would certainly have forfeited her life."¹⁸

"That was a truly momentous good deed on your part," said Li P'ing-erh. "As long as you are an officer in the legal system, you ought, whenever you can, to utilize your position in the court to treat people favorably. If for no other reason, it would serve to accumulate merit for this little bit of a child of yours."

"What would you suggest?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Quite aside from anything else," said Li P'ing-erh, "it must have been very hard on that young lady. How could her

delicate little fingers ever have withstood such treatment without being hurt?"

"She was hurt so badly that the fingers of her two hands were streaming with blood," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"In the future," said Li P'ing-erh, "you ought to subject people to the squeezers and the bamboo more sparingly.

Where you can afford to be lenient,
you should be lenient.

There are opportunities to accumulate
good fortune everywhere."¹⁹

"One can't afford to take feelings into account in the conduct of public affairs," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Just as the two of them were drinking together there, whom should they see but Ch'un-mei, who lifted aside the portiere and came into the room.

On seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li P'ing-erh were drinking together, thigh over thigh, she said, "The two of you are doing just as you please, having a good time and drinking wine. Late as it is, you haven't thought to send a servant out to meet my mistress. Lai-an is the only one accompanying her sedan chair.

What with all the intervening gates and doors,
I'm afraid she may be late, but you don't seem to care about it."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that:

Her flowery headdress was in disarray,²⁰ and
Her clouds of hair were in disorder,

his whole face became wreathed in smiles, and he said, "Little oily mouth! My guess would be that you've been sleeping."

"The drawnwork kerchief on your head has jumped out of place," remarked Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you pull it back down where it belongs?"

Then, offering it to her as she spoke, she said, "Here's some good, sweet Chin-hua wine. Won't you have a cup?"

"Have some," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll send a servant to meet your mistress."

Leaning on the end of the table with one hand while she fiddled with her shoe, Ch'un-mei said, "I've only just gotten up, and I'm not feeling very well. I don't want anything to drink."

"Just look at you, little oily mouth!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You've had more than a little already."

"In any case, your mistress is not here today," said Li P'ing-erh. "You might as well have a cup. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Sixth Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "you go ahead and drink. I really don't have a mind for it. Whether my mistress is here or not doesn't make any difference to me. Even when she is present, if I don't feel like it, and she offers me some, I refuse it."

"If you don't want any wine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "have a mouthful of tea. I'll send Ying-ch'un out front for a servant to go and meet your mistress."

As he spoke, he offered her the cup of tea, steeped with osmanthus, sesame seeds, and cured bamboo shoots, that he had been holding in his hand.

Ch'un-mei accepted it as indifferently as though she were:

Uncertain whether it was there or not,²¹

and, after merely swallowing a mouthful, put it down, saying, "You needn't send Ying-ch'un after anyone. I've already called in P'ing-an, who's right here. He's older than the others; you might as well send him."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for P'ing-an through the window, and the servant responded, "I'm here, awaiting further orders."

"If you go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will tend the front gate?"

"I've deputized Ch'i-t'ung to look after the gate," said P'ing-an.

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take a lantern with you and hurry off to meet your mistress."

Thereupon, he took a lantern and set straight off to meet P'an Chin-lien. Before he had gone halfway, whom should he see but Lai-an accompanying her sedan chair as it approached from the south.

It so happens that the two chair-bearers were persons with whom he was already familiar. One of them was called Chang Ch'uan-erh, and the other was called Wei Ts'ung-erh.

P'ing-an went up to them, took hold of one of the shafts with his hand, and said, "I've come to meet the mistress."

Chin-lien then proceeded to interrogate him, saying, "P'ing-an, is your father at home yet? Was it he who sent you to meet me, or somebody else?"

"For Father to send me," said P'ing-an, "is not likely at all. Not likely at all. It was Sister who sent me to meet you."

"I imagine that your father is not yet home from the yamen," said Chin-lien.

"Not yet home?" said P'ing-an. "He went to pay a visit to someone outside the gate, but he's been home since this afternoon. He's in the Sixth Lady's room having a good time and drinking wine. If Sister hadn't called me inside and pressured him to send me with a lantern to meet you, I wouldn't be here now. It seemed obvious to me that since Lai-an, who's still so young, was the only one accompanying your sedan chair, and there was reason to fear you might be late, or suffer some inconvenience on the road, you really needed an older servant to come meet you. But since that would have left no one to tend the front gate, I deputized Ch'i-t'ung to look after it, before being free to come myself."

"When you left," Chin-lien went on to ask, "where was your father?"

"When I left," said P'ing-an, "Father was still in the Sixth Lady's room drinking wine. It was only after Sister importuned him on your behalf that Father sent me to meet you."

When Chin-lien heard this, she remained silent for some time in her sedan chair before expostulating sardonically, "That lousy ruffian! I might just as well be dead for all he cares. More than ever, he's taken to sleeping all the time in that whore's room, that's all there is to it. And this may cause her to think that in the future she can depend forever on that piddling bladder's spawn of hers. She had better beware of the fact that:

After high noon the sun has passed its zenith.

"Chang Ch'uan-erh, just let me ask you, since there are no outsiders present, and you frequent:

The doors of a thousand households,

The gates of ten thousand families,

which of them would clothe a baby who has only just been ejected from the womb in garments made from whole bolts of silk or satin?

Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang,

Would that do, or would it not do?"

"If you hadn't mentioned it," said Chang Ch'uan-erh, picking up where Chin-lien had left off, "I would not have presumed to say anything about it, but that would never do. To say nothing of the extravagance, I fear it would only serve to diminish his share of good luck. He hasn't yet come down with smallpox, measles, chicken pox, or rubella. It's no easy thing to raise a child to adulthood.

"Just last year there was a case, outside the East Gate, of a certain prominent family with its own large landed estates, the patriarch of which was in his sixties. He occupied a hereditary post and had incalculable wealth at his disposal, being one of those of whom it can be said that:

His oxen and horses form teeming herds,

His stores of grain are inexhaustible.

And as for his maidservants and concubines, to mention only those with the ability to take charge of a household and wear formal robes, he had seventeen or eighteen at his disposal. But however much he wanted a son to show for it, he did not have any. So he:

Performed ceremonies in the Eastern Temple,

Presented offerings in the Western Monastery,

Donated sutras and contributed effigies,

leaving no stone unturned in his quest, when, contrary to all expectation, his seventh concubine bore him a son, which made him as happy as could be. Just as in the case of the master of your household, all day long he pampered the child as though it were a pearl on the palm, wrapping it in a nest of brocade and embroidery, satin and silk. Moreover, he replastered five rooms for it, until they looked like snow grottoes, and purchased four or five waiting women to look after it, carrying on all day as though he were touched in the head. But before it was three years old it came down with smallpox and died. If you don't mind my saying so, it's really better to:

Let them go and let them come like spilt water."

"Let them go and let them come like spilt water,

indeed!" responded Chin-lien. "His only regret is that he can't keep him wrapped in gold all day long."

"There's something else I'd better tell you about," said P'ing-an. "If I don't tell you, and you find out about it later, you'll hold it against me. It's about that bunch of scamps that Manager Han spoke to Father about. He has had them put in the squeezers and beaten in the yamen, has incarcerated them in the lockup, and intends to have them escorted to a higher court to stand trial. This morning Ying the Second came and spoke to Shu-t'ung about it. I imagine he must have received a number of taels of silver from him, because he took a sizable packet to the shop and insisted on having two or three taels worth chiseled off for his use. He then bought quite a lot in the way of delicacies and so forth, had Lai-hsing's wife prepare them for him, and proceeded to carry them off to the Sixth Lady's quarters. He also purchased a jug of Chin-hua wine. After first sharing these things with the Sixth Lady, he then took the remainder to the shop up front, where he invited Uncle Fu the Second, Pen the Fourth, your son-in-law, Tai-an, and Lai-hsing to join him in making a communal feast of it. They enjoyed this treat right up until the time Father came home, before breaking up."

"Didn't he offer you anything to eat?" asked Chin-lien.

"Offer me anything!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "That impudent southern slave! Why even you ladies of the household don't carry any weight in his mind. I ought not to mention it, but Father is spoiling him rotten. Just to start out with, he has been up to dirty business with him in his studio. It's really not surprising since he was formerly a 'gate-boy' in the district yamen. There isn't much he doesn't know about anything. If Father doesn't get rid of that southern slave soon, before long the entire household will be corrupted by him."

"When he was drinking wine in Li P'ing-erh's quarters," asked Chin-lien, "how long did it go on?"

"They were drinking the better part of the day," replied P'ing-an. "I saw with my own eyes that he didn't come out until his face was bright red."

"When your father came home," said Chin-lien, "didn't he say anything to him about it?"

"Father's lips were sealed," said P'ing-an. "What could he have to say about it?"

"That lousy shameless ruffian of a benighted ruler!" exclaimed Chin-lien.

He'd sell his own son to obtain a son-in-law:

Both of them are going about it ass-backwards.

At the same time you're plotting to plug his shitty asshole, that slave, for his part, is busy fucking your favorite concubine."

She then enjoined P'ing-an, "If you ever catch him up to this kind of dirty business anywhere with that southern slave again, come and tell me about it."

"Your instructions are duly noted," replied P'ing-an. "I can count on old Chang Ch'uan-erh here not to leak inside information. Having served the needs of our household for lo these many years, he's an oldtimer. As far as I'm concerned:

If you don the black livery of a servant,

You must cling to even the blackest post.

Since you're my mistress, if I have anything to say, how could I fail to report it to you? But you must keep it to yourself and not mention so much as a word about me."

Thereupon, he accompanied the sedan chair, talking as they went, all the way to the front gate of the compound.

As P'an Chin-lien stepped out of the sedan chair, above the waist she wore a blouse of lilac-colored, cloud-patterned Nanking silk that opened down the middle, emblazoned with a variegated embroidered mandarin square enclosing a roundel that featured a pair of magpies face to face, a rebus for the words "happy reunion." Below the waist she had on a long trailing drawnwork skirt of white glazed damask with a foot-wide border that featured a motif of playing children tugging on a branch of vine.²² On her bosom she had fastened a gold openwork brooch that held the two sides of her collar together, and beneath this she held a purse made of gold-spangled sheepskin.

Thus attired, she went first to the master suite in the rear compound to pay her respects to Wu Yüeh-niang.

"You could have stayed overnight," said Yüeh-niang. "What led you to come back so soon?"

"My mother wanted me to stay," replied Chin-lien, "but she's taken the eleven-year-old daughter of my maternal aunt into her household to raise, and we would all have been squeezed together on the same k'ang. *Who* wants to stay over under such conditions? I was afraid that:

What with all the intervening gates and doors,

I'd better just come home. My mother asked me to tell you how much she appreciated your generous gifts."

Thereupon, having paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she went to the quarters of Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and the others to say hello and then headed back to the front compound. On learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she went straight there to pay her respects to Li P'ing-erh. When Li P'ing-erh saw her come in, she promptly stood up and welcomed her with a smile.

After they had exchanged mutual salutations, Li P'ing-erh said, "Sister, you've come home early. Please sit down and have a cup of wine."

Turning to Ying-ch'un, she said, "Quickly, fetch a chair for the Fifth Lady to sit on."

"I've already had something to drink today," said Chin-lien. "Rather than indulging in two feasts on the same day, I'd better excuse myself."

After saying which, she prepared to take herself nonchalantly off without more ado.

"A fine slave you are!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How impudent can you get! You come home and don't even bother to salute me with a kowtow."

Chin-lien picked up where he left off, saying, "I kowtow to you! You haven't earned the right to it.

If a slave is not to be impudent,

Who is to be impudent?"

Gentle reader take note: These few words of Chin-lien's were clearly intended to reflect satirically on Li P'ing-erh. Since she had first shared a few drinks with Shu-t'ung, and later done the same with Hsi-men Ch'ing, was this not a case of indulging in two feasts on the same day? But Hsi-men Ch'ing had no way of grasping the point of her remarks. Truly:

It is clear that words serve as both

the needle and thread;

That bring out discordant patterns

from the fabric's ground.²³

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 35

HARBORING RESENTMENT HSI-MEN CH'ING PUNISHES P'ING-AN; PLAYING A FEMALE ROLE SHU-T'UNG ENTERTAINS HANGERS-ON

Do not enter the subprefectural yamen
or the district yamen;
Practice diligence in the performance
of your daily tasks.
The pond accumulates water in order to
guard against drought;
Business, if conducted industriously,
will support a family.
In teaching your sons and grandsons,
teach them a craft;
Plant mulberry trees or date trees,
do not plant flowers.
Try not to pay any attention to
idle gossipmongering;¹
When thirsty, drink spring water,
if dejected, drink tea.²

THE BURDEN of the above eight lines of regulated verse is simply that fathers and mothers must train their sons and grandsons from infancy to:

Study their lessons and learn propriety,³
so they will know how to be:

Filial and obedient to their parents,⁴
Respectful to their elders and superiors,
Harmonious with their neighbors, and
Content with their various occupations.⁵

On no account should they permit their young offspring to:

Become arrogant, indolent, or unruly,
Congregate in groups of three or five,
Turn into dedicated idlers, devoted to their leisure,
Sport bows and flaunt arrows,⁶
Make a hobby of raising caged birds,
Play at kickball and suchlike sports,⁷
Drink wine or engage in gambling,
Toy with the breeze and patronize prostitutes, or
Do whatever they please without restraint.

If they do, in the future they are sure to:

Devote themselves to stirring up trouble, and
Bring their families to rack and ruin.⁸

Families such as this only succeed in involving their sons in the meshes of the law, with the result that, at the worst:

Their lives are lost and their families ruined;⁹

or, at the least:

They suffer chastisement and endure incarceration,
Their property is prey to government confiscation,
Their conduct is governed by petty functionaries,
Their fathers and elder brothers are implicated,
They are troubled by remorse and subject to sorrow.
What benefit is there to be derived from this?

The story goes that when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the yamen the next morning, he first withdrew from the courtroom to consult with Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, to whom he said, "These four men have repeatedly sent people to me seeking to pull strings on their behalf, in order to secure lenient treatment for them."

"People have come to my place about it, too," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but I hesitated to raise the issue with you. Since

that's the way things stand, we might as well simply have them brought into court here and now, give them a warning, and let them go."

"What you say makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

They then ascended the tribunal and ordered the attendants to bring them before the court. The culprits, Ch'e Tan and company, knelt down before them. Afraid they would get another beating, they kowtowed for all they were worth.

Without waiting for Hsia Yen-ling to initiate the proceedings, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "What am I to do with a bunch of 'bare sticks' like you! How did you ever get so many people to speak up on your behalf? You all ought to be escorted to a higher court to stand trial, but I'll let you off this once. If any of you ever falls into my hands again, I'll see to it that you die a living death in prison. Now get out of here."

Whereupon, along with Han the Second, they were all shouted out of the courtroom and fled, as though:

Whether their fates were governed by metal or by water,

There was no place for them to hide.

This is the way the case was settled. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh, with five taels of silver in hand, sought out Shu-t'ung to get word of what had happened, and surreptitiously slipped him the silver. Shu-t'ung accepted it and put it in his sleeve, but P'ing-an, from his vantage point at the gate, caught sight of this transaction.

Shu-t'ung thereupon said to Ying Po-chüeh, thus and so, "I spoke to Father about it yesterday, and today he has gone to the yamen to settle the case."

"The fathers and elder brothers of those four have approached me repeatedly about it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They are afraid that they will be subjected to further punishment."

"You can rest easy on that score," said Shu-t'ung. "I can assure you they won't suffer so much as a single stroke."

On receiving this information, Ying Po-chüeh hurried off to communicate this news to them.

By lunchtime the four scamps had returned to their homes, where each and every one of them laid hold of their fathers and elder brothers and began to weep out loud. Each of them had lost no inconsiderable amount of silver, only to end up with the scars of a beating on their haunches. They would not dare to recklessly foment any trouble in the future. Truly:

Catastrophe ever follows in the wake

of officious actions;

Vexation is always the consequence

of lack of forbearance.

To resume our story, before Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home that day, Shu-t'ung called Lai-an into the studio to sweep the floor and, while he was there, opened a food box, in which someone had sent a place setting of decorative confectionery, and gave him some molded sugar candy¹⁰ to eat.

As a result, that page boy, though he:

Never, ever, should have done it,

said to him, "Brother Shu-t'ung, I've got something to tell you. Yesterday, when brother P'ing-an went to meet the Fifth Lady's sedan chair, he told all kinds of tales about you along the way."

"What did he say about me?" Shu-t'ung demanded to know.

"He said that you had managed to squeeze a few taels of silver out of someone, with which you made bold to buy wine and meat and have it delivered to the Sixth Lady's quarters, where you remained eating and drinking for half the day before coming out. And that you had then employed the leftovers to treat the staff in the shop in the front compound but had not offered him anything to eat. He also said that you and Father had been up to some kind of business in the studio."

Nothing might have happened if Shu-t'ung had not heard this, but having heard it, he made a point of remembering it, though he allowed the rest of the day to go by without saying anything about it.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had made prior arrangements not to go to the yamen that morning, but to go to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate, where the farewell party to see off Stockade Commander Hsü Nan-ch'i to his new post was being held.

It was not until that afternoon that he returned home, when he dismounted and instructed P'ing-an, saying, "If anyone should come looking for me, just tell them that I haven't come home yet."

When he had finished speaking, he went to the front reception hall, where Shu-t'ung helped him off with his outer garments.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "Did anyone show up today?"

"No one," Shu-t'ung replied. "But His Honor Hsü Feng-hsiang, the supervisor of the State Farm Battalion, sent you two packages of crabs and ten catties of fresh fish. I sent off a thank-you note in reply and gave the messenger two mace of silver. Also, your elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, sent six invitations inviting the ladies of the household to attend the third-day celebrations tomorrow."

It so happens that Wu K'ai's son, Wu Shun-ch'en, had just married Third Sister Cheng, the niece of their former neighbor Ch'iao Hung's wife. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent them the customary present of tea, and this is why they had received these invitations.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound and showed her the invitations, saying, "You had all better prepare yourselves to attend the party tomorrow."

When he had finished speaking, he came out to his studio and sat down. Shu-t'ung hastened to add some charcoal to the brazier, put some pellets of sweet-smelling incense in the burner, and then offered him a cup of tea with both hands. As Hsi-men Ch'ing held the teacup in his hand, the page boy slowly moved closer until he was standing right beside him at the end of the table. After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a meaningful moue, signaling to him to close the door, and then pulled him onto his lap with one hand, while he pinched his cheeks with the other. Hsi-men Ch'ing stuck out his tongue, and the young man, who was holding a phoenix-embossed breath-sweetening lozenge in his mouth, transferred it to him, while at the same time stroking his jade stalk below.

"My child," Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Has anyone out there been giving you a hard time?"

"There is something," the servant took the opportunity to say, "but if Father had not asked, I would not have presumed to bring it up."

"Say what you like. It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Shu-t'ung then proceeded to tell him about P'ing-an, saying, "The other day, when you had called me into the studio, he and Hua-t'ung were eavesdropping outside the window. When I went outside afterwards to fetch some water so you could wash your hands, I saw them with my own eyes. Moreover, in talking to people outside, he called me a southern slave and abused me in every conceivable way."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became enraged and fulminated, "If I don't beat that slave's bottom right off for him, I might as well forget it."

We will say no more for the moment about this conversation in the studio.

For some time now, P'ing-an had been on the watch for any such goings on, so before anyone knew it, he barged into her room and told Chin-lien all about it. Chin-lien responded by sending Ch'un-mei to the front compound to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing if he would come speak to her.

No sooner had she rounded the corner of the juniper hedge than she encountered Hua-t'ung, who was playing with a pine moth caterpillar and said, "What have you come for, Sister? Father's in the studio."

Ch'un-mei merely gave him a rap on the head with her knuckles. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the rustling of skirts outside, he knew that someone was coming. Hastily pushing the page boy away, he went over to the bed and lay down, while Shu-t'ung pretended to busy himself with brush and inkstone at the desk.

Ch'un-mei pushed open the door and came in. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, she licked her lips, and said, "The two of you are certainly keeping to yourselves in the room here, with the door closed, no less. No doubt you're enjoying your honeymoon, but Mother has something she wants to say to you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was lying face-up with his head on the pillow, said, "Little oily mouth! What does she want to say to me? You go ahead. I'll come along after I've laid down for a while."

Ch'un-mei was adamant and said, "If you refuse to go, I'll drag you out of bed myself."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to withstand her insistence on:

Dragging him away, dead or alive,
and allowed himself to be dragged off to Chin-lien's quarters.

"What was he up to in the front compound?" Chin-lien asked.

"He and the page boy, just the two of them, were in the studio, with the door latched," replied Ch'un-mei. "They were so quiet you'd think they were trying to catch a fly. Who knows what sort of funny business they were up to? It was just as though they were enjoying their honeymoon. When I went in, the page boy was at the desk, pretending to be engaged in his secretarial duties. I opened my eyes wide, but that one merely lay back on the bed, and was reluctant to come, even when I tried to drag him."

"When he comes into this room of mine," said Chin-lien, "it's just as though he were afraid someone was going to:

Stew him in a pot and eat him.

The worthless, shameless good-for-nothing! As though he still possessed a sense of shame! What do you suppose he was up to, in broad daylight, closing himself inside the room with that slave, for no good reason? No doubt he was busy boring his way into the stinking asshole of that slave; and at night he'll come into my room and want to sleep with me. How fastidious can you get!"

"You believe all the nonsense that little oily-mouth tells you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since when did I do any such thing? I was looking on as he wrote out some gift cards and had just lain down on the bed."

"Why should you go out of your way to write out gift cards behind closed doors?" said Chin-lien. "What sort of:

Classified information or ominous rumor,
were you dealing with? Had you discovered:

A three-legged guardian deity, or

A double-horned elephant,

that you were afraid to let anyone see?

"Tomorrow sister-in-law Wu's family is holding a 'third-day party' to celebrate her son's marriage, and she has dropped us an invitation.

Neither too long, nor too short,¹¹

you've got to come up with some piece of goods that I can take with me as a complimentary gift for the occasion. If you don't provide me with something, I'll have to find some other lover to demand it from. Elder Sister is presenting a complete outfit of clothes and five mace of silver, and some of the others have hairpins, or ornamental flowers. If I am the

only one without anything, I won't go."

"Take a bolt of red silk from the clothes cabinet in the front compound as your complimentary gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I won't be able to go then," said Chin-lien. "Who wants that diaphanous silk stuff, anyway? If I trot out something like that, everyone will only laugh at me."

"Don't get all worked up about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Wait till I go look on the upper floor over there. I'll find something suitable for you to give her. Right now I still need several more bolts of material for the congratulatory gifts I'm sending to the Eastern Capital, so I can pick up something for you as part of the same lot."

Thereupon, he went to the upper floor of Li P'ing-erh's belvedere and picked out two bolts of jet silk emblazoned with brocaded mandarin squares that featured a *ch'i-lin*, two bolts of Nanking variegated satin, one bolt of scarlet silk that featured a *tou-niu*¹² design, and a bolt of kingfisher blue cloud-patterned satin.

He then said to Li P'ing-erh, "How about coming up with a blouse of cloud-patterned damask for Chin-lien to give as a complimentary gift tomorrow? If you don't have anything like that available, I can send a servant with a note to get one from the silk goods store."

"There's no need for you to get anything from the store," said Li P'ing-erh. "I've got an outfit lying around of brocaded cloud-patterned damask, with a scarlet blouse and blue skirt, that I never use. The two of us can join together in presenting it as our complimentary gift."

Li P'ing-erh proceeded to open a trunk and take it out, after which she personally took it over to show to Chin-lien, saying, "Pick whichever you like, Sister, either the blouse or the skirt. The two of us might as well wrap them both up in a single package and present it as our complimentary gift, which will save us the trouble of sending out for something else."

"As long as it's yours," said Chin-lien, "it's hardly right that I should make use of it."

"My good sister," said Li P'ing-erh, "how can you talk that way?"

She had to urge her for some time before Chin-lien consented to the arrangement. They then took the package out and had Ch'en Ching-chi replace the label and write their two names on it. Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the task of selecting bolts of material in the rear compound. But no more of this.

To resume our story, P'ing-an was at his post at the front gate when whom should he see but Hsi-men Ch'ing's friend Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai, who sauntered up and asked, "Is the honorable gentleman at home?"

"The master is not at home," replied P'ing-an.

Scrounger Pai did not believe it but walked straight in as far as the reception hall, where he noticed that the latticework doors were closed and said, "So he really isn't at home. Where has he gone?"

"Today he's gone outside the South Gate to see someone off," said P'ing-an. "He hasn't come home yet."

"If he was seeing someone off," said Scrounger Pai, "he ought to be home by now."

"Uncle Pai," said P'ing-an, "if you have something to say, say it to me, and I'll tell him about it when he comes back."

"It's not anything in particular," said Scrounger Pai, "it's just that we haven't seen each other for some time, and so, finding myself at leisure, I've dropped by to pay him a visit. Since he's not here, I'll wait for him."

"I fear he may not come back for some time," said P'ing-an. "You'll merely wait for him in vain."

Scrounger Pai chose to ignore this suggestion and, pushing open the latticework doors, walked into the reception hall and sat himself down in a chair. The page boys paid no attention to him but let him do as he pleased.

Who could have anticipated that:

As providence would have it,

at that very time Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ying-ch'un to carry the bolts of material he had chosen and proceeded to accompany her toward the front compound. Just as they came around the hanging screen, the first thing he saw was Scrounger Pai sitting there in the reception hall. Ying-ch'un put down the bolts of material she was carrying and headed back to the rear compound as fast as she could go.

"So my brother is at home after all!" exclaimed Scrounger Pai as he came down from the hall and greeted him with a bow.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon seeing him, had no alternative but to offer him a seat. When he surveyed Scrounger Pai, he saw that:

On his head he sported a washed-out, reblocked, old
silk cap, that looked as though it had made the
pilgrimage as far as the summit of Mount T'ai;¹³

On his body he wore a stiffly-starched white cotton gown,
with a frayed collar and worn lapels, that looked
as though it had been rescued from a fire;

On his feet he had antique bronze-textured, edible tree
fungus-shaped, black boots, that curled up at toe
and heel, had hopelessly split seams, and squeaked
like the beats of a clapper keeping time to a song;
Into which were stuffed a pair of stirrup-like stockings,
barely held together by tangled string, the yellow

threads of which were beginning to turn fragrant. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him but did not call for tea.

Noticing that Ch'in-t'ung was standing in attendance nearby, Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Take the bolts of material to the guest room and get our son-in-law to have them properly wrapped up and sealed."

Ch'in-t'ung assented and proceeded to carry the bolts of material off toward the antechamber.

Scrounger Pai lifted his hand in salutation and said, "I'm afraid I've been remiss in not coming to see you for some time."

"Many thanks for your concern," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've been constantly away from home myself. Every day I'm tied up with business at the yamen."

"Brother," asked Scrounger Pai, "do you have to go to the yamen every day?"

"Every single day I have to be in attendance at both sessions of the court," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "On ordinary days we have to sit on the bench and hear cases, and on the first and fifteenth days of every month we also have to perform the ceremonies of bowing before the imperial tablet, taking the formal roll call, presiding over the general disposition of pending cases, and mustering the local constables, the neighborhood heads of the relevant mutual security units, and the police officers on rotational duty. Then there is a lot more busywork when I get home. I really don't have a moment's worth of free time."

"Today I had to go outside the South Gate because Hsü Nan-ch'i has just been promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade, and his colleagues held a party to see him off. I've only just arrived home. Tomorrow Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the imperial estates, has invited me to a party, but it's too far away, so I can't go. Day after tomorrow I've got to find out what is entailed in going to welcome the new regional investigating censor for Shantung. On top of all this, Ts'ai T'iao, the fourth son of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital, has been appointed commandant-escort upon his marriage to Princess Mao-te,¹⁴ and T'ung T'ien-yin, the nephew of T'ung Kuan, the defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, has just been appointed to headquarters and promoted to the post of commander of the guard, with a substantive appointment as notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs. Congratulatory gifts to the several relevant levels will be required. What with all this, I've been completely worn out for the last few days."

They had been talking for what seemed like half a day before Lai-an showed up with some tea. Scrounger Pai had just picked up his teacup and swallowed a mouthful, when whom should he see but Tai-an, who came flying toward the interior of the compound with a large red missive in his hand.

"Judicial Commissioner Hsia is here," he reported. "He's just dismounting outside."

While Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the rear compound to change his clothes, Scrounger Pai concealed himself in an antechamber on the west side of the courtyard, from which vantage point he could observe what happened by looking out through the hanging blind.

After some time, Judicial Commissioner Hsia came in. He was wearing a round-collared robe of jet moiré emblazoned with a mandarin square of variegated embroidery featuring a golden lion with a ruffled mane, over a kingfisher blue silk undergown. Around his waist he wore an official girdle with a decorative plaque of aromatic liquidambar wood mounted in a gold setting. On his feet he wore black court boots. A bunch of keys dangled from his waist. The whole area was rendered black by the number of his servitors as he made his way in to the reception hall.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having donned his official cap and girdle, came out from the rear compound to greet him. When they had finished with the social amenities, the two of them sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host. Before long, Ch'i-t'ung came out with two cups of tea on a square platter of carved Yunnan agateware lacquer. The bodies of the teacups were made of fine plaited bamboo splints, covered with a thin layer of lacquer and mounted in silver. The teaspoons were of gold, in the shape of apricot leaves. The tea was steeped with osmanthus and cured green soybeans.

After they had finished their tea, Judicial Commissioner Hsia said, "With regard to that matter I mentioned the other day of going to welcome the new regional investigating censor, I sent someone to inquire about it today. It turns out that his surname is Tseng, and that he became a metropolitan graduate last year, in the year *i-wei*.¹⁵ His certificate of appointment has already been received in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, the seat of his jurisdiction. Our colleagues are all planning to set out tomorrow to welcome him at a distance. Although you and I are military officials, we serve as judicial commissioners in a yamen authorized by express imperial command, so we are not the same as the authorities in regular army and guard units. Consequently, we can delay our departure until the day after tomorrow and look for a place ten li outside the city at which to prepare a meal in order to welcome the new regional investigating censor."

"What my senior colleague proposes is just the thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But there is no need for you to trouble yourself about it. Your pupil will send someone to find a suitable Buddhist or Taoist temple or monastery, or a private estate would also do, and send a cook ahead to make all the necessary preparations."

"In that case," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "I'll impose upon my colleague once again."

After they had finished their conversation and drunk another serving of tea, Judicial Commissioner Hsia got up and took his leave. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen him off, he came back inside and changed out of his formal clothes, but Scrounger Pai had still not departed.

Striding back into the reception hall, he sat down and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ever since you stopped attending the monthly meetings of our club two months ago, it has been in danger of breaking up. Old Sun, although he has the necessary seniority, is unable to take charge of anything, and Brother Ying the Second is dodging his responsibilities. The other day, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, we held a meeting at the Temple of the Jade Emperor in conjunction with the celebration of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal during the Middle Primordial Festival, at which,

including myself, only three or four of us showed up. There was no one to foot the bill, since all of us had turned up empty handed. It was an embarrassment to Abbot Wu who, after the ceremony of dismissing the marshals that evening, had engaged the services of a professional storyteller to entertain us, at considerable expense to himself. Although he didn't say anything about it, all of us:

Felt uneasy at heart.¹⁶

It's not like it was in the old days when you presided over the club and were able to take charge of things. It won't be long before we'll have to ask you to start attending again."

"Needless to say," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if the club must break up, let it break up. I scarcely have the time to worry about such things. If I have the leisure, I'll continue to arrange for Abbot Wu to perform the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal once a year in order to requite Heaven and Earth, but that's it. You all can continue to meet, or not, as you please, but you needn't bother to tell me about it."

With these few words of reproof he succeeded in reducing Scrounger Pai to silence, but he continued to sit there as before. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was not going to leave, he had no alternative but to call for Ch'in-t'ung and have him set up a table in one of the antechambers. He then went and fetched four saucers of appetizers:

Both meaty and vegetarian, including one of pan-fried wheat gluten, and one of roast pork. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company as he ate, and poured the wine. He sent to the rear compound for a pair of large chased silver goblets and poured out several cupfuls for him before he got up to take his leave.

Hsi-men Ch'ing accompanied him as far as the gate that led into the second courtyard, where he said, "You'll have to excuse me if I don't see you off any further. I'm wearing an informal skullcap in which it wouldn't do for me to be seen in public."

At this point Scrounger Pai finally said farewell and made his departure.

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the reception hall, pulled out a chair for himself, and called in a loud voice for P'ing-an.

When P'ing-an appeared before him, Hsi-men Ch'ing cursed at him, saying, "You lousy slave! Still standing are you?"

He then called for three or four of the orderlies on duty to stand in attendance on either side. P'ing-an did not know what it was all about. So frightened that his face turned as sallow as wax, he got down on his knees.

"When I came in the gate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I instructed you that, no matter who came to see me, you were to reply that I was not at home. Why did you not obey me?"

"When Uncle Pai came to call," replied P'ing-an, "I told him that you had gone outside the South Gate to see someone off, and had not yet returned home; but he didn't believe me and insisted on coming inside anyway. I followed him in and said to him, 'Uncle Pai, if you have something to say, all you have to do is tell me what it is, and when Father comes home, I'll report it to him.' He didn't say anything in response but pushed open the latticework doors to the reception hall himself and took a seat. Afterwards, who could have anticipated that you would come out and run into him?"

"Why you slave," cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can stop shooting off your mouth! You've got some nerve! No doubt you'd let anyone come in while you're off gambling and drinking somewhere, instead of sticking to your post at the front gate."

Then, turning to the attendants, he ordered, "Smell his breath"

The orderlies smelled his breath and reported, "There's no odor of wine there."

"I want two of you who are experienced at administering punishment to stand by," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Give this slave a real finger-squeezing for me."

Thereupon, what with:

Two men having to deal with but one, they put on the finger-squeezers and proceeded to tighten them.

They squeezed P'ing-an until:

The pain was difficult to bear, and he called out, "I really did say that Father was not at home, but he forced his way in."

The orderly who had put the finger-squeezers on pulled the string taut, knelt down, and reported, "the squeezers are in place."

"Give the squeezers fifty strokes," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have someone count them off from the side."

When the squeezers had been struck fifty times, they stopped.

"Give him an additional twenty strokes with the light bamboo," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing.

In no time at all, he was given twenty strokes of the bamboo, with the result that:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and

His haunches were completely covered with weals.

"Let him go," shouted Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The two orderlies stepped forward to remove the finger-squeezers, and when they did so, P'ing-an screamed with pain.

"What am I to do with you, you lousy slave!" cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You say you were on duty at the gate, but I imagine you have been demanding bribes from my visitors and thereby damaging my reputation abroad. If any hint of such things should ever come to my ears, I'll have that slave's bottom of yours beaten right off for you."

P'ing-an kowtowed, got to his feet, hitched up his trousers, and made his way outside.

Noticing that Hua-t'ung was standing nearby, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Take this little slave down and give his fingers a

squeezing too.”

The page boy, in his turn, was thereupon subjected to the squeezers until he:

Howled outlandishly like a stuck pig.

But we will say no more at present about how Hsi-men Ch'ing went about subjecting people to the squeezers in the reception hall.

To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien came out of her quarters and headed toward the rear compound, but she had not gotten any further than the ceremonial gate behind the main reception hall when she observed Meng Yü-lou, all by herself, eavesdropping behind the hanging screen.

“What are you listening to here?” Chin-lien asked.

“I'm here listening to Father having P'ing-an beaten,” Yü-lou replied. “Even that little slave, Hua-t'ung, has been put in the finger-squeezers and given a squeezing. I don't know what it's all about.”

In a little while, Ch'i-t'ung came by, and Yü-lou called him to a halt and asked him, “Why is P'ing-an being beaten?”



Harboring Resentment Hsi-men Ch'ing Punishes P'ing-an

"Father's angry with him for letting Scrounger Pai into the house," Ch'i-t'ung replied.

"It wasn't really because he let in Scrounger Pai," said Chin-lien, picking up where Ch'i-t'ung had left off, it must be because he's been:

Busting his ivories.

If he hadn't been:

Busting his ivories,

why should he have beaten the page boy this way for no good reason? That lousy shameless good-for-nothing! It's a wonder he still has the face to play the master of the house, utterly devoid of shame as he is."

At this point, Ch'i-t'ung went about his business.

“What did you mean, just now, by saying that he had been:
Busting his ivories?”
asked Yü-lou.

“I’ve been wanting to tell you but haven’t gotten around to it,” said Chin-lien. “Day before yesterday, I went to my mother’s place to celebrate her birthday. It has come to my ears that, while I was not at home, that southern ‘sweetie’¹⁷ of a page boy, having managed to squeeze a few taels of silver out of someone in return for his good offices, proceeded to lay them out on delicacies, which he had prepared for him in the front compound, put in square boxes, along with a jug of Chin-hua wine, and delivered to the Sixth Lady’s quarters, where he remained eating and drinking with her for half the day before coming out.

“When that shameless good-for-nothing came home, he was told about it, but he had nothing to say. On top of which, he locked himself inside the studio in the garden together with that page boy. Who knows what sort of business the two of them were up to. The page boy, P’ing-an, happened to come inside to deliver a notice from somebody and, seeing that the door was closed, was standing there outside the window, when that southern page boy opened the door and saw him there. I imagine he must have reported this to that lousy shameless good-for-nothing, and today he’s getting his revenge by beating P’ing-an in order to get his rocks off. Who knows but what, one of these days, that southern slave is going to be the ruination of the whole household. But what’s it to him!”

“That’s a fine way to talk!” said Yü-lou. “If you include the whole household:
There are both the wise and the foolish.”¹⁸
You don’t mean to say that all of us are corruptible, do you.”

“That’s not it,” said Chin-lien. “Let me explain it to you. Right now in this household there are only two people who hold a preferential place in his heart. One of them is a member of the household and the other is not. All day long he carries on just as though his soul has become fixated upon their bodies. Whenever he sees them:

He talks, and he laughs;
while the rest of us are so out of favor that, no matter what we do, he treats us like an angry fighting cock. The lousy fickle ruffian, he’ll come to a bad end! It’s just as though his heart has been bewitched by a vixen so that he has eyes only for them. Third Sister, just you listen to me. In the future they’re bound to bring about:

Eight strange and seven untoward events,
around here.

“Just today, on the matter of a complimentary gift, I had a quarrel with him. When he came home, he didn’t go to her quarters but went to his studio instead, where who knows what he was up to. I sent Ch’un-mei with instructions to find out where he was and ask him to come and see me. Who could have anticipated that, in broad daylight, he had shut himself up in the studio with that southern slave, behind closed doors. Ch’un-mei pushed open the door and went in, which startled him to such an extent that he was rendered:

Wide-eyed and speechless.
When he came to my quarters, I gave him a piece of my mind, but he did his best to evade the issue:
Concealing the left and covering up the right.”¹⁹

At first he offered me a bolt of red silk material to serve as my complimentary gift, but I rejected it. Afterwards, he went over to the upper floor of Li P’ing-erh’s belvedere to look for something more suitable.

The thief suffers from a sense of guilt.”²⁰
Troubled as she was by a bad conscience, she took an outfit of brocade clothing out of her trunk and personally came to offer it to me, saying, ‘Sister, see if you don’t think this outfit would do. It would save me the trouble of breaking it up if the two of us shared in making it our complimentary gift.’ I said, ‘As long as it’s yours, it’s hardly right that I should make use of it. I’ll just get Father to send for something from the silk goods store instead.’ She became flustered at this and said, ‘Sister, why make such a fuss about it. Pick whichever you like, either the blouse or the skirt, and when you’re satisfied, we can have it taken up front so Son-in-law Ch’en can attach a label and write our names on it.’ She pressured me into accepting it for half the day before I finally assented. She let me pick the blouse.”

“So that’s that,” said Yü-lou. “It was kind of her to insist on offering it to you.”
“You don’t understand,” said Chin-lien. “It’s not right to concede anything to her. In this day and age:
One merely fears the wide-eyed guardian deity;
There’s no need to fear the closed-eyed Buddha.

No matter whether it be wives or husbands, if you cut them the slightest bit of slack, you’ll end up being treated like:

Warden Wang’s lictors;
Not even worth a fuck.”
“Slavey Six,” teased Yü-lou:
“You’re just like wheat gluten;
As hard to masticate as leather.”

At this sally the two of them laughed together.

Whom should they see just then but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, “Third Lady and Fifth Lady, you’re invited to the rear compound to eat some crabs. I’ll go on to invite the Sixth Lady and Mistress Ch’en.”

The two of them walked toward the interior, hand in hand, where they found Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh sitting in the veranda outside the door of the master suite.

"What are the two of you laughing about?" they were asked.

"I'm laughing at Father for beating P'ing-an," said Chin-lien.

"I was upset by all the wild screaming and yelling," said Yüeh-niang, "and figured that he must be having somebody beaten. So it turns out to have been him. What was it all about?"

"It was because he had been:

Busting his ivories,"

said Chin-lien.

Yüeh-niang, who was ingenuous by nature, then asked, "What ivories are you talking about? Where were they, and how did he come to break them?"

At this, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou started to guffaw:

Falling into a heap with laughter.

"I don't know what you're laughing at," said Yüeh-niang, "if you don't explain it to me."

"Sister," said Yü-lou, "you don't know about it, but Father had P'ing-an beaten because he let Scrounger Pai into the house."

"So what if he did let Scrounger Pai into the house," said Yüeh-niang. "But what's all this about his:

Busting his ivories?

I've never seen the like of that loafer, without a stake of his own to venture, sitting at home with his idle prick between his legs, and only venturing out for no good reason:

As though he didn't know any better,

in the hopes of picking up something at somebody else's place."

"He just came to call on Father," said Lai-an.

"A likely story!" said Yüeh-niang. "I suppose he just fell off his k'ang and decided to come pay a call. Don't talk such stinking rot! It's enough not to accuse him of coming only to scrounge something to eat."

After some time, Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh showed up, and the group of them sat down in a circle to enjoy the crabs.

"There's still some of that grape wine in my room," Yüeh-niang said to Hsiao-yü. "Go and decant some of it for the ladies to drink."

At this, Chin-lien, sharp-tongued as ever, said, "To go with the crabs, it would be even better if we had some Chin-hua wine to drink."

"It's too bad we've got only the crabs to go with the wine," she went on to say. "If we had a roast duck, we could tear it into pieces to complement the wine."

"At this hour, where would you go to buy a roast duck?" said Yüeh-niang.

Among those present, when Li P'ing-erh heard this, her face turned crimson with embarrassment. Truly:

The burden of the tale contains

a deep meaning;

The topic of the story conceals

a hidden intent.

Yüeh-niang, however, was a straightforward person. How could she be expected to understand:

The story within the story?

We will say no more, at present, about how the ladies ate their crabs.

To resume our story, P'ing-an had been punished so severely that he was barely able to waddle as he made his way to his room at the front of the compound. His fingers had been squeezed so badly that he had to keep them splayed apart.

Pen the fourth, Lai-hsing, and company all hurried over to ask him, "P'ing-an, what did Father have you beaten for?"

"How should I know?" wailed P'ing-an.

"Father was angry with him for letting Scrounger Pai into the house," said Lai-hsing.

"Luckily you were there at the time," said P'ing-an, "and saw how I attempted to stop him twice, and reported that Father was not at home. But he insisted on going in and made his way inside the latticework doors to the reception hall. I said to him, 'If you have something to say, say it to me. Father has gone outside the South Gate to see someone off. I don't know when he'll be back. You'll merely wait for him in vain.' He said, 'I'll wait for him anyway,' and without another word, he proceeded to take a seat. Who could have anticipated that Father would come out from the rear compound and run into him? He really didn't have anything to say to him, except, 'I've happened by to pay you a call.' After tea had been served to him, he still wouldn't get up to leave, when who should appear but His Honor Judicial Commissioner Hsia. I assumed he would leave then, but he concealed himself in an antechamber and still refused to depart. Father had no alternative but to invite him to remain. Anyone with the slightest sense of shame would have stayed a little while and then made his departure, but he refused to leave until wine had been served to him. Father was so irritated that when he came back inside he had me beaten, saying that I had been shirking my duties at the gate and letting people into the house. If you say it's just my rotten luck that I failed to stop him, I can only reply, 'Didn't I try to stop him? It was he that insisted on coming in and sitting down, and he got away with it, while I got beaten.

What's it got to do with me?"

"That god-damned louse of a dog-bone!

His sons will be thieves and his daughters whores!"²¹

May the food he scrounged in our house be evacuated through his backbone!"

"If it rots his backbone, it will only be doing him a favor," said Lai-hsing. "It will leave room for him to scrounge even more in the future."

"I hope he develops a case of dysphagia!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "May cancer devour his esophagus! The world is full of people who exhibit shameless effrontery, but none of them is a match for this shameless dog-bone. He comes barging into our household so often the dog doesn't even bite him. The lousy scrounging beggar! He's been fucked so often, the lousy cuckold, it's a wonder his asshole hasn't putrefied!"

"If his asshole had putrefied," laughed Lai-hsing, "who would be the wiser? People would merely attribute the stench to the rankness of his body odor."

Everyone laughed at this sally.

"I dare say he doesn't have enough rice to make his evening meal," said P'ing-an. "Who knows what hunger his wife must endure? He's at such loose ends he's reduced to scrounging something to eat at someone else's place to save the cost of a meal at home."

That's not a long-term solution.²²

He'd do better to let his wife take on a lover, and play the role of cuckold. At least that would be to show some sign of vitality, rather than abjectly exposing himself to abuse at the hands of other people's servants."

Truly:

On the outside he may play the
role of wastrel,
But at home his wife can only
nibble her toes.

Tai-an was in the shop having his hair cut. When he had paid the barber and sent him on his way, he came out and said, "P'ing-an, if I don't say anything, I'll be so frustrated I could burst. You serve your master as a servant, but you still don't understand the nature of the head of the household. How can you blame anyone else for your troubles? As the saying goes:

You don't raise a child in the hope it will
shit gold and piss silver;
All you can hope for is that it will
respond empathetically to you.

What you were faced with is not to be compared to the situation when Uncle Ying the Second or Uncle Hsieh come to pay a call. If you respond to them that he is at home, or not at home, they are on such intimate and familiar terms with each other that it really doesn't make any difference. But where anyone of lesser standing is concerned, and when he has specifically instructed you to tell them that he is not at home, how could you just let them in?

If he doesn't beat you,
Who should he beat instead?"

"P'ing-an," said Pen the Fourth in jest, "has reverted to his childhood. His fingers are splayed like those of a baby learning to play pat-a-cake. Or, perhaps, he's just been playing with himself²³ too strenuously all day."

Everyone laughed again at this sally.

"If he got it for letting someone in," said Pen the Fourth, "what did Hua-t'ung do to entitle him to a share of the squeezers? A tasty treat, indeed, to have to share with anyone, the way you'd keep someone company in:

Drinking wine or eating meat!

When your ten fingers are fastened in the squeezers, what need is there for someone to share the treat?"

Hua-t'ung was still rubbing his hands and crying.

"My child, stop crying," Tai-an said to him in jest. "Your mother has really spoiled you. She's taken the trouble to tie these crullers between your fingers, and you don't even seem to enjoy them."

We will say no more, at present, about how the servants carried on at the front of the compound.

In the meantime, Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy in the anteroom supervising Ch'en Ching-chi and Shu-t'ung as they wrapped up the gifts and bolts of material, and wrote out the accompanying documents, so that they could be dispatched to the Eastern Capital the following day, to be delivered to Commandant-Escort Ts'ai T'iao and Commander T'ung T'ien-yin. But no more of this.

The next day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to his yamen, Wu Yüeh-niang and his other womenfolk, riding in five sedan chairs, wearing pearl and jewel-bedecked caps on their heads, clad in brocaded gowns, and with Lai-hsing's wife accompanying them in a smaller sedan chair, set out for the house of her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, to participate in the third-day celebrations after the marriage of their son, Wu Shun-ch'en, to Third Sister Cheng. Only Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were left at home to look after the house.

That morning, Han Tao-kuo sent gifts to thank Hsi-men Ch'ing for his efforts on his behalf, including a jug of Chin-hua wine, a jellied goose, a set of pig's trotters, four roast ducks, and four shad. On the accompanying card he had written, "Presented by your pupil, Han Tao-kuo, with his compliments." Because there was no one at home, Shu-t'ung declined to formally accept them but detained the entire consignment, boxes, carrying pole, and all, until Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen, when he brought them out to show to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ch'in-t'ung to the shop to fetch Manager Han and proceeded to berate him for his lack of savoir

faire, saying, "What did you have to go buying these gifts for? I cannot possibly accept them."

"Your Honor," said Han Tao-kuo, with a bow:

"My obligations to you are so great,

for having taken pity on me in my plight, and providing me with a way to vent my spleen, that my entire family:

Will never be able to thank you enough.²⁴

These insignificant things are merely intended to be:

A token of my gratitude.

I hope Your Honor will see fit to accept them with a smile."

"This will never do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, as an employee of mine:

You're like a member of the family.

How can I accept presents from you?"

He then turned to the original bearer of the gifts and said, "Carry them back where they came from."

Han Tao-kuo was thrown into such consternation by this that he pled with him for half the day before Hsi-men Ch'ing was induced to instruct his attendants, saying, "I will only accept the goose and the wine. Have the other gifts carried back where they came from."

He then ordered page boys to take cards and go to invite Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to pay him a visit.

Turning to Han Tao-kuo, he said, "This afternoon, ask Lai-pao to look after the store for you, and come sit with us for a while."

Saying, "You won't even accept my gifts, and now I'm putting Your Honor to additional trouble," Han Tao-kuo assented and left.

Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged to have his household lay in a lavish quantity of additional provisions and, that afternoon, had an Eight Immortals table set up in the summerhouse in the garden, the Kingfisher Pavilion. Ying Po-ch'ieh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were the first to arrive.

"Manager Han has gone to the trouble to buy gifts in order to thank me for my intervention on his behalf," Hsi-men Ch'ing told them. "Despite the fact that I repeatedly refused to accept them, he has pulled out all the stops in begging me to do so. I have consented to keep only the goose and the wine, but it would hardly be right to enjoy them all by myself. So I have invited the two of you to come keep him company during his visit."

"He consulted with me about buying gifts in order to thank you," said Ying Po-ch'ieh. "But I said to him, Whatever you give him is not going to mean anything to someone who lives on such a lavish scale. Don't put yourself to the trouble. Even if you send the gifts, he is certain not to accept them.' So how has it turned out? It's just as though I'd:

Made the trip through your belly.

Sure enough, you refused to accept what he sent you."

When he had finished speaking, he had a drink of tea, and the two of them started to play a game of backgammon.

Before long, Han Tao-kuo showed up, and after the two of them had exchanged salutations, they all sat down together. Ying Po-ch'ieh and Hsieh Hsi-ta occupied the seats of honor, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over the feast as host, and Han Tao-kuo sat down to one side.

Four plates and four bowls were immediately provided, and the table was spread with an assortment of delicacies in such profusion that they could not have been finished. In addition there were two large platters piled high with steamed corn flour pastries basted with rendered goose fat. Hsi-men Ch'ing took the jug of Chin-hua wine and ordered that Lai-an should open it in their presence and heat it in a brass warming pan, that Shu-t'ung should serve it to them, and that Hua-t'ung should be in charge of fetching additional condiments and dishes from the rear compound, as needed.

When the wine had been poured, Ying Po-ch'ieh instructed Shu-t'ung, saying, "Go back to your First Lady's quarters in the rear compound and ask, 'Why haven't any of the crabs been trotted out for Master Ying the Second to eat?' Go and say that I want a taste of the crabs."

"You silly dog!" expostulated Hsi-men Ch'ing, "There's not a crab to be had. To tell you the truth, His Honor Hsi Feng-hsiang, the supervisor of the State Farm Battalion, did send me two packages of crabs the other day, but by now the ladies of the household have eaten them all up. The few that are left over have already been pickled."

Turning to a page boy, he instructed him, saying, "Split up a few of the pickled crabs and bring them out for us."

"The ladies of the household are not at home today," he went on to explain. "They've gone to my Sister-in-law Wu's place for the third-day celebration of her son's marriage."

Before long, Hua-t'ung came out bearing two platters of pickled crabs, which Ying Po-ch'ieh and Hsieh Hsi-ta proceeded to polish off completely between them.

Noticing that Shu-t'ung was pouring the wine, Ying Po-ch'ieh said to him, "In his whole life, your Uncle Ying has never been able to abide drinking wine without a song to accompany it.²⁵ You boast of being able to sing southern-style songs, but I haven't heard any of them. Today, whatever happens, I won't drink this wine unless you sing one for me."

Shu-t'ung was about to clap his hands and start to sing, when Ying Po-ch'ieh said to him, "You could sing ten thousand that way, but it wouldn't amount to anything.

If you portray a dragon it must resemble a dragon;

If you portray a tiger it must resemble a tiger.²⁶

It won't do unless you step aside and put on your makeup and costume, like the actor who plays the female lead in a play."

Shu-t'ung remained where he was, merely looking to see what Hsi-men Ch'ing's reaction would be.

"You dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing berated Ying Po-chüeh with a laugh. "All you ever do is give people a hard time."

Then, turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Since he's so insistent about it, I'll have Tai-an go out front and ask one of your sister servants for the loan of some clothes. You can come back after stepping aside somewhere to make yourself up for the part."

Tai-an first went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound and asked Ch'un-mei for the loan of some things for this purpose, but she refused. He then went to the master suite in the rear compound and approached Yü-hsiao, from whom he succeeded in borrowing four silver hairpins, an ornamental comb, a pin for the front of the coiffure in the shape of a Taoist goddess, a pair of imitation lapis lazuli pendant earrings in gold settings, a blouse of scarlet chiffon that opened down the middle, a green skirt of heavy silk brocade, a purple gold lame headband, and some rouge and powder, with which Shu-t'ung dressed up in the studio until he looked exactly like a woman, made up in the most alluring fashion.

So attired, he returned to the feast and proffered Ying Po-chüeh a cup of wine with both hands. Whereupon:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
he stood to one side and sang a song to the tune "Jade Lotus Blossoms":

Scattered red flowers bob on the water;²⁷
The plums on the branch tips are small.
For all this time my eyebrows have grown pale;
who is there to paint them?
It was the spring that brought this load of
sorrow in its wake;
Now that spring has gone, why has my sorrow
not dissipated?
Since our separation,
We are parted by distant mountains, distant waters.
Only on your account,
I have calculated the day of your return so often,
I have worn away the tip of my comb.²⁸

When Ying Po-chüeh heard this, he indulged in exaggerated compliments without end, saying, "For such a servitor as this, it's no wonder you see fit to provide him with a bowl of rice. Just listen to that throat of his; it's a veritable flute. People may praise the singing girls from the licensed quarter, but they stick to the same repertory. We've heard it all before. How can any of them sing as mellifluously as this? Brother:



Playing a Female Role Shu-t'ung Entertains Hangers-on

We are not flattering you to your face,
but to have a person like this as your body servant cannot but be a source of gratification to you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, and Ying Po-ch'ieh said, "Why do you laugh? What I'm saying is perfectly serious. You mustn't let this youngster down. With regard to everything, including his clothing, you should look on him with a favorable eye. It must have been difficult for Magistrate Li to relinquish him to you. It is an indication of his generous feelings toward you."

"It's just as you say," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Nowadays, when I'm not at home, every single requirement in connection with my studio, whether great or small, such as the acceptance of gift cards, the sealing of correspondence, the entertainment of guests, and so forth, is taken care of by him, along with my son-in-law. But my son-in-law also has to look after things in the shop."

When Ying Po-chüeh had drunk the proffered wine, he poured out another two cups and said to Shu-t'ung, "Have a little wine at my behest."

"I wouldn't presume," said Shu-t'ung. "I don't know how to drink."

"If you refuse to drink it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you'll make me angry. I'm awarding it to you. What is there to be afraid of?"

Shu-t'ung's only response was to fix his eyes on Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Master Ying the Second is awarding it to you. Go ahead and drink it."

The page boy knelt down on one knee, languidly:

Bending low his powdered neck,
and took a sip of wine from the cup, leaving half a cupful inside, and proffering it in turn to Ying Po-chüeh, who drank it off. Only then did he turn around and offer a cup of wine to Hsieh Hsi-ta, for whom he sang a second song to the same tune.

New lotus blossoms bend in the pond;
Sprinkled with pearly drops of rain.
The fragrant southern breeze disturbs even the
 billing swallows and cooing orioles.²⁹
Traces of tears transgress the boundaries
 of what remains of my makeup;³⁰
My waist has so wasted away it is
 reminiscent of Hsiao-man's.³¹
Since our separation,
I have suffered a thousand ills, ten thousand ills.³²
Only on your account,
I have longed so for the day of your return,
I have worn away the jade balustrade.³³

Hsieh Hsi-ta asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, how old is this Book Boy of yours?"

"He has just turned fifteen this year," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsieh Hsi-ta then asked him, "How many southern-style songs do you know?"

"I don't know all that many songs," replied Shu-t'ung. "I can only do my best to entertain you gentlemen at your feast."

"What a prepossessing lad," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta, offering him some wine in his turn.

Shu-t'ung then stepped down to wait on Han Tao-kuo, who protested, "His Honor deserves precedence. "How could I presume to take such a liberty with him?"

"Today you're a guest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" said Han Tao-kuo. "Only after His Honor has been served will I consent to have any wine."

Shu-t'ung stepped over to offer wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing and then proceeded to sing a third song to the same tune.

Beside the eastern hedge chrysanthemums bloom;
By the gilded wellhead the phoenix trees fade.³⁴
In the southern bower, sad cries of frontier geese
 disturb the breast.
My spring feelings urge me to entrust news of the
 plum blossoms to a courier;³⁵
But when the migrating geese return, my lover
 does not return.
Since our separation,
News has miscarried, tidings have miscarried.
Only on your account,
I have so resented your failure to return,
I have stamped my embroidered shoe out of shape.³⁶

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished drinking, Shu-t'ung moved over in front of Han Tao-kuo, who was so flustered he hastily jumped up to receive the proffered wine.

"You'd better sit down," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so he can feel more comfortable singing."

Only then did Han Tao-kuo sit down, and Shu-t'ung proceeded to sing a fourth song to the same tune.

Filling the heavens the willow catkins fly;
Wings of bees and butterflies wildly cavort.
Atop the ridge the southern branch of the flowering
 plums has blossomed.

I should pluck a spray of plum blossoms and entrust it
to the royal courier;
How many times have I paused in my needlework, only
to utter long sighs?
Since our separation,
I have pined for you by day, pined for you by night.
Only on your account,
I have calculated the day of your return so often,
I have worn out the tips of my fingers.³⁷

Han Tao-kuo did not even wait for the song to be finished before he hastily took the cup of wine and:

Drained it in one gulp.

While they were drinking, what should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Uncle Pen the Fourth has come and wants to speak to Father."

"Tell him to come in here and speak to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long Pen the Fourth, wearing a black silk jacket, a sash with a single dangling tassel, and white-soled black boots, came forward and bowed to the company, after which he was given a seat to one side. Tai-an promptly provided him with a cup and a pair of chopsticks, and Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered him to go to the rear compound and fetch him a complement of food.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "How's the work going on the improvements to our country estate?"

"The front tier of buildings has just been tiled," Pen the Fourth reported. "The foundations for the summerhouses behind them were laid just yesterday. But we still lack the building materials for the anterooms on either side and the living quarters in the rear. We will also need five hundred one-foot two-inch square bricks for the paving of the reception hall and the summerhouses. The old materials won't do. We also lack the large ornamental tiles for the coping on the corners of the wall. We have already used more than a hundred cartloads of dirt in order to lay the foundations and build up the artificial hill, and we will also need twenty taels worth of lime."

"The lime won't be any problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At the yamen tomorrow I'll order the registered lime-burners to deliver it to you. The other day Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, promised to let me have some bricks. If you make out a list of what you need and send it to him, along with a few taels of silver, he'll be pretty sure to comply as a partial return favor to me. All that we need now is the lumber."

"The other day," said Pen the Fourth, "you wanted me to go look the situation over at that country estate outside the gate. This morning I dropped by the graveyard to pick up Chang An, and we went to take a look at it. It turned out to be the estate of the distaff relatives of the imperial family named Hsiang. Hsiang the Elder has died, and his younger brother, Hsiang the Fifth, is prepared to sell off even the paved avenue leading to the tombs of his ancestors and the mausoleum. We would hardly want to demand anything like that. In discussing it with him, we agreed that it would suffice for our purposes to pull down the three reception halls, six antechambers, and a tier of auxiliary rooms. His asking price was five hundred taels, but if we come back to him with three hundred fifty taels in hand, we ought to be able to dismantle what we need. To say nothing of the timber and lumber, the bricks, the tiles, and the dirt alone are worth several hundred taels."

"I wondered who it was you were talking about," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "So it's the estate of Hsiang the Fifth. A suit has been brought against him for illegal appropriation of land, and it is being tried by the military intendant of the State Farms Circuit. He has already expended a lot of silver on the suit, and he is also maintaining Lo Ts'un-erh in the licensed quarter, so that, right now, he has managed to end up with no money on hand. If you want what he has to offer, give him three hundred taels of silver for it, and he'll have to settle. After all:

A cold hand can hardly hold onto a hot dumpling;

At whose altar is he to recite the Buddha's name?"

"Tomorrow," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Pen the Fourth, "take two large ingots of silver with you and, along with Chang An, go to negotiate with him. If he agrees to a selling price of three hundred taels of silver, you can proceed to demolish whatever you need."

"I understand," Pen the Fourth responded.

After some time, a bowl of soup and a platter of steamed pastries was brought out from the rear compound for Pen the Fourth to eat. Wine was poured, and he kept company with the others as they continued to drink. Shu-t'ung sang another song and then stepped into the background.

"There's not much fun in drinking wine this way," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "It would be better if we had a dicebox so we could game at forfeits as we drink."

"Go to the Sixth Lady's quarters up front," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "and fetch a dicebox for us."

Before long, Tai-an brought a dicebox and put it down in front of Ying Po-ch'üeh, after which he slipped over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's side and, covering his mouth with his hand, whispered to him, "The baby in the Sixth Lady's room is crying. Ying-ch'un would like you to send someone to fetch the Sixth Lady."

"Put the wine flagon down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and quickly go send a page boy to take a lantern and go after her."

"Where are those two page boys, anyway?" he went on to ask.

"Ch'in-t'ung and Ch'i-t'ung," said Tai-an, "have already gone off with two lanterns to meet her."

Ying Po-chüeh saw that there were six dice in the dicebox and, taking up one of them in his hand, said, "I'm going to cast a die, but first, each of you in turn must come up with a line associated with the name of a domino combination, and numbers appropriate to it. When the die is cast, if any of the numbers you have mentioned should match the number on the die, you will have to drink a large cup of wine yourself, as a forfeit, and the next player in line will have to sing a song, or, if he is unable to sing a song, tell a joke. If he is unable to do either of these things, he will definitely have to drink a large cup of wine as a forfeit."

"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why make it so complicated?"

"When the master of the revels chooses to fart," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it must be:

Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.

You have no jurisdiction over me."

Then, turning to Lai-an, he said, "You pour a cup, first off, as a forfeit for your master. Only after that can we proceed with our game of forfeits."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and drank it off.

"Listen up, you all," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'm going to start the game, and if I do anything wrong, I, too, will have to pay a forfeit."

Then he said:

"Young Chang has fallen down drunk
in the western chamber.³⁸

How much wine has he consumed;

One large flagon, or

Two small flagons?"

Sure enough, the number that came up when he threw the die was a one spot. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Shu-t'ung to rejoin them and pour the wine for Ying Po-chüeh's forfeit. Hsieh Hsi-ta, the next player in line, was slated to sing a song.

"I'll sing you a song to the tune 'Plucking the Cassia,' " said Hsieh Hsi-ta, and, clapping his hands to keep time, he sang:

How captivating is this alluring damsel,
just sweet sixteen.

Her every feature is romantic;

In each particular she is hip.³⁹

Her brows suggest spring peaks;

Her eyes transmit autumn waters;⁴⁰

Her temples flaunt raven tresses.

In vain do I long for her;

Unable to rid my thoughts of her for
a single hour or half a minute.⁴¹

Though next to each other;

We are as isolated as if relegated to
the sea's rim or the sky's edge.⁴²

I'm getting thin on her account;

I'm getting sick on her account.

Whoever might help us to consummate
our marriage affinity,

Would be a compassionate bodhisattva,
relieving our distress.⁴³

Ying Po-chüeh drank his wine and then passed the dicebox to Hsieh Hsi-ta, whose turn it was to cast the die, after which it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn to sing.

Hsieh Hsi-ta picked up the die and said:

"Thanks be to Hung-niang⁴⁴ for
helping him to bed.

What time is it?

The third night watch,

The fourth period thereof."

It so happened that:

Strange as it may seem,

the number that came up when he threw the die was a four spot.

"Hsieh Hsi-ta will have to drink four cups of wine," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"Spare me two cups," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I can't drink that much."

Shu-t'ung poured out two full cups of wine for him, and he drank off the first cup while waiting for Hsi-men Ch'ing to sing. While this was going on, he and Ying Po-chüeh between them had managed to finish off a whole saucerful of fresh water chestnuts.

"I can't sing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I'll tell you a joke instead. A man went into a fruiterer's shop and asked if he had any torrey nuts for sale. The shopkeeper replied that he did and brought them out for his inspection, whereupon the customer began to put one after another into his mouth without stopping. At this, the shopkeeper demanded to know, 'If you're not going to buy them, why are you eating them so assiduously?' 'I'm eating them,' the man said, 'for their soothing effect on the lungs.' 'You may be eating them to soothe your lungs,' the shopkeeper replied, 'but it only gives me a case of heartburn.' "

Everyone laughed at this.

"Though it give you a case of heartburn," said Ying Po-chüeh, "bring on another saucer or two. I'm like:

The old matchmaker picking up horse droppings;

As fast as they drop I take them home to dry."

Hsieh Hsi-ta finished off his remaining cup of wine, after which it was the turn of the third player, Hsi-men Ch'ing, to cast the die.

He said:

"She left behind her gold hairpin

to be a keepsake.

How much did it weigh?

Five or six,

Or seven mace."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then picked up the die, and the number that came up when he cast it was a five spot. Shu-t'ung poured out two and a half cups of wine for him.

"Brother has a great capacity," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta. "It doesn't make sense that he, too, should get off with only two cups of wine. Brother, you really ought to drink four cups. Just take it that each of us is showing you his respects."

It was now the turn of Han Tao-kuo to sing, but he declined, saying, "I yield to Brother Pen the Fourth's seniority."

"I can't sing," said Pen the Fourth, "so I'll tell you a joke instead."

Hsi-men Ch'ing drank off two cups of wine, after which Pen the Fourth said, "A magistrate was interrogating a suspect in a case of illicit sexual intercourse and asked him, 'Initially, how did you go about violating her?' To which the man replied, 'Her head was facing east, and her feet were also facing east, when I did it.' 'Nonsense,' the magistrate responded. 'How could you do justice to the office with anybody in such a crooked position?' At which point a bystander came forward, knelt down, and said, 'Your Honor, as for that crooked position in the Office of Justice, if there are any openings in that body, I would be happy to fill them.' "⁴⁵

"A fine one you are, Brother Pen the Fourth!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You know how to look out for yourself, don't you! After all, His Honor is not yet old. There might be something to be said for anything else, but you can hardly offer yourself as a replacement where his performance in the bedroom is concerned."

When Pen the Fourth heard these words, he was so startled that his face turned crimson with embarrassment.

"Uncle Two," he stammered, "what kind of talk is that! No such thought ever entered my head."

Ying Po-chüeh said, "You've given me the upper hand.

What kind of talk is that?

It's got a sandalwood haft."⁴⁶

Having relinquished the blade,

You've nothing but the sheath."

Pen the Fourth was too uncomfortable to remain where he was but also found it awkward to leave. He felt as though he were:

Sitting on a pincushion."⁴⁷

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon proceeded to finish off what remained of his four cups of wine, after which it was Pen the Fourth's turn to cast the die.

Just as he was about to pick up the die, whom should he see but Lai-an, who came in and said, "Uncle Pen the Fourth, there's someone outside looking for you. When I asked him what it was about, he said he was from the kiln."

Pen the Fourth could hardly wait for an excuse to absent himself, so as soon as he heard these words, he disappeared like:

A golden cicada molting its skin."⁴⁸

"Manager Han," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Now that he has gone, it is your turn to cast the die."

Picking up the die, Han Tao-kuo said, "I will comply with the rules.

The old lady took up a rod with which

to chastise Hung-niang.

How many strokes did she give her?

Eight or nine,

Or ten strokes."

"It's my turn to sing," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but instead of singing, I, too, will tell you a joke."

Turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Fill up the cups all around the table, including your master's. Then prepare to listen to my joke. A Taoist priest, together with his disciple, were on their way to deliver a written invocation to the house of a donor. When they arrived at the donor's door, the disciple loosened his sash so that his gown hung straight down. When

you wear it that way,' his master said, 'it looks as though you don't have any bottom at all.' 'If I didn't have a bottom, Master,' the disciple retorted, turning to face him, 'you wouldn't be able to stand it for a single day.' "

"You perverted dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"One can hardly expect ivory to emerge
from the mouth of a dog."⁴⁹

We will say no more, for the moment, about how they continued to carouse.

To resume our story, before this Tai-an had gone to the front of the compound and set out with Hua-t'ung, taking a lantern with them, to fetch Li P'ing-erh home from the party at Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law's place. When Li P'ing-erh heard that her child was crying back at home, she determined not to wait for the formal presentation of the gifts to the bride and groom, but left her complimentary gift behind, intending to take her leave and set out for home.

Her host, Wu K'ai's wife, and Wu the Second's wife were reluctant to let her go, saying, "Whatever you do, at least wait until the formal presentation of the gifts to the bride and groom."

"Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you don't understand the situation. It would be better to let her go home. There isn't anyone there to take care of things, and the baby is really crying for her. The rest of us can stay a little longer without its making any difference."

Only then did Wu K'ai's wife consent to let Li P'ing-erh make her departure. Leaving Hua-t'ung behind, Tai-an took Ch'in-t'ung with him, and the two of them accompanied Li P'ing-erh's sedan chair back home before the rest of the party. Some time later, when the female guests were ready to depart after the formal presentation of the gifts, Yüeh-niang and the others set out for home in their four sedan chairs. They had only one lantern to light their way, and it was the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month, when the moon is dark.

"Where's the other lantern?" asked Yüeh-niang. "How come there's only one available?"

"We originally brought two with us," said Ch'i-t'ung, "but Tai-an demanded one of them and took Ch'in-t'ung with him to accompany the Sixth Lady home before the rest of the party."

To Yüeh-niang the issue was like a dormant account, not worth pursuing any further, but Chin-lien took it to heart and asked Ch'i-t'ung, "How many lanterns did you bring with you originally?"

"Ch'in-t'ung and I brought two lanterns with us when we came to get you," said Ch'i-t'ung, "but later, when Tai-an showed up with Hua-t'ung, he demanded the use of one of them, took Ch'in-t'ung with him in place of Hua-t'ung, and escorted the Sixth Lady home before the rest of you."

"Did that jailbird, Tai-an, not bring a lantern with him?" Chin-lien demanded to know.

"He and I brought another lantern with us when we came," reported Hua-t'ung.

"Since he already had one, that should have sufficed," said Chin-lien. "Why did he demand this other one of you?"

"That's just what I said to him," reported Ch'i-t'ung, "but he insisted on taking it anyway."

Chin-lien then addressed herself to Wu Yüeh-niang, saying, "Sister, just look at the way that sycophantic slave carries on. When we get home, I'll have something to say to him."

"Why bother?" said Yüeh-niang. "The baby was anxiously awaiting her at home, so he took an extra lantern to escort her back. What of it?"

"Sister," said Chin-lien, "that's not it at all. It doesn't make any difference to me. It's you, as the mistress, who ought not to be so lax in enforcing household discipline. On a bright night it might not matter, but when the moon is as dark as this, how can it be right for four sedan chairs to be lighted by a single lantern?"

As they were speaking, the sedan chairs arrived at the gate, and Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh went back to the rear compound. Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou got out of their sedan chairs together.

No sooner were they inside than Chin-lien demanded to know, "Where is Tai-an?"

"He's on duty in the rear compound," reported P'ing-an.

He had hardly finished speaking when Tai-an appeared.

Chin-lien gave him a piece of her mind, saying, "I hardly know what to do with you, you sycophantic jailbird! You'd better look out from now on. You may choose to dance attendance only on those who bask in temporary favor, but you'd better watch your step or you'll slip up. If you already had one lantern, that should have sufficed. Why should you have so far succumbed to delirium as to have insisted on usurping another one, as well as exchanging page boys? You appropriated two lanterns to escort her single sedan chair, while our four sedan chairs only rated a single lantern. Are the rest of us not also Father's wives?"

"Mother, you're doing me an injustice," protested Tai-an. "When Father learned that the baby was crying, he sent me to take a lantern, and go, as quickly as possible, to fetch the Sixth Lady home before the others. He was afraid the baby might cry himself into a serious state. Surely you don't think that if Father hadn't sent me, I'd have taken it upon myself to go and fetch her."

"That's enough out of you, you jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "He may have sent you to fetch her, but he didn't tell you to take all the lanterns for yourself. Brother, you're like:

The sparrow who only flies where the pickings are best.

Make no mistake about it. It's always wise to:

Add a stick of fuel to the cold stove,

As well as a stick of fuel to the hot."⁵⁰

It's not as though we are preordained to be out of favor forever."

"Mother, what are you saying!" protested Tai-an. "If any such thought ever entered my head, may I be thrown from my horse and fracture my breastbone."

"You deceitful jailbird!" ranted Chin-lien. "Don't you worry! From now on I'm going to rinse my eyes, the better to keep track of you."

While still continuing to speak, she and Meng Yü-lou headed back toward the rear compound together.

Tai-an, for his part, turned to his fellow servants and complained, "What a purely provoking business! Father sent me to go fetch her, and now, for no reason at all, I have to put up with such a tirade from the Fifth Lady."

When Yü-lou and Chin-lien got as far as the ceremonial gate, they ran into Lai-an and asked him, "Where is your father to be found?"

"Father, along with Master Ying the Second, Master Hsieh, and Uncle Han, is in the summerhouse drinking," replied Lai-an. "Shu-t'ung has dressed himself up as a singing girl and is singing for them. You ladies ought to go take a look."

Chin-lien took Yü-lou by the hand and said, "Let's go have a look."

When the two of them went up outside the summerhouse and looked through the latticework, what did they see? Ying Po-chüeh was sitting in the seat of honor, with his cap askew, so drunk that he appeared just like a puppet on its strings.⁵¹ Hsieh Hsi-ta was too drunk to keep his eyes open. Shu-t'ung in his disguise as a singing girl, was standing at their side, pouring the wine, and singing southern-style songs. Hsi-men Ch'ing had surreptitiously instructed Ch'in-t'ung to paint Ying Po-chüeh's face with powder, and surreptitiously slip a garland of straw over his head.

Chin-lien and Yü-lou, as they looked on from outside, couldn't help laughing uncontrollably, exclaiming, "The lousy jailbirds! When they die at some future date, they'll have nothing left to atone for, having already fully exposed their ugliness to view."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the laughter outside, he sent a page boy out to ask who it was. Only then did the two of them continue on their way to the rear compound. By the time the party broke up, it was already the first watch. That night Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to sleep.

When Chin-lien returned to her quarters, she asked Ch'un-mei, "When Li P'ing-erh got home today, did she have anything to say?"

"No, she didn't say anything," replied Ch'un-mei.

"Did that shameless good-for-nothing go into her room or not?" Chin-lien went on to ask.

"When the Sixth Lady came home," said Ch'un-mei, "Father paid a visit to her quarters; in fact, he went there twice."

"Was it actually on account of the baby's crying that he sent someone to fetch her home?" Chin-lien asked.

"In the afternoon the baby did start to cry unusually hard," said Ch'un-mei. "He cried when he was picked up and cried when he was put down. No one knew what to do."

"And where did that slave, Shu-t'ung, get the clothes he was dressed up in?" Chin-lien went on to ask.

"At first Tai-an came and tried to get some from me, but I sent him packing," said Ch'un-mei. "In the end he managed to borrow them from Yü-hsiao in the master suite. It was only after the situation with the baby had been reported to Father in the front compound that he sent the page boys after her."

"Well, if that's the way it was, I guess that's all there is to it," said Chin-lien. "I figured his sending someone to bring her home was just another case of that shameless good-for-nothing sorting people differentially into:

Three classes and nine categories."

"And if anyone should come after clothes again," Chin-lien continued, "see that you don't give any to that 'sweetie' of a slave to wear."

When she had finished speaking, realizing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not going to come to her quarters that night, she closed the door in a huff and went to bed.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh was already aware that Pen the Fourth was making money from being in charge of the work on Hsi-men Ch'ing's country estate, and now, on top of that, he heard that the next day he would be going with silver in hand to purchase the demolition rights to the buildings on the estate of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Hsiang the Fifth, from whom, at the very least, he was certain to get a kickback of some taels of silver. So when it happened in the course of the game of forfeits that Pen the Fourth was indiscreet enough to tell such a joke, Ying Po-chüeh took advantage of the occasion to take him to task and thereby give him something to think about.

Sure enough, Pen the Fourth had been frightened. So, the next day, he sealed up three taels of silver and went in person to Ying Po-chüeh's home to kowtow to him.

Affecting an air of innocence, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I haven't done all that much for you. What's all this about?"

"I have been lacking in courtesy with regard to you for some time," said Pen the Fourth. "I only hope that, early and late, you will continue to do what you can to uphold my interests where His Honor is concerned. My gratitude will know no bounds."

Ying Po-chüeh thereupon accepted the silver, entertained him with a cup of tea, and saw him out the door.

Taking the silver with him, he went into the interior of the house and said to his wife:

"If the old man is reluctant to be ruthless,

His old lady will lack even a cotton skirt.

I acted as both advocate and guarantor for that dog-bitten rascal Pen the Fourth, and now that he's gotten his hands on a good piece of business, he:

Hogs the contents of his own ricebowl,

and has no further use for me. His Honor has put him in charge of the work at his country estate, and tomorrow he has commissioned him to take silver in hand and close a deal on the estate of Hsiang the Fifth. He's making money enough and to spare. Yesterday at our drinking party I took him to task for something he said, and he panicked. There was no reason to fear that he wouldn't come seek me out today and present me with these three taels of silver. I'll use them to buy a few bolts of cloth, which should suffice to make winter clothing for our children."

Truly:

He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;

He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.⁵²

One merely resents that his idle sorrows
are such an annoyance;

Before discovering that the foolish fare
better than the clever.⁵³

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 36

CHAI CH'IENT SENDS A LETTER ASKING FOR A YOUNG GIRL; HSI-MEN CH'ING PATRONIZES PRINCIPAL GRADUATE TS'AI

From Fu-ch'uan gazing into the distance
west of Chien-chiang;¹
I see only a solitary cloud formation
blocking the sunset.
The tears that I am wont to shed, are
lost amid the misty trees;
There is no way to transmit a letter,
geese and fish are scarce.
My wish to enquire after you is impeded
by three thousand li;
Separated as we are, I only long in vain
all twenty-four hours.
Broad as the sea and high as Heaven²
are my thoughts of you;
On whom can I rely to let you know
the date of my return?

THE STORY GOES that the next day Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling went out to the suburbs to welcome the new regional investigating censor. He also took the occasion to visit his country estate and reward the construction workers for their services.

That evening, when he arrived home, he had no sooner come in the gate than P'ing-an reported, "Today a courier on his way from Tung-ch'ang prefecture to deliver documents to the capital stopped by to drop off a letter. He said that it was a letter addressed to you from His Honor Chai Ch'ien of the grand preceptor's household. I accepted it and had it taken back to the First Lady's quarters. The messenger will return for an answer tomorrow afternoon."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he went back to the master suite, opened the letter, and proceeded to peruse it. What did it have to say?

Respectfully indited by his devoted servant in the capital, Chai Ch'ien, for the perusal of the newly promoted officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing:

I have long admired your lofty eminence without having had the opportunity to meet you in person. As the repeated recipient of your lavish kindness, my sense of indebtedness knows no bounds. The instructions which you formerly transmitted to me are imprinted in my heart. In all things I will do everything in my power to uphold your interests where His Honor is concerned.

As for that trifling matter that I made bold to trouble you with by means of your esteemed servant, I imagine that you have already taken care of it for me. At present, taking advantage of a convenient messenger, I present you with my card and ten taels of silver as an inadequate expression of my esteem, as well as my concern for your well-being. I respectfully hope that you will see fit to vouchsafe me a reply, for which:

My gratitude will be impossible to contain.³

In addition, the new principal graduate Ts'ai, who is His Honor's adopted son, has received an imperial dispensation to return to his native place in order to visit his parents. His route will take him by your honorable place of abode, and I hope that you may be able to entertain him for a meal, a favor that he likewise will never dare to forget. Such is my earnest supplication.

Indited one day after the solar term Autumn Begins.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the letter, he sighed incessantly, saying, "Quickly, send a page boy to summon a matchmaker. What have I been doing to completely forget such a thing as this and allow it to slip out of my mind?"

"What is it?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang. "Tell me about it."

"Chai Ch'ien," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "the majordomo of His Honor the grand preceptor's household in the Eastern Capital, sent me a letter some time ago saying that he was without a son, and asking me if I could seek out a young girl hereabouts, no matter whether she be rich or poor, cost being no object, since all he cares about is that she be healthy. He wants her for the purpose of procreation. He said that no matter what the dowry and bride price might be, I should simply send him an itemized account, and he would promptly remit the silver. He promised that in the future he would do everything in his power to uphold my interests where His Honor is concerned with regard to my official career. I've been so busy for some time, what with assuming office and:

Seven of this and eight of that,⁴

that I completely forgot about it and allowed it to slip out of my mind. Lai-pao, also, has been going to the shop every day and has failed to remind me.



Chai Ch'ien Sends a Letter Asking for a Young Girl

"Today, far away as he is, he has sent someone to deliver a letter asking how the nuptial arrangements are going, and also enclosing ten taels of silver in lieu of a congratulatory present. Tomorrow, when the courier comes for his answer, how am I to reply? He'll be as annoyed as can be.

"When the matchmaker comes, tell her, for better or for worse, to seek out such a person for him as fast as possible. He doesn't care whether the status of the family is high or low, as long as the girl is healthy. A fourteen-or fifteen-year-old, or even a sixteen-or seventeen-year-old, would do. Whatever the bride price may be, I will take care of it. Or, better yet, we could take Hsiu-ch'un from Li P'ing-erh's quarters-she's not bad looking-and give her to him."

"I must say," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "Are your legs on fire, you good-for-nothing? What have you been doing with yourself the last two or three months? When someone makes such a request of you, you ought to look for a genuine virgin on his behalf if you expect him to be grateful. As for that maidservant, you've already had your way with her, so how could it be appropriate to send her? If you take his request seriously, he'll exert his efforts on your behalf in the

future. Right now you're trying to:

Sculpt a Buddhist effigy on the one hand,
While burning incense to it on the other.
Into such turbulent water you can hardly
hope to insert an oar.

It's not like setting out to purchase something, when you can simply take your silver to the marketplace and buy it. Even young girls brought up in the women's quarters are not all the same. You've got to give the matchmaker time to deliberately make her rounds and size up the possibilities. You talk about it as nonchalantly as though it were an easy matter."

"Tomorrow, when he comes for an answer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what am I to tell him?"

"It's a wonder that someone like you, who is accustomed to adjudicating matters, should be at a loss to handle someone in a matter of this kind," said Yüeh-niang. "When that man comes tomorrow, give him a generous tip, and send him off with a written reply. All you need to say is that you've found a girl for him, but that her trousseau and dowry have not been entirely taken care of yet, and that you'll send someone from here to escort her on her way as soon as the preparations are complete. In the meantime, it won't be too late for you to delegate someone here to look for a suitable prospect. Thereby, you will:

Accomplish two objectives with a single act,⁵

bring about a favorable outcome, and feel that you have complied appropriately with his request."

"You've got a point there," Hsi-men Ch'ing said with a smile.

He then proceeded to send for Ch'en Ching-chi and instructed him to write the reply overnight.

The next day, when the courier arrived, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to interview him in person and asked, "When will the principal graduate Ts'ai's boat get here, so that I can prepare to receive him?"

"When I left," the man said, "His Honor Ts'ai had just taken leave of the court and was preparing to start out from the capital. Majordomo Chai said that he feared His Honor Ts'ai might be temporarily short of funds for the trip home, and that he hoped you might be good enough to lend him something, for which he would undertake to reimburse you if you wrote him the amount required."

"Tell His Honor Chai," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that no matter what he might need, I will:

Not fail to comply with his orders."

Having finished speaking, he directed Ch'en Ching-chi to usher him into an antechamber and entertain him with food and wine. When he was ready to leave, he turned the reply over to him and gave him five taels for his traveling expenses. The courier bowed in thanks, went happily out the gate, and set out on his long journey. Truly:

When thoughts are pressing one wants to wave
the flying squirrel flag;
When the mind is eager one beats to tatters
the purple flowered whip.⁶

Gentle reader take note: Originally An Ch'en⁷ had been placed at the head of the list in the *chin-shih* examinations, but the censors had argued that because he was the younger brother of An Tun,⁸ the grand councilor of a previous reign whose name had been proscribed, he could not be designated the first scholar of the realm. Emperor Hui-tsung thus had no alternative but to elevate Ts'ai Yün⁹ to the number one position in his stead. Having been designated the principal graduate, he had offered himself as a protégé to Ts'ai Ching and been accepted as his adopted son. He had thereupon been appointed to a position as proofreader in the Palace Library and granted permission to return home in order to visit his parents.

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang despatched page boys from the household to summon Old Mother Feng, Auntie Hsüeh, and other matchmakers, whom she directed to enquire everywhere for any family that had a healthy young daughter, so they could obtain a card with her vital statistics and discuss the match. But no more of this.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing despatched Lai-pao to the port on the New Canal to wait for the arrival of Principal Graduate Ts'ai's boat. It so happens that he was traveling on the same boat with his fellow *chin-shih* graduate An Ch'en. This metropolitan graduate An Ch'en, because his family was too poor, had been unable to find a second wife. He had:

Lost out on the east, and
Fallen short on the west,

as a consequence of which, he, too, had taken leave of the court and was on his way home to seek a second wife. For this reason the two of them were traveling on the same boat.

When they arrived at the port on the New Canal, Lai-pao went aboard with Hsi-men Ch'ing's calling card and presented them with a gift for the road consisting of wine, noodles, chicken and goose delicacies, salt, soy sauce, and the like.

On top of all this, while Ts'ai Yün was still in the Eastern Capital, Chai Ch'ien had already said to him, "In Ch'ing-ho district there is a certain Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing who is also one of His Honor's protégés. He presides over a prominent family and is one of those who is:

Wealthy yet observant of the rites.¹⁰

As a result of His Honor's patronage, he currently holds a post as a judicial commissioner. When you arrive there, he is certain to entertain you lavishly."

Since this information was already:

Firmly fixed in his mind,

When Ts'ai Yün saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent his servant some distance to welcome him, and that he had also provided such a generous present, he was completely delighted.

The next day, when they arrived at Ch'ing-ho, he and his fellow metropolitan graduate, An Ch'en, went into the town to call upon Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, had already engaged a cook to prepare a feast on his premises. Because he had attended a party in the yamen of District Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien, where he had been impressed by the singing of a troupe of Su-chou actors, he had asked Shu-t'ung about them and been told that they were staying at Mo-tzu Ying-erh outside the South Gate. He had consequently engaged the services of four of them for the occasion.

Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün that day had wrapped up and sealed a chiffon kerchief, a book, and a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes, while Metropolitan Graduate An Ch'en had also prepared the customary book and kerchief, four bags of tender leaf tea, and four Hang-chou fans as presentation gifts. Both of them wore their official robes and black silk hats as they sent in their calling cards. Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, came out and ushered them into the reception hall, where they went through the social amenities and exchanged bows of salutation. Only after a servant had presented their gifts did they consent to sit down in the positions appropriate for guests and host.

Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün initiated the proceedings by raising his hand, inclining his body in his host's direction, and saying, "Worthy Sir, Chai Ch'ien in the capital was loud in your praise as the:

Distinguished scion of a prominent house,¹¹

one of the great lineages of Ch'ing-ho. We have long admired your virtue and reputation without having the opportunity to make your acquaintance. Now that we have been enabled to pay our respects beneath your hall, we are fortunate indeed."

"You do me too much honor," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day I received a letter from Chai Ch'ien stating that the equipages of you two venerable gentlemen might condescend to come my way. I should certainly have gone forth to welcome you had I not been prevented from doing so by my official responsibilities. I hope that you will be magnanimous enough to forgive me."

"Might I enquire as to the native places and courtesy names of you two gentlemen?" he went on to ask.

"Your pupil is named Ts'ai Yün," replied Principal Graduate Ts'ai. "Though I currently reside in K'uang-lu, my native place is Ch'u-chou. My courtesy name is I-ch'üan, or One Spring. I have been lucky enough to be designated principal graduate and have received an appointment as proofreader in the Palace Library. I have been given an imperial dispensation granting me permission to return home and visit my parents. Not having anticipated Chai Ch'ien's praise of your surpassing virtue, I fear I have been tardy in paying my respects."

"Your pupil is a native of Ch'ien-t'ang district in Chekiang," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "and my courtesy name is Feng-shan. I currently hold a position as observer in the Ministry of Works and have also been granted permission to return home in order to seek a second wife. May I make bold to enquire, Worthy Sir, as to your distinguished courtesy name?"

"I am but a low-ranking official occupying a military office," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could I presume to affect a courtesy name?"

Only after being pressed repeatedly did he say, "My courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan, or Four Springs. Thanks to repeated acts of patronage on the part of His Honor Ts'ai Ching, and the support of Chai Ch'ien, I have been granted the rank of battalion commander in the Embroidered Uniform Guard and occupy a post as a judicial commissioner, for which, if the truth must be known, I am hardly qualified."

"Worthy Sir," responded Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "you are:

A man of no ordinary ambition.¹²

Your reputation for elegance is well-known. There is no need to be so self-effacing."

When they had finished with the social amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited his guests to visit the summerhouse in his garden so they could loosen their formal clothing and relax, but Principal Graduate Ts'ai declined, saying, "My desire to return home is pressing, my boat is moored by the shore, and I feel compelled to be on my way. But having had the pleasure of contemplating your distinguished countenance, I do not wish to depart precipitously. What is to be done? What is to be done?"

"If you two gentlemen will condescend not to reject my snail-like abode," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I humbly beseech you to plant your literary banners here for the nonce, that I may detain you for the space of a meal, and thereby gratify my desire to offer you a meager entertainment."

"Since that is your gracious desire," responded Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "your pupils will comply with your command."

Thereupon, divesting themselves of their formal robes, the two of them sat down, while the attendants served another round of tea. Ts'ai Yün took advantage of the occasion to visually survey Hsi-men Ch'ing's premises.

Noting that the garden pools and decorated pavilions, the secluded luxuriance of the flowers and trees:

Stretched before them as far as the eye could see,

he was delighted by the prospect and:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,

remarked hyperbolically, "Truly, a vista to rival the Isles of the Blest."

Thereupon, a table with an inlaid chessboard on its surface was set before them, and they commenced a game.

"I happen to have a couple of actors in attendance today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to enhance the pleasures of the feast."

"Where are they?" asked Metropolitan Graduate An. "Why not tell them to come in so we can have a look at them?"

In no time at all, the four actors knelt down and kowtowed to them.

"Which two play the leading male and female roles?" asked Principal Graduate Ts'ai. "And what are their names?"

Thereupon, a member of the troupe came forward, and said, "I play the leading male roles, and my name is Kou Tzu-hsiao. That one over there plays the leading female roles, and he is called Chou Shun. This one, who plays subsidiary female roles, is called Yüan Yen. And that one, who plays young male lead roles, is called Hu Ts'ao."

"Where are you actors from?" asked Metropolitan Graduate An.

"We are all natives of Su-chou," replied Kou Tzu-hsiao.

"Make yourselves up and come perform something for us," said Metropolitan Graduate An.

When the four actors retired to put on their makeup, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that female clothing, hairpins, and combs should be fetched from the rear compound and told Shu-t'ung to get dressed up with the rest. As a result, there were three actors playing female roles, and two playing males. The first piece they played was from the southern-style ch'uan-ch'i drama entitled *Hsiang-nang chi* (The scent bag).

Two place settings were provided for Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An at the upper end of the reception hall, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host below in order to keep them company. As they continued their drinking, the actors performed a scene from the play and then came over to join them.

Shu-t'ung's performance in a junior female role caught the eye of Metropolitan Graduate An, who asked, "And where does this actor come from?"

"This is my paltry servant, Shu-t'ung," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Calling him over, Metropolitan Graduate An rewarded him with a drink of wine, saying, "This youngster is absolutely marvelous. He could not be improved upon."

Principal Graduate Ts'ai also called the other performers over and rewarded them with wine, saying, "How about singing that song to the tune 'New Year's Audience' that begins with the words:

Beside the flowers, beside the willows."

Kou Tzu-hsiao responded by standing to one side, clapping his hands to keep time, and singing:

Beside the flowers, beside the willows,
Beyond the eaves threads of gossamer curl.
Before the mountains, before the waters,
On horseback the eastern breeze is soft.
I sigh that the course of my journey,
Is like that of tumbling tumbleweed.
Though I gaze longingly toward my native place,
The geese are distant, the fish are submerged.¹³
The sorrow of separation fills my breast,
but who is there to transmit it?
Like the day lily, my mother's days are short.
My dreaming soul is drawn to her in vain.
Chorus:
Lo-yang is far away,
When will I ever ascend to the golden halls
of the nine-gated palace?¹⁴

When he had finished singing the first song, he went on to sing the next song in the suite, to the same tune as before:

Ten years have I toiled at blue lamp and yellow scrolls,¹⁵
Applying myself by firefly light at study window.¹⁶
At snow-lit desk I have expended studious effort,¹⁷
Hoping to shed honor on my family,
And bring added luster to my name.
I will enter the lists in the literary tournament.
Having mastered the three thousand rules of deportment,¹⁸
The five hundred successful heroes will contend
for their standings in the rank.
Quickly apply Tsu T'i's whip,¹⁹
The sooner to earn an audience with the emperor.
Chorus:
Lo-yang is far away,
When will I ever ascend to the golden halls

of the nine-gated palace?²⁰

Metropolitan Graduate An addressed himself to Kou Tzu-hsiao, saying, "Do you know the song from the play *Yü-huan chi* (The story of the jade ring), which begins with the words:

Your kindness and virtue are without bounds?"

"That's a song to the tune 'Prelude to Painted Eyebrows,' " replied Kou Tzu-hsiao. "I do know it."

Your kindness and virtue are without bounds.
My feelings at meeting my new parents
are not shallow.
I am fortunate to be able to entrust my life to you,
Who have also granted me your daughter in marriage.
This meeting of wind and cloud²¹ will enable me to
take flight on some future day;
This mating of male and female phoenix will lead to
inseparable harmony here and now.
Chorus:
Clearly they are not husband and wife
for this life alone,
In a former life jade was planted in Indigo Field.²²

Shu-t'ung poured a round of drinks and then, clapping his hands to keep time, proceeded to sing the next song in the suite, to the same tune as before:

My tender body has just come of age.
The profoundness of my parents' kindness²³
is as vast as the heavens.
Blushing at my inability to repay them,
This heart of mine is entangled.
For this mating of the mandarin ducks
I am bathed in their kindness.
Serving my husband with dustpan and broom,
I look forward to his success.
Chorus:
Clearly they are not husband and wife
for this life alone,
In a former life jade was planted in Indigo Field.²⁴

It so happens that Metropolitan Graduate An Ch'en, as a native of Hang-chou, was enamored of the "southern breeze."²⁵ When he saw how well Shu-t'ung could sing, he pulled him over by the hand and the two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them as they drank.

After some time, the wine ran out, and Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted them on a tour of the garden, after which they returned to the summerhouse and played a game of chess. He ordered a page boy to fetch two partitioned tabletop boxes containing thirty varieties of delicacies, fresh things in season, and so forth, for them to enjoy with their wine.

"Your pupils have just met you for the first time," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün. "We really ought not to be the cause of any further inconvenience in your secluded mansion. It is growing late, and we had better bid you farewell."

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Are you two gentlemen, when you depart, planning to return to your boat?" he went on to ask.

"We have arranged to avail ourselves of temporary quarters in the Buddhist Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate," replied Principal Graduate Ts'ai.

"Right now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "even if you are only going outside the gate, it's rather late. The best thing to do would be to keep a couple of your retainers here to wait on you, and send the rest back there, with instructions to return and fetch you in the morning. That way we could both have the opportunity to fully express our feelings."

"Although it is an indication of your love of hospitality, Worthy Sir," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "how can we avoid putting you to inordinate inconvenience?"

Thereupon the two of them directed all of their retainers, on the one hand, to return to the Buddhist temple outside the gate to spend the night, and, on the other, to bring horses to fetch them early the next morning. The crowd of retainers assented and took their leave. But no more of this.

The two of them played two games of chess in the summerhouse. The actors performed another two scenes from the play for their entertainment, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing, fearing that it was getting late, paid them for their services and sent them on their way. He only retained Shu-t'ung to pour the wine and wait on them at the feast. Gradually, as they continued drinking, it became time to light the lamps, and the two of them went outside to adjust their toilets.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Patronizes Principal Graduate Ts'ai

Drawing Hsi-men Ch'ing aside with his hand, Principal Graduate Ts'ai said to him, "Your pupil, on this return home to visit his parents, is somewhat short of traveling expenses."

"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need for you to remind me. You can be sure that I will faithfully comply with Chai Ch'ien's esteemed behest."

After some time, he ushered his two guests back into the flower garden, saying, "There is another cozy little structure I would like you to see."

Showing the way to the two of them, he skirted the juniper hedge until he came to the "snow cave" in that secluded nook, the Hidden Spring Grotto. The interior was brightly illuminated with lamps and candles, and on a low zither stand there had already been laid out a lavish spread of delicacies and wine.

The couches and beds were precisely right;
Zither and books were elegantly displayed.

The drinking party was resumed, and Shu-t'ung was there to entertain them with his singing.

"Do you happen to know the song that begins with the words:

Red has entered into the palace peaches?"

asked Principal Graduate Ts'ai.

"That's a song to the tune "Moon over the Brocaded Hall," said Shu-t'ung. "I know it."

"Since you do know it," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "sing it for us."

Thereupon, after pouring another round of wine, Shu-t'ung, adopting a southern style of delivery, clapped his hands to keep time and sang:

Red has entered into the palace peaches,
Green has returned to the royal willows.
Orioles sing in the imperial park during early spring.
Blinds are rolled up to admit the eastern breeze,²⁶
In silken garments the morning chill is still sharp.
Blessed that an immortal maiden has seen fit to
give a letter to the blue bird;²⁷
I recall the kindness of my solicitous mother,
in emulation of the black crow.²⁸

Chorus:

The prospect is beautiful.

I only wish our human situation were an eternal spring;

So we could prolong our revels on the Isles of the Blest.²⁹

When Metropolitan Graduate An heard this performance, he was:

Unable to contain his delight,³⁰

and, remarking to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "This youngster is deserving of respect," he raised his cup of wine and drank it off at one gulp.

Shu-t'ung, attired in:

Turquoise sleeves and red skirt,

and adorned with a gold lamé headband:

Lifting high a jade goblet,

offered up the wine and sang, to the same tune as before:

Hard to repay, our mother's exertions,
Her maternal kindness is without limit.
May she live as long as Red Pine and Wang-tzu Ch'iao.³¹
To wait upon her morning and evening,
Among my kin, there is my elder brother's wife.
In the spring breeze, the flowers of the cherry trees³²
share their fragrance;
In the evening of the year, the pine and the cypress
maintain their integrity.

Chorus:

The prospect is beautiful.

I only wish our human situation were an eternal spring.

So we could prolong our revels on the Isles of the Blest.³³

That evening they continued drinking until the middle of the night before retiring to rest. In both the Hidden Spring Grotto and the Kingfisher Pavilion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had provided beds and curtains and supplied quilts and mattresses of satin and brocade. After having deputed the two page boys, Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, to wait upon his guests, Hsi-men Ch'ing bade them good night and returned to the rear compound.

The next day, the attendants of Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An came to fetch them with bearers, sedan chairs, and horses. Hsi-men Ch'ing had a repast prepared for his guests in the reception hall and provided platters of assorted snacks, wine, and rice for their servitors. He had the two page boys bring forth his parting gifts in square boxes. For Principal Graduate Ts'ai there were a piece of satin brocade, two pieces of spun silk fabric for collar facings, five hundred pellets of storax, and a hundred taels of silver. For Metropolitan Graduate An there were a piece of variegated satin, one piece of spun silk fabric for collar facings, three hundred pellets of storax, and thirty taels of silver.

Principal Graduate Ts'ai repeatedly refused to accept the proffered gift, saying, "A loan of merely thirty taels would be sufficient. What need is there for such prodigality, and with your generous gifts to boot?"

"It is fitting that my fellow graduate should accept," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "but it would hardly be appropriate for me to do so."

"It is but a paltry gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "no more than an expression of my feelings on this occasion, Venerable Sir, of your triumphant return home in order to remarry. It is my humble hope that it may serve to alleviate the cost of a cup of tea."

Thereupon, the two of them both got up from their places to express their thanks, saying:

"These sentiments, this kindness,

When will they ever be forgotten?"³⁴

After which, instructing their retainers to accept the gifts and put them away in their felt bags, they took their leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Once your pupils have departed, we will be:

At opposite ends of the world."³⁵

Temporarily absenting ourselves from your instruction, on our return to the capital at some future date:

Should we advance but an inch in our careers,³⁶

we will naturally feel obliged to repay your generosity."

"Though we must part today," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "I trust that on some future occasion we will have the opportunity to reciprocate by receiving your distinguished countenance."

"Though you have condescended to visit your pupil's snail-like abode," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I fear you have experienced but too shabby a reception. I hope that you will be considerate enough to overlook it. I really ought to see you off for some distance were it not for the responsibilities of my office. I must therefore bid you a premature farewell."

Accompanying his two visitors as far as the gate, he watched as they mounted their horses and departed. Truly:

Having won the right of "returning to one's

home in brocade robes";³⁷

Such success alone "enables one to believe

that he is a real man."³⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 37

OLD MOTHER FENG URGES THE MARRIAGE OF HAN AI-CHIEH; HSI-MEN CH'ING ESPOUSES WANG LIU-ERH AS A MISTRESS

Time passes languidly aboard the light vessels
on the waterways of Wu;
Parting cups were refilled and you indulgently
supported my unsteady gait.
On the blue sea you may be assailed by sorrow
as light flickers lambently;
Among scattered peaks I can hardly object to
the colors of divergent shades.
As you are propelled forward by your orchid oars
how full are your feelings;
While I am reduced to leaning on the balustrade
as the sun sets in the west.
Amid misty waves, so near and yet so far, how vast
is the distance between us;
There is no need for you to harbor in your breast
a sense of redoubled sadness.

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing saw off Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An as they made their departure.

One day, as he was riding on horseback, wearing his eye shades and preceded by an escort who shouted to clear the way, he ran into Old Mother Feng.

He sent a page boy to call her to a halt and question her, saying, "Father says to ask you how things are going with that girl you were commissioned to look for. Why haven't you come to the house to report on it?"

The old woman promptly stepped up to him and said, "These last few days, although I've looked over a number of prospects, all of them were the daughters of butchers or carriers, about whom it would not have been appropriate to report back to you. Who could have anticipated that:

As providence would have it,

there has been a girl from a suitable family right before my eyes all along, that I simply failed to remember. She's as talented as she can be and was born in the year of the horse, so next year she'll be just fourteen years old. If I hadn't passed by her place yesterday and been invited in for a cup of tea by her mother, who was standing at the door, I wouldn't have had the chance to see her. It hasn't been more than a few days since she's started to put up her hair in a cloud-shaped chignon. Her posture is as straight as the handle of a writing brush. She has two tiny bound feet. Her face is heavily made up, and she's got a little bit of a mouth. In fact, she's as captivating as an elf.

"Her mother says that she was born on the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month, and her informal name is Ai-chieh, or Love. Quite aside from the fact that she appears to be lovable to us womenfolk, if you were to set eyes on her yourself, sir, you'd fall in love with her to I know not what extent."

"What a crazy old crone you are!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What would I want with her for no good reason? I've got more than enough of that sort of thing at home as it is. The truth of the matter is that Master Chai Ch'ien, the majordomo of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital, is looking for a concubine, with a view to procreation, and asked me to see if I could find one for him. If you can come up with a prospect that satisfies him, it will certainly redound to your benefit."

"Who's daughter is it?" he went on to ask. "See if you can get a card from them with the year, month, day, and hour of her birth, and bring it to me to look at."

"Who's family does she belong to?" said Old Mother Feng. "I'll tell you all about it, sir.

Distant, it is not a thousand li;

Close, it is but a stone's throw.¹

It's not as though she were anyone else. She's the daughter of Han Tao-kuo, the manager of your silk goods shop. If you want to take a look at her, just wait until I've had a word with her old man, obtained the card with her vital statistics, and settled on a day, and you can go see for yourself."

"If you can manage it thus and so," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed her, "go ahead and speak to him about it, and, if he agrees, get the card with her vital statistics, and come back to my place to report on the situation."

The old woman assented to this and went her way.

Two days later, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting in the front reception room, he suddenly caught sight of Old Mother Feng, who had come back to report to him. She handed him the card with the girl's vital statistics, which read, "The young woman, née Han, is fourteen years old and was born on the fifth day of the fifth month, at midnight."

"I told her old man what you had said to me," she reported, "and he replied that if Your Honor should see fit to show her such favor, it would also be his daughter's good fortune. The only problem is that his household is poor, so they don't have the wherewithal to handle the necessary expenses."

"Tell him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that it won't cost him so much as a thread in the way of expenditure. Everything required in the way of clothing, jewelry, trousseau, furniture, etc., will be taken care of by me, and I'll even provide him with twenty taels of silver in the way of a bride price on behalf of the groom. Tell him that if his household takes care of no more than her shoes and footbindings, that will suffice. When the time comes, I'll also arrange to have her old man escort her to the Eastern Capital."

"Her status will not be comparable to that of an ordinary concubine. Majordomo Chai is seeking a mate with a view to procreation and may well treat her like a wife. If his daughter should be fortunate enough to bear him so much as:

A single boy or half a girl,²
there is no reason to doubt that she would end up enjoying great wealth and distinction."

"They would like to know," asked Old Mother Feng, "when you will pay them a visit in order to have a look at her, so they can prepare themselves accordingly."

"As long as they are agreeable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll just go over there tomorrow and take a look at her. He's been sending me one letter after another, he's so anxious about it. Tell them not to make any special preparations for me. I'll just drink a cup of clear tea and be on my way."

"Your Honor," said Old Mother Feng, "you're:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door.

Though what they provide may not amount to anything special, you ought to stay and sit for a while. Since it's your own employee's home, you can hardly expect them to skimp if you pay them a visit."

"You've got it all wrong," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What you don't understand is that I've got other things to do."

"If that's the way it's to be," said Old Mother Feng, "I'll go tell them about it."

She then betook herself to Han Tao-kuo's house and told his wife, Wang Liu-erh, word for word, everything that had been arranged, saying, "His Honor, back at his residence, took a look at the card with your daughter's vital statistics and was as pleased as could be. He says that it won't cost you so much as a thread in the way of expenditure. Everything required in the way of dowry and trousseau will be taken care of at his place, and he'll even provide you with twenty taels of silver in the way of a bride price on behalf of the groom. All you'll need to do is to make sure that your daughter is supplied with the customary handmade shoes and footbindings for the occasion. When the day arrives, he'll even arrange for your husband to escort her to her new home. And if, by any chance, your daughter should become pregnant in:



Old Mother Feng Urges the Marriage of Han Ai-chieh

A year or half a year,³ it will be a piece of good luck for your entire family, and there is no reason to doubt that you will end up enjoying great wealth and distinction.

"Tomorrow, when his stint at the yamen is over, he'll pay you a visit in order to take a look at her. He says that you shouldn't make any special preparations for him, or expect him to stay for long; that he'll just drink a cup of tea, have a look at her, and be on his way."

"Really, Mother," said Wang Liu-erh. "You wouldn't tell me a story, would you?"

"Surely you don't mean to suggest that, if your employer had not spoken thus, I would come and try to put one over on you. It's not as though he's got nothing else to do. At his place:

People come and people go,
Altogether without ceasing."

When the woman heard these words, she got together some wine and food for the old lady and then sent her on her way with the injunction, "Come and help me out first thing tomorrow."

That evening, when Han Tao-kuo got home, the woman settled the arrangements for the morrow with him. In the morning, he got up early and went to Kao-ching, or High Well,⁴ to order a carrier-load of sweet water, and he also bought some premium-grade nuts, which he left off at home before setting out for the shop to conduct his business.

He left his wife at home:

Alluringly dressed and heavily made up,
decked out in such a way as to make a spectacle of herself. She took the trouble to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before wiping clean the cups and goblets, shelling the nuts, and brewing some good tea, as she awaited the advent of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Old Mother Feng had already showed up to make sure everything was ready for her visitor.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing was through with his duties at the yamen, he went home to change into informal clothes, donned a "loyal and tranquil hat,"⁵ mounted his horse, put on his eye shades, and, accompanied by the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, proceeded straight to Han Tao-kuo's house, where he dismounted and went in.

Old Mother Feng hastened to invite him inside and gave him a seat. After some time, Wang Liu-erh, leading her daughter Ai-chieh, came out to greet him. Hsi-men Ch'ing hardly bothered to look at the daughter but couldn't take his eyes off the woman. He saw that, above, she was wearing a jacket of purple satin, a jet silk vest, and a jade-colored skirt, beneath which appeared the up-turned tips of her two feet, enclosed in black satin shoes with gold spangled toes. She was tall of stature and had a rosewood complexion and a face shaped like a melon seed, the temples of which were adorned with two long spit curls. Truly:

Before knowing what she's like on the inside,
One observes how slickly she is tricked out.

Behold:

Glossy and smooth,
Without benefit of makeup,⁶
By nature, her demeanor is alluring.⁷
Slender and graceful,⁸
Too indolent to use powder,
Innately, her persona is enchanting.⁹
Her two eyebrows resemble distant hills;
Her pair of eyes are like autumn waters.¹⁰
Her sandalwood mouth is barely open;
Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction
and butterflies to madness.
Her slender waist is constricted;
Covertly suggesting thoughts
of breezes and moonlight.
If she is not Ts'ui Ying-ying
bent on an assignation,¹¹
She must surely be Cho Wen-chün
appreciating the zither.¹²

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her:

His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,
to such an extent that:

He was unable to control himself.
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,

"So this is the sort of woman Han Tao-kuo keeps in his house. No wonder that bunch of scamps the other day were out to molest her."

He also noticed that her daughter cut quite a striking figure and thought to himself, "With a mother who looks like that, how could her daughter be anything but good-looking?"

The woman made him an obeisance, after which she instructed her daughter, Ai-chieh, to come over. Facing Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,

she kowtowed to him four times, after which she got up and stood in attendance to one side. Old Mother Feng made haste to bring in some tea, and the woman brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup before telling her daughter to offer it to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked the young woman over from tip to toe.

Raven locks pile up beside her temples;
Powder and cosmetics adorn her cheeks.
Her carriage exhibits the rare beauty

of a secluded flower;
Her full flesh is a delicate jade that
exudes its own bouquet.¹³

He then ordered Tai-an to get the betrothal gifts, consisting of two embroidered handkerchiefs, four gold rings, and twenty taels of silver, out of his felt bag and directed Old Mother Feng to place them on the tea tray. Her mother lost no time in putting the rings on her daughter's hands, after which she bowed to him in thanks and returned to her room.

"In another couple of days," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the woman, "I'll send someone to bring your daughter over to my place to be fitted for her trousseau. You can use this silver to make shoes and footbindings for her at home."

The woman hastily kowtowed to him once more and thanked him, saying, "We all belong to Your Honor:

From the crowns of our heads to the soles of our feet, and we have put you to this additional trouble on behalf of our daughter. The two of us:

Though we should forfeit our lives could not repay you.¹⁴

We are obliged to Your Honor for everything and are especially grateful for your generous provision of betrothal gifts."

"Is Manager Han not at home?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"This morning, after discussing matters with me, he went off to the shop," the woman said. "Tomorrow I'll have him go over to your place and kowtow to you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing that the woman was glib with her tongue, and that the words "Your Honor this, and Your Honor that" were seldom out of her mouth, felt himself irresistibly attracted to her.

As he was about to take his leave, he announced to her, "I'm on my way."

"Stay a little longer," the woman said.

"I can't stay any longer," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he proceeded out the door, went straight home, and told Wu Yüeh-niang everything that had happened.

Yüeh-niang said, "It is a case of:

A marriage affinity between people a thousand li apart
connects them by a single thread.¹⁵

As long as this daughter of Manager Han's is suitable, we will not have expended our efforts in vain."

"Sometime soon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send someone to bring her over here to stay for a couple of days in order to be fitted for her trousseau, and, right now, I'll begin by spending ten taels of silver to have half a set of jewelry, hairpins, bracelets, and the like, made up for her."

"You'd better have them made up as quickly as possible," said Yüeh-niang. "If we can get her old man to escort her on this trip, we won't have to send anyone ourselves."

"We might as well resign ourselves to closing the shop for a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and get Lai-pao to accompany him, so he can enquire at the residence whether or not the gifts for Commandant-Escort Ts'ai T'iao that we despatched by the adjutant the other day have actually arrived."

To make a long story short, two days later Hsi-men Ch'ing actually sent a page boy to fetch the daughter of the Han family. Her mother, Wang Liu-erh, had purchased an appropriate gift and personally accompanied her.

When they arrived, she kowtowed and was introduced to Yüeh-niang and the rest of the womenfolk of greater and lesser status, saying, "I'm imposing upon you."

"His Honor and the First Lady," she went on to say, "as well as all the rest of you ladies, have condescended to show such favor to our daughter that, speaking for the two of us:

Our gratitude knows no bounds."

At first they were served tea in Yüeh-niang's room, after which they were entertained in the main room of the master suite. Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh all kept them company.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had purchased two bolts of red and green Lu-chou pongee and two bolts of poplin, with which to make lingerie for her, and had also called in Tailor Chao to make her two sets of brocaded satin clothing and a gown of figured scarlet satin.

Her mother, Wang Liu-erh, did her best to set her daughter at ease before going home that evening.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also bought a lacquer chest adorned with gold tracery for her trousseau, a dressing case, a mirror stand, boxes and jars, a brass and a pewter basin, a slop pail, a brazier grate, and so forth.

This was not the work of a day, but everything was finally taken care of. A letter was written and the tenth day of the ninth month was selected for her departure. Hsi-men Ch'ing obtained the services of four couriers from the district yamen and also deputed two orderlies, carrying dispatch cases and armed with bows and arrows, to accompany her. Lai Pao and Han Tao-kuo hired four horses for themselves and, following closely behind the wagons and the closed sedan chair, escorted her on her way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.

Wang Liu-erh, who was left at home without either her husband or her daughter for company, cried over it for two or three days.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing, having nothing else to do, rode his horse over to look in on the house on Lion Street, where Old Mother Feng offered him some tea.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a tael of silver, saying, "I'm much indebted to you in that matter of Manager Han's daughter the other day. You can buy something to wear with this tael of silver."

The old woman made haste to kowtow to him in gratitude.

"Have you been over to their place anytime in the last couple of days?" Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask.

"Not a day has gone by that I haven't gone over there to keep her company," said Old Mother Feng. "Ever since her daughter left she's really had no one to rely on at home. As a mother she had grown dependent on her. She cried over it for two or three days. It's only in the last couple of days that she's reconciled herself somewhat to the situation.

"She also said that she was much beholden to you in the matter of her daughter and asked me, 'Has His Honor given you anything in the way of a gratuity for your pains?' I replied, 'The gentleman is busy, and I haven't been over to his place the last several days. It is not my place to concern myself with how much or how little he may give me.' She also promised that when her husband returned I would be handsomely rewarded."

"When her old man returns," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he's bound to have picked up a little something and could hardly fail to express his gratitude to you."

After they had talked for a while, seeing that:

There was nobody about,

he stealthily whispered into the old woman's ear, thus and so, "Whenever you're free, go over to her place and exercise your ingenuity in broaching the subject, but just say politely that I'd like to drop by and visit her for a while sometime when I'm free, and see how she reacts, whether she agrees or not. I'll come back tomorrow to find out how she responds."

The old woman covered her mouth with her hand and laughed sardonically, saying, "Sir, you're just like:

An itinerant shoemaker tempted by an unmarried girl;

Wherever two hides meet you'll cobble them together.¹⁶

Having dug up a silver doll with a thrust of the spade;

You are bent on acquiring its mother into the bargain.

Later this evening I'll gradually make bold to broach the subject with her. You're not acquainted with this woman, sir. She's the younger sister of Butcher Wang, who slaughters cattle on our back street here. As the sixth sibling in her generation of the family, she's called Wang Liu-erh, or Wang the Sixth. She was born in the year of the snake, so she's twenty-eight years old. Although she dolls herself up in such a way as to make a spectacle of herself, it doesn't follow that she is promiscuous. Be sure to come back tomorrow, sir, after I've had a chance to sound her out, and I'll have something to report to you."

"That's it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and, having finished speaking, he mounted his horse and went home.

The old woman, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, prepared a meal for herself, ate it, locked the door of the house, and made her way slowly to Oxhide Lane where the woman lived.

The woman opened the door, ushered her into an inner room, and offered her a seat, saying, "Yesterday I prepared a batch of noodles for you, but you didn't show up."

"I certainly intended to come," the old woman said, "but I went to someone else's place and got so tangled up with one thing and another that I was unable to get away."

"I've just prepared some steaming hot rice," said the woman, "and some stir-fried wheat gluten. Have something to eat."

"I've just finished eating," the old woman said, "but I'll sip some tea."

The woman then served her a cup of strong tea, and she looked on as her host ate her meal.

"You can see how forlorn I am," the woman said. "I've allowed myself to become so dependent on that heartless darling of mine that, ever since she left, the house seems completely deserted. I've got to do everything myself now, with the result that:

My nose is dingy,

My mouth is sooty,¹⁷

and I hardly look like a human being. It might even have been better if she had died and left me with a broken heart. This way, when she's so:

Far away from home,

how would you have me put her out of my mind? However urgently I long to see her, there's no way it can be done."

As she spoke her eyes felt sour and she began to cry.

"It hardly bears repeating," the old woman said, "but it was ever thus.

When a boy is born, everyone feels hot with excitement;

When a girl is born, everyone feels coldly indifferent.

Though she should live to be a hundred years old;

Sooner or later, she will belong to someone else.

However much you may complain about it today, in the future, when your daughter is installed in the mansion, she will start out on a firm footing. If she should bear so much as:

A single boy or half a girl,

the two of you will be in a position to enjoy yourselves and no longer have any reason to complain about me."

"When it comes to the doings in a prominent household," the woman said, "there are bound to be:

Layers within layers.

Who knows how things will turn out? By the time any child of hers amounts to anything, our jawbones may have long since been exposed to the elements somewhere."

"How can you say such a thing?" the old woman said. "Your daughter is as smart as they come. There's no need to

worry about her as far as needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments are concerned. Who is there that scruples to:

Depend upon his marriage connections
for his daily bread,
that you should be worried on her behalf?"

The two of them talked for some time, passing the same cup of wine back and forth between them, until the conversation gradually started to warm up, whereupon the old woman said, "I've got a silly proposition to make to you. Your husband is away from home, so that both the front and rear quarters of your house are completely deserted. In the evenings, when you're left all by yourself, aren't you afraid?"

"You're a fine one to talk when it's you who got me into this fix in the first place," the woman said. "You really ought to come over in the evenings to keep me company."

"Just in case I might not be able to make it sometime," the old woman said, "if I offered to stand as guarantor for someone else to come keep you company, would you be willing to agree to it?"

"And who might that be?" the woman asked.

The old woman covered her mouth with her hand and laughed, saying:

"One guest does not trouble two hosts.

His Honor from the mansion came over to the other house yesterday and said to me, thus and so, that since your daughter had left home, leaving you all by yourself, he'd like to drop by and visit you for a while sometime. What do you say? There isn't anyone else here. If you were to go along with him, you wouldn't have to worry about having enough to eat, to wear, to spend, or to use. Once such a liaison was established, in the future, he'd even be willing to look for another house for you, which would be better than this out-of-the-way corner where you are now."

On hearing this the woman smiled and said, "With a houseful of goddess-like women at his disposal, what would he want with an ugly piece of goods like myself?"

"How can you say such a thing?" the old woman said. "It has always been true that:

In one's lover's eyes one appears like
a veritable Hsi-shih.¹⁸

It is clear that:

This meeting was fated to occur.

It's not as though His Honor has nothing else to do. If he weren't particularly interested in you, he would not have made a point of coming to my place yesterday, giving me a tael of silver, and saying that he was much indebted to me in that matter of your daughter the other day. Later on, when there was no one else present, he brought up the subject with me and told me to come here and broach it to you, saying that, if you were willing to consider it, he would be waiting for an answer from me.

In mortgaging land to make the deed,
The parties involved must be agreed.

Surely you don't mean to suggest that I would lie about it."

"If he deigns to visit me," said the woman, "invite him to come over tomorrow. I'll be waiting for him."

The old woman, seeing that she had indicated her assent, sat with her a while longer, after which, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

she made her departure.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, she gave him a complete account, word for word, of what the woman had said. Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Unable to contain his satisfaction,¹⁹

and promptly weighed out a tael of silver for Old Mother Feng so she could purchase wine and delicacies for the occasion.

The woman, on hearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was coming, straightened up the interior of her house:

Lit incense and hung curtains,
and laid in a supply of:

Fine tea and fine water.

Before long, the old woman showed up with a basketful of chicken, fish, appetizers, groceries, and fruits, which she had purchased, and took them into the kitchen to be properly prepared. The woman took the trouble to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before baking a small quantity of wheat cakes and wiping the tables and chairs until they shone.

Sometime after noon, Hsi-men Ch'ing donned a skullcap and informal clothes, put on his eyeshades, and headed straight for her door, accompanied by the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'i-t'ung. Upon dismounting to go inside, he directed that the horse be taken back to the house on Lion Street and brought back for him that evening, while he kept only Tai-an to wait on him in the meantime. Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded into the parlor and sat down.

After some time, the woman, having dressed herself to befit the occasion, came out to greet him, saying, "I'm afraid we imposed on you the other day. You've gone to so much trouble on behalf of our daughter that:

Words do not suffice,

to express our gratitude.”

“If there’s anything I may have overlooked,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I hope the two of you will not hold it against me.”

“With regard to our whole family,” the woman said:

“Our obligations to you are so great,

we could never hold anything against you.” After saying which, she kowtowed to him four times.

Old Mother Feng then brought in some tea, and the woman served it to him. Observing that the horse had been sent away and that Tai-an had closed the front door, the woman sat with Hsi-men Ch’ing for a while and then ushered him into an interior sitting room, at the other end of which a k’ang frame was set in an alcove behind a sliding paper door. The room was decorated with a set of four hanging scrolls, in frames carved with a motif of bees enjoying the fragrance of the flowers, depicting the story of Chang Chün-jui’s meeting with Ts’ui Ying-ying²⁰ in the form of a collage of pieces of variegated silk and satin. The table was crowded with a dressing case, a mirror stand, boxes and jars, pewter utensils, and other objects, and a stick of incense was burning on the floor beneath it. In the place of honor there was a folding Tung-p’o armchair, in which Hsi-men Ch’ing took his seat. The woman then poured a cup of strong tea, flavored with walnuts and marinated bamboo shoots, and served it to him. When Hsi-men Ch’ing had finished it, the woman took away the cup, sat down on the edge of the k’ang at the lower end of the room to keep him company, and asked him for a while about how things were going at home.

Hsi-men Ch’ing noticed that the woman handled the tray herself and said, “You really ought to have a girl to help out around here.”

“The truth of the matter is,” the woman said, “that ever since our daughter left home, things have been less convenient. In those days she was always here to help out, but now I’ve got to do everything myself.”

“That’s no problem,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Tomorrow, just get Old Mother Feng to find a twelve-or thirteen-year-old maidservant for you who can relieve you, at least to some extent, of the burden of housework.”

“It will have to wait till my husband gets back,” the woman said, “when we’ll simply have to:

Scrape together something from the east or the west,
with which to get Old Mother Feng to find such a girl for us.”

“There’s no need for that,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Whatever it may cost, I’ll pay her myself.”

“How could it be appropriate to put you to such additional trouble and expense?” the woman said. “It’s not as though we haven’t imposed on Your Honor enough as it is.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw that she had a way with words, his heart was filled with delight, and when Old Mother Feng came in to set up a table for them, he spoke to her about the matter of finding a maidservant.

“Since His Honor has already agreed to it,” Old Mother Feng said, “you ought to kowtow to him in thanks. Auntie Chao’s place in the southern quarter has a twelve-year-old girl available. I can bring her here for you to look over tomorrow. She’s a girl of humble social origin who was raised by her own family. Her father is a military patrolman whose horse was killed in a fall. Being unable to pay the cost of reparation, and fearful of the beating he would be subjected to by the commandant of the Regional Military Command, he has had to sell his daughter. The asking price for her is only four taels of silver. You might as well get His Honor to buy her for you.”

The woman hastened forward and bowed to him in gratitude. Before long the table was spread with saucers of food and the wine was ready to be poured. The woman filled a cup to the brim and proffered it to Hsi-men Ch’ing with both hands.

She was about to kowtow to him as well, but Hsi-men Ch’ing hastened to pull her up with one hand, saying, “You’ve already saluted me just a while ago. There’s no need for any further obeisance. A simple bow will do.”

The woman, with a broad smile on her face, made him a bow and then sat down to one side on a low stool. In the kitchen, Old Mother Feng prepared the appetizers, fruits, and other dishes and served them up one at a time. There were also a couple of chopsticks worth of thin pancakes, which the woman filled with shredded pork and vegetables selected with her own hand, rolled up into spring rolls, and offered to Hsi-men Ch’ing on a saucer. The two of them proceeded to:

Pass their winecups back and forth,
as they drank together in her room. Tai-an was also provided with a place to sit in the kitchen, where Old Mother Feng kept him company and gave him something to eat. But no more of this.

When they had shared a few rounds of drinks, the woman moved her seat closer to Hsi-men Ch’ing, so that she could talk to him and serve him more conveniently. After this, Hsi-men Ch’ing continued to drink with the woman, passing the same cup of wine back and forth between them. Seeing that no one came in, he embraced her by the neck, and they fell to kissing and sucking each other’s tongues. The woman then stuck her hand out below and grasped Hsi-men Ch’ing’s jade stalk. Mutually:

Carried away by lecherous desires, they called a halt to their drinking, closed the door to the room, and stripped off their clothes. The woman then proceeded to spread out her bedding on the k’ang frame in the alcove.

By this time the sun was already setting in the west. Hsi-men Ch’ing, exhilarated by the wine, took the silver clasp out of his wallet and fastened it in place, while the woman pumped his organ with her hand. She observed that:

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
It became empurpled and shiny,
Tumid, and extremely thick.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Espouses Wang Liu-erh as a Mistress

On the one hand, she sat down in Hsi-men Ch'ing's lap, while on the other hand, up above, the two of them fell to embracing each other by the neck and kissing. The woman then raised one of her legs, guided his organ into her vagina with her hand, and the two of them poked away for a while. Hsi-men Ch'ing, fondling the soft smoothness of the woman's body and the fineness of her pubic hair, wanted to fully engage with her, so he ordered her to lie faceup on the end of the bed, and then, supporting himself on his two hands and wrapping her feet around the small of his back, devoted himself to retracting and thrusting. What did this bout of clouds and rain look like?

Behold:

An awe-inspiring aura obscures the halcyon couch,
A baleful breath immures the mandarin duck quilt.
On the coral pillow they display their prowess,
Behind kingfisher curtains they vie in audacity.

The male warrior is enraged;
 Thrusting himself forward, he stabs away
 with his black-tasseled spear.
 The female commander is angry;
 Spreading her hips, she makes a show of
 her life-threatening sword.
 One comes, the other goes;
 As An Lu-shan consorts with
 Yang Kuei-fei.²¹
 One butts, the other lunges;
 As Chang Chün-jui makes up to
 Ts'ui Ying-ying.²²
 To left and right they join together;
 In the Milky Way the Weaving Maid
 meets the Herd Boy.²³
 Above and below they coil about;
 In the fairy cave the immortal maiden
 confronts Juan Chao.²⁴
 The spear comes, the bucklers bear the brunt;
 Ts'ui Huai-pao unites himself with
 Hsüeh Ch'üung-ch'üung.²⁵
 The ballista attacks, the blade fends it off;
 Shuang Chien conjoins himself with
 Su Hsiao-ch'ing.²⁶
 This one gives vent to the warbling of an oriole;
 It much resembles Wu Tse-t'ien's rendezvous
 with Hsüeh Ao-ts'ao.²⁷
 That one gives voice to the twittering of a swallow;
 It is just like Shen I-chi's consorting
 with Empress Lü.²⁸
 When they first engage;
 The short spear stabs indiscriminately,
 While the sharp blade responds in kind.
 Subsequently to that;
 Both ballistae fire simultaneously,
 And the bucklers ward the missiles off.
 The male warrior is excited;
 Wielding his spear, he wants to penetrate
 as far as the heart cavity;
 The female commander is agitated;
 Opening her orifice, she tries to swallow
 her assailant, head and all.
 The one who deploys the pair of ballistae,
 Comes and goes, in his assault upon
 the forces of the Inner Crotch;
 The one who brandishes the pair of bucklers,
 Above and below, defends herself against
 the General Beneath the Navel.
 One, adopting the position "The Golden Cock
 Standing on a Single Foot,"²⁹
 Raises high her jade leg in order to
 display her spirit.
 The other, assuming the pose "The Bare Tree
 Extending Its Roots,"³⁰
 "Inserts the arrow upside down"³¹ in order to
 penetrate the vagina.
 The engagement is protracted,
 His starry eyes grow dim,
 The slightest move produces
 a melting sensation.
 The battle is prolonged,
 Her slender waist writhes gently,
 As the duel continues she worries

how long she can last.
 The Matron of the Cave of Scanty Hair
 backs across the bridge,
 Releasing her waters to drown the invader.
 The General of the Raven Black Armor³²
 waves his spear in vain,
 Turning about in the endeavor to escape.
 He of the navel aphrodisiac is unhorsed;
 In an instant, he is trampled underfoot,
 his flesh reduced to dust.
 She that is warm and tight feigns confusion;
 In a moment, she collapses into herself,
 sinking down into the abyss.
 He of the heavy armor, finds it to be
 scattered hither and yon,
 Just like falling flowers, driven about
 by a drenching rain.³³
 She of the brocade noose, finds her
 vigor gone, her muscles lax,³⁴
 Just like withered leaves, swirled around
 by a violent wind.³⁵
 The Marshall of the Sulfur Ring,
 His helmet awry and armor shattered,
 has nowhere he can flee.
 The General of the Silver Armor,
 Sticks close to her own encampment,
 loath to let him escape.

Truly:

The threatening clouds rise up as high as
 the nine-layered heavens,
 While down below the defeated combatants
 lie tumbled on the field.³⁶

It so happens that the woman suffered from a malady. Whenever she engaged in sexual intercourse she required her partner to pluck the flower in her rear courtyard, while she stimulated her clitoris below, before she was able to experience orgasm. If not, no matter what happened, she could not come. Even when Han Tao-kuo engaged in intercourse with her, he approached her by the rear entry more often than not, coming in by the front door no more than two or three times a month. A second malady of hers was that she was inveterately fond of sucking cock. She would keep it in her mouth for the longest time, even all night long, without being satisfied. No matter how much spunk her partner may have ejaculated, once subjected to her sucking and titillation, his member would re-erect itself forthwith. It was precisely these two maladies of hers that struck a responsive note in Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart.

That day he continued to engage with her until the first watch before going home.

"Come a little earlier tomorrow, sir," the woman said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while it is still daylight, so we can have time to take off all our clothes and really play together."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted. The next day he went to the silk goods shop on Lion Street, where he weighed out four taels of silver and gave them to Old Mother Feng so she could purchase the maidservant for Wang Liu-erh's use, whose name was changed to Chin-erh.

Obsessed with the sweet prospect before him, on the second day, Hsi-men Ch'ing again rode his horse to the woman's home to pay her a visit. Originally both Ch'i-t'ung and Tai-an accompanied him, but when they got to her door, he told Ch'i-t'ung to take the horse back to the house on Lion Street.

Old Mother Feng devoted herself to going out with the jug to buy wine, picking up things on the street to prepare for them, running errands on their behalf, and so forth, and was dependent for her living on what she could make out of these transactions. Every time Hsi-men Ch'ing paid her a visit, he gave the woman one or two taels of silver for her expenses. He would come while it was still daylight and remain right up until the first watch before going home.

The members of his household were kept as completely in the dark as if they had been:

Locked tight in an iron bucket.

Since Old Mother Feng was working so hard at the woman's place every day, she seldom showed up at Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Li P'ing-erh sent page boys to summon her two or three times, but she claimed she was unable to get away. Whenever she felt like it, she would lock the door and stay away for a whole day at a time.

One day the page boy, Hua-t'ung, ran into the old woman and brought her home with him.

"Old Mother," Li P'ing-erh complained to her, "I haven't seen so much as your shadow for days on end. What kind of:

Pussyfooting errands,

have you been up to? Every time I send after you, you're not there. You seem to have completely given up stopping by

here. Are you really as busy as all that? I'm left with this accumulation of clothes, waistbands, and the baby's bedding that I've been waiting for you to come and help the maidservants launder for me, but you never show up."

"My dear mistress," the old woman exclaimed, "that's a fine thing to say!

If you insist on sending a scribe to arrest a deserter,

He can do no more than cite a body of precedents.

If you endeavor to turn a salt peddler into a sculptor,

He'll only end up making an 'idol' use of his time."³⁷

"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "you're as bad as:

The abbot of the Stone Buddha Monastery:

Every time you're asked to officiate, you're too busy.

I'm sure you're out making money for yourself all day long, it's just that I don't know where you are."

"As for me," the old woman expostulated:

"The tempest having blown away the rest of my face,

My mouth can hardly be expected to keep up.

What money have I been making that you should have reason to be angry with me? You can be sure that I've had it anxiously in mind to drop by, but I just haven't been able to make it. I hardly know myself what it is that's been keeping me so busy all day. Some time ago the First Lady in the rear compound gave me the silver and asked me to pick up a rush prayer mat for her Buddhist devotions outside the South Gate, but I forgot all about it. Yesterday, when I finally remembered her request, the lousy southern slave of a mat seller was nowhere to be found. What will I say to her?"

"Do you mean to say that you still don't have that prayer mat for her?" exclaimed Li P'ing-erh. You might as well have been:

Free as you please,

and run off somewhere with a bonze. She's already given you the silver for it, and after all this time you still haven't bought it for her. How can you go on:

Playing the fool and putting on airs, that way?"

"It has had to wait," the old woman said, "until I've had a chance to explain the situation to the First Lady, but when I do, I'll return this silver to her. Yesterday, when I was riding a mule, I almost lost it."

"If you had lost that money of hers," said Li P'ing-erh, "you'd be a dead duck."

The old woman then headed straight for the rear compound, but before going into Yüeh-niang's room she went into the kitchen to reconnoiter, where she found Yü-hsiao sitting together with Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu.

Upon seeing her, Yü-hsiao said, "So you've finally showed up, Old Feng. Where have you come from, exalted person that you are? Your Sixth Lady is ready to eat your flesh alive. She claims that you haven't been showing her so much as a glimpse of your shadow."

The old woman went up to them, bowed twice, and said, "I've just been in her place up front where she nagged away at me for some time."

"What about the rush prayer mat that Mother asked you to pick up for her?" asked Yü-hsiao.

"I went outside the South Gate yesterday with silver in hand," said the old woman, "but the vendor who sells rush prayer mats has sold out his stock and gone back where he came from. He won't return until the third month of next year. I've still got the silver right here. Sister, let me turn it over to you."

"You crazy crone!" laughed Yü-hsiao. "Father is still in the room weighing out silver. After he comes out, you can return it to her personally."

"Sit down for a while," she then went on to say. "I've got something to ask you. How long has it been since Manager Han set out to escort his daughter to the capital? He ought to be back any time now, and when he returns it ought to be a piece of good luck for you. He's bound to express his gratitude to you in some way."

"Whether he thanks me or not is up to him," the old woman said. "As of today, he's only been gone eight days. He won't be back before the end of the month."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing finished weighing out the silver, turned it over to Pen the Fourth to take out to the country estate, and then went out himself.

The old woman went into the master suite to see Yüeh-niang but still hesitated to produce the silver, simply saying, "That southerner had only a few coarse prayer mats available and went home after selling them off. He'll come back next year with good rush prayer mats of higher quality."

Yüeh-niang, who was a straightforward person, said, "Well that's that. You might as well hold onto the silver, and next year I'll ask you to pick up two of them for me, that's all."

She gave the old woman some tea cakes to eat, after which she returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

"Did the First Lady give you a hard time?" Li P'ing-erh asked.

"I was able to paper things over in such a way as to satisfy her," the old woman said. "She actually gave me some tea to drink and rewarded me with a couple of large cakes when I took my leave."

"Those must have been the cakes left over from her visit to the Ch'iaos' house yesterday to celebrate the full-month ceremony for the birth of their daughter," said Li P'ing-erh. "Old Mother, that mouth of yours, true to form, is as lethal as:

The mosquitoes in the sixth month:

They bite you to death."

"As long as you're here today," she went on to say, "you might as well take care of the laundry before going home."

"Get your things together and procure some starch," the old woman replied. "I'll come by first thing tomorrow morning. This afternoon I still have to go to the home of an old client of mine to conduct some business."

"You old baggage!" exclaimed Li P'ing-erh. "You're never content unless you can:

Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves.

If you don't show up tomorrow, I'll have something to say to you."

The old woman talked and laughed for a while before taking her leave.

Li P'ing-erh urged her to stay, saying, "Don't leave until you've had something to eat."

"I'm still full," the old woman replied. "I don't need to eat anything."

Whereupon, fearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing might have preceded her in paying a visit to Wang Liu-erh's place, she hastened on her way:

Covering two steps with every one.

Truly:

The matchmaker is like a secondary ghost
that haunts the locality;

Going back and forth, one party to the other,
wiping the oil from her lips.

In a single day she manages to go a thousand
times a thousand steps;

But merely succeeds in engendering hardship
for her pair of legs.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 38

HSI-MEN CH'ING SUBJECTS TRICKSTER HAN TO THE THIRD DEGREE; P'AN CHIN-LIEN ON A SNOWY EVENING TOYS WITH HER *P'I-P'A*

Though her lovely person is warm and soft,
 she is a practiced old hand;
Like a jade flagon illuminated by moonlight,
 she is made to inspire passion.
Lightly turning her jadelike countenance,
 the flowers look seductive;
At the slightest perturbation of her delicate brows,
 her cloudy chignon falls loose.
Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction,
 the peach blossom's pistil is open;
Sufficiently alluring to drive butterflies to madness,
 her willowy waist is pristine.
The heart of the beholder is held in thrall,
 subject to lasting infatuation;
May she not take after the "willows" in the quarter,
 who respond with pallid affection.¹

THE STORY GOES that when Old Mother Feng had proceeded as far as the postern gate leading to the front reception hall, she saw Tai-an standing in attendance outside the latticework doors to the hall with tea tray in hand.

Tai-an made a meaningful moue in her direction, saying, "You go on over there. Father and Master Ying the Second are talking together. As soon as they're done, and he's seen him off, he'll start out himself. He's already sent Ch'i-t'ung ahead to deliver the wine."

As soon as the old woman heard these words, she hastened on her way:

 Covering two steps with every one.

It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh had come to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing about the merchant contractors Li Chih and Huang the Fourth, who had undertaken the assignment to procure one-third of the annual quota of thirty thousand tael worth of incense, wax, and other materials for use by the imperial household. Their share, therefore, in addition to whatever interest they could make on the transaction, would amount to ten thousand taels of silver, which would be paid over to them in bullion upon delivery of the consignment to Tung-p'ing prefecture.

"I've come to consult with you," he said, "about whether or not you would care to take a hand in the transaction."

"Why should I want to become a purveyor?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. They:

 Substitute the counterfeit for the genuine,

 Bribe officials and promise them kickbacks.

When such cases come before my yamen, we are required to proceed against them. Why should I involve myself in such a business?"

"If you don't participate," said Ying Po-chüeh, "they'll just go to someone else. All you have to do is lend them two thousand taels of silver, on which they will pay you five percent interest per month, and when they receive payment for their consignment they will return your original investment. What do you think? If you agree to the undertaking, I'll speak to them and have them bring the contract to you tomorrow."

"Only out of consideration for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll put up a thousand taels of silver for them. Right now, because of the construction work on my country estate, I'm short of cash."

When Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had indicated his assent, he said, "Brother, if you're so strapped for cash, couldn't you, somehow or other, come up with another five hundred taels worth of merchandise in order to make up an even one thousand five hundred for them? They wouldn't dare let you down."

"If they let me down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll know how to handle them. But there's another thing, Brother Ying the Second. If I put up any money for them, they mustn't run around on the outside flaunting my name in order to:

 Fleece people to the east and cheat them on the west.

If I get wind of anything like that, I fear there'll be more than enough room to accommodate them in the lockup at my yamen."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how can you say such a thing?

 The supervisor cannot relinquish his responsibility.

If they run around on the outside flaunting your name and no harm is done, so much for that. But if they should do any damage, what am I good for? You can simply relax on that score. If anything goes amiss, I'll be the first to tell you about it. If you agree, I'll let them know so they can be prepared to draft the contract tomorrow."

"Don't have them come tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got something to do. Have them come the day after tomorrow."

When they had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh took his leave.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to prepare his horse, put on his eye shades, and asked, "Has Ch'i-t'ung already left?"

"He's still here," said Tai-an. "He's gone to fetch your riding crop."

Before long, the riding crop was fetched, and Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and set off for Oxhide Lane.

Who could have anticipated that Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, or Trickster Han, who had lost at gambling and managed to get stark staring drunk, should turn up at his elder brother's house looking for something more to drink.

Pulling a string of small sausages out of his sleeve, he said, "Sister-in-law, since my elder brother hasn't returned yet, why don't the two of us share a jug of distilled spirits."

The woman, who was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might show up and was aware that Old Mother Feng was in the kitchen, did not take him up on it, saying, "I don't want anything, but if you insist on a drink, take it out of the way somewhere and indulge yourself. I'm sick and tired of the way you:

Devote yourself to stirring up trouble,

when your elder brother is away from home. What are you coming around again for, anyway?"

Trickster Han, opening wide his bleary eyes, refused to leave. Catching sight of a jug of wine underneath the table, with a white clay stopper and a red paper label attached to it, he asked, "Sister-in-law, who's wine is that? Open it up and decant a flagon's worth for us to drink. Ai-ya, you're keeping it all for yourself."

"Don't you dare touch it," the woman exclaimed. "It's a gift from His Honor in the mansion. Your elder brother hasn't even seen it yet. There'll be time enough to pour out a cup for you after he gets home."

"Why should I wait for any elder brother?" said Han the Second. "Even if it belonged to the emperor himself, I'd help myself to a cup."

He was just about to pull out the clay stopper when the woman gave him a precipitate shove with her hand, snatched up the wine jug, and lugged it into her bedroom.

It took a while for Trickster Han, who had been knocked flat on his back, to regain his feet.

His discomfiture turning into anger,²

he muttered abusively, "You lousy whore! I brought these sausages over with the best of intentions, thinking that you must be lonely all by yourself and would be happy to share a cup of wine with me. You've not only ignored my suggestion, but knocked me down into the bargain. Don't you worry. You may have found yourself another lover with plenty of money and decided to ignore me. You may want to break up with me, so you're deliberately giving me a hard time, disregarding me, mocking me, and driving me away. You'd just better not let me catch the two of you together, you worthless whore, or it'll be a case of:

A white blade going in, and

A red blade coming out."

No sooner did the woman hear these indiscreet words than:

A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and

In an instant her two cheeks were purple.

Picking up a laundry bat in her hand, she drove him out of the house, cursing as she went, "You lousy starveling of a gallows bird! You've had it! You think you can guzzle yourself drunk somewhere and then turn up at my place and freeloader, do you? Well I'm not going to let you get away with it."

Muttering imprecations as he went, Trickster Han cursed her for a whore all the way out the door.

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would come riding along just at this juncture and, catching sight of him, demand to know who it was.

"You know perfectly well who it is," the woman replied. "It's that bastard Han the Second. Seeing that his elder brother is away from home, he's in the habit of losing at gambling and then coming around here in his cups to make trouble for me. When his elder brother is at home, he gives him a beating when he runs into him."

Trickster Han, observing the lay of the land, disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"That dead duck of a beggar!" Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed. "Tomorrow, when I get to the yamen, I'll give him something to remember me by."

"I've just provided you with another source of irritation," the woman said.

"You don't understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We can't let him get away with that sort of thing."

"What you say is right," the woman responded. "It has always been true that:

Goodness is taken advantage of by others,

Benevolence merely gives rise to disaster."³

As she spoke, she ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing into the parlor and offered him a seat.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Ch'i-t'ung to return home with the horse and said to Tai-an, "You keep watch at the front door. If that 'bare stick' so much as flaunts his shadow around here, lock him up, and bring him to the yamen tomorrow."

"When he heard that you had arrived," said Tai-an:

"Who knows where his soul ended up going to."

Hsi-men Ch'ing took a seat. The woman, after making him an obeisance, promptly directed her maidservant Chin-erh to bring out a cup of tea, flavored with fruit kernels, from the inner room and serve it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which she told her to kowtow to him.



Wang Liu-erh Menaces Trickster Han with a Laundry Bat

"That will do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She looks like a nice enough girl. You might as well make what use of her you can."

"Old Mother Feng is here, isn't she," he went on to say. "Why don't you have her take care of the tea?"

"As for that old body, Mother Feng," the woman said, "I've asked her to busy herself in the kitchen."

"That wine that I had the page boy deliver a while ago," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is 'Bamboo Leaf Green'⁴ that was given to me by a eunuch. It contains a lot of medicinal ingredients and has a very bracing taste. I noticed the other day that the wine you obtained around here was not fit to drink. That's why I had this jug of wine brought over for you."

The woman made him another bow, saying, "Thank you very much for the wine. It's just as you say. We're so out of the way, living in this obscure alley, that we don't even have access to a decent wine shop. Where would we get high-quality wine without going all the way to Main Street?"

"When Manager Han gets home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you ought to talk it over with him. I'd be willing to spend a few taels of silver to buy a house on Lion Street so the two of you could simply move over there to live. It would be

nearer the silk goods store, on the one hand, as well as being more convenient for shopping and everything else.”

“What you say is right,” the woman said. “If you could see fit, somehow or other, to show us such favor, so that we could manage to get away from this place, it would be wonderful. Even with regard to your coming and going, it would have the advantage of obviating a good deal of gossip on the part of petty-minded people. As long as what we do is right, there’s no reason to be afraid of anybody. If this is something you’ve made up your mind to do, go ahead and do it. It’s all the same whether he’s at home or not. After all, there’s no other road for him to take.”

After they had talked for a while, a table was set up in the inner room, and she invited Hsi-men Ch’ing inside to loosen his clothes, sit down, and relax. Before long, wine and food were prepared, and the table was spread with chicken, duck, fish, pork, as well as appetizers and snacks of all kinds. The woman kept him company and poured the wine.

It was not long before the two of them sat down together:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,

and proceeded to drink in earnest. When they began to feel the effects of the wine, they took off their clothes:

Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport,

Enjoying each other to their heart’s content.

The woman had long since laid out a thick layer of bedding on the k’ang frame and fumigated it until it exuded a pungent fragrance.

Hsi-men Ch’ing was aware that the woman was fond of the game of breeze and moonlight and was anxious to see what he could do to arouse her. Before leaving home, he had secreted a brocaded bag in his sleeve, which he now opened to reveal a silver clasp, a “ladies’ delight,” a sulfur-imbrued ring, a medicated band of white satin, a “pendent jade ring,” a navel aphrodisiac plaster, and a “titillating bell,” a full complement of sexual implements. The woman:

Lay down faceup on the pillow,

Raised her jade legs on high, while

Her “chicken-tongue” protruded from within.

Hsi-men Ch’ing first had the woman insert the “titillating bell” in her vagina, after which he fastened the silver clasp to the root of his organ, fitted the sulfur-imbrued ring around the neck of his glans, and stuck the navel aphrodisiac plaster on his navel. The woman guided his organ into her vagina with her hand until:

The two of them were joined together, and

It gradually penetrated more than halfway.

“Daddy!” the woman exclaimed, “I’m afraid your legs will start to hurt if you squat that way. Pull the pillow over so you can sit on it, and let this whore of yours do the moving.”

“I’m afraid you’re not really comfortable,” she went on to say. “Why don’t you try fucking me with one of my legs suspended? How would that be?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing actually unwrapped one of her foot bindings and tied it around her foot in such a way that one leg was suspended from the latticework partition of the bed. Thereupon he lowered his head and proceeded to thrust and retract until her vaginal fluids began to flow uninterruptedly, like a snail secreting its slime.⁵ In the process of retracting, a good deal of white discharge emerged.

“Why are you producing this white discharge?” Hsi-men Ch’ing asked.

He was about to wipe himself off when the woman said, “Don’t wipe it off. Let me suck it for you.”

Thereupon, she squatted down in front of him and lapped it up so thoroughly that:

The sound of her sucking was audible.

This so affected Hsi-men Ch’ing that his:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Turning her over, he set out, with her cooperation, to pluck the flower in her rear courtyard. His turtle head was encumbered with the sulfur-imbrued ring so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was difficult to proceed. The woman knit her brows and silently endured the pain for some time before he succeeded in immersing the knob of his glans. Hsi-men Ch’ing thereupon began to thrust and retract in earnest, while the woman rubbed his organ with her hand until:

It gradually penetrated more than halfway.

Parking her posterior in Hsi-men Ch’ing’s lap, and:

Turning her head around with an amorous glance,

she said, in a quavering voice, “Daddy! Slow down a bit. The rest of it is even thicker and larger. How will this whore of yours ever endure it?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing lifted her haunches in order to:

Observe the sight as he went in and out.⁶

Then, addressing her by her informal name, he said, “Wang Liu-erh, my child, your daddy doesn’t know why it is, but this is the one thing that delights him the most. Who would have thought that today I should meet up with you. You’re truly a woman after my own heart. In the days to come you and I will be:

Inseparable in life or death.”

“Daddy!” the woman replied. “I only fear that in the future you will grow tired of playing with me and pay me no heed. What then?”

“Once we become acquainted,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “you’ll see that I’m not that sort of person.”

As they talked together, the two of them had been going at it for about the time it would take to eat a meal. Hsi-men Ch'ing told the woman that she would have to utter promiscuously whatever:

Obscene sounds and wanton words,
occurred to her before he would come. The woman, from underneath, raised her hips with her hands, the better to receive his semen.

When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense,
and Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Ejaculated like a geyser.⁷
When they were finished, he retracted his organ which still carried the sulfur-imbrued ring, and the woman sucked it clean for him before the two of them lay down to sleep:

Head to head and thigh over thigh.⁸
Truly:
The predilection appealing equally to his taste,
He chooses to pluck the flower in the rear courtyard.
There is a song that testifies to this:

My handsome lover,
Particularly loves to pluck the flower in the rear courtyard.
Ordinarily he comes in by the front door,
But it is already occupied by the Brazenfaced Vanguard.⁹
When he presses his way into the portal, it is hard to bear,
But he pulls up on the reins,
Wheels his steed about, and
Returns triumphant to the fray;
Infusing my body with a melting sensation.
My powdered face is utterly abased;
My powdered face, suffused with the glow of sunset clouds.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman embraced each other until the second watch. It was only when the page boy arrived to fetch him with the horse that he got up and returned home.

The next morning, as soon as he got to the yamen, he sent two bailiffs to arrest Trickster Han and hale him before the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where he was arraigned for petty larceny in the neighborhood. Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,
he was subjected to the ankle-squeezers and given twenty strokes of the bamboo, so severely that:

Fresh blood flowed down his legs.
As a result, he was confined to his bed for a month and very nearly forfeited his life. After that, he was so intimidated that he dared not molest the woman with so much as his shadow. Truly:

He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;
He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.

A few days later, Lai-pao, Han Tao-kuo, and their retinue arrived back from the Eastern Capital.

Lai-pao gave a complete report on their mission to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, on seeing the girl, was very much delighted and said to thank you for your trouble. He put us up in the grand preceptor's mansion for two days, while we awaited his answer. He has sent you a black horse as a gift. He sealed up a present of fifty taels of silver for Manager Han, by way of the bride-price for his daughter, and also gave me a gift of twenty taels for my traveling expenses."

"That was only appropriate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he read the letter he had received in reply, it was no more than an expression of the idea that:

His gratitude knew no bounds.
From this time on, the two households exchanged visiting cards employing the terminology appropriate for married relations and addressed each other as kinsmen. But no more of this.

When Han Tao-kuo had kowtowed in gratitude and was about to go home, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Manager Han, you must keep this bride-price for your daughter as a fitting reward for the kindness the two of you displayed in raising her."

Han Tao-kuo repeatedly refused to accept it, saying, "Thanks to your gracious magnanimity, we have already received compensation some time ago. How could it be right for me to accept this silver in addition? We've already imposed upon you more than enough as it is."

"If you don't agree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll be annoyed. Take it home with you, but don't spend it. I've got something in mind for it."

Han Tao-kuo then kowtowed in gratitude, took his leave, and went home. When his wife saw that her husband had come back, she was utterly delighted. On the one hand, she took his luggage and brushed the dust off his clothes, while, on the other, she asked how things had gone, and whether their daughter had been well received when they arrived at

their destination.

Han Tao-kuo told her about the events of the trip, both going and coming, saying, "It's a very decent establishment. When our daughter arrived there, she was provided with a suite of three rooms for herself, with two maidservants to wait on her, as well as clothing and hair ornaments, it goes without saying. The next day, she was taken to meet the lady of the house. Majordomo Chai was extremely pleased with her. He put us up for two days and regaled us with more wine and food than we or the servants could eat. He also provided a gift of fifty taels of silver, by way of a bride-price, which I repeatedly refused to keep for myself, but His Honor wouldn't take it and insisted that I bring it home with me."

Thereupon he proceeded to turn the silver over to the woman, who put it away. Only then did the woman feel as though:

The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.

"Tomorrow," she said, turning to Han Tao-kuo, "we ought to provide a tael of silver as an expression of thanks to Old Mother Feng. While you were away, I have been much indebted to her for constantly coming to keep me company. His Honor has also seen fit to reward her with a tael."

While they were speaking, whom should he see but a maidservant who came in to serve them with tea.

"Where did this young lady come from?" asked Han Tao-kuo.

"This is a maidservant that we have just purchased," the woman replied. "Her name is Chin-erh. Come over here and kowtow to your father."

After she had performed her kowtow, the maidservant went off to the kitchen.

His wife then proceeded, thus and so, to relate the whole story of her affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"After you went away, he dropped by here three or four times before coming up with the four taels of silver with which I was able to purchase this maidservant. Every time he comes by, he's good for a tael or two of silver. Han the Second, who really:

Doesn't know his place,¹⁰

got angry about it and came over here looking for trouble, but he happened to run into him and ended up being dragged off to the yamen, where he was beaten to a stinking pulp. Up until now, he hasn't dared show his face around here any more. His Honor, seeing how inconvenient our present location is, has promised to buy a house for us on a main street, and have us move in there to live."

"No wonder he refused to accept this silver just now," said Han Tao-kuo. "He told me to take it home with me, but not to spend it. So this is what it turns out to be about."

"Now that we've already got this fifty taels of silver in hand," the woman said, "in the future he's sure to add a few taels in addition and find a decent house for us. It's all owing to my willingness to surrender my body to him. We might as well take advantage of the opportunity to get what we can out of him and improve our life-style."

"After I've gone to the shop tomorrow," Han Tao-kuo said, "if he should show up, pretend that I don't know anything about it. Don't be remiss in your treatment of him, but cater to his every whim. It's not all that easy to make money these days. How did you ever happen on this way of doing it?"

"You lousy ruffian!" his wife laughed. "You'll drop dead in your tracks someday. You're certainly proficient enough at:

Eating the bread of idleness.¹¹

You don't have any idea what your old lady has had to put up with."

The two of them laughed about it a while longer, after which she fed him his supper, and husband and wife prepared themselves to rest.

The next morning, Han Tao-kuo stopped by the mansion to fetch the keys and then proceeded on his way to open the shop, where he gave Old Mother Feng a tael of silver to reward her for her pains, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

One day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling were returning from the yamen, the judicial commissioner noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was riding a tall dappled black horse and asked him, "My colleague, how does it happen that you're no longer riding that white horse of yours but have exchanged it for this one? It certainly seems to be a fine steed, but what does it look like in the mouth?"

"I'm letting that horse rest at home for a couple of days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This horse was sent to me as a gift the other day by my kinsman Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital. It had been presented to him by Assistant Regional Commander Liu of the Hsi-hsia¹² army. It only has four teeth as yet in its mouth. It has a good gait, either fast or slow, its only faults being that it insists on hogging the manger and is prone to kick. When it first arrived, it had lost a good deal of weight from the rigors of the road, but in the last couple of days it is looking better on a regular diet."

"This horse of yours steps along pretty well," said Hsia Yen-ling. "You might as well ride it regularly as you traverse the streets every day, but don't try to take it too far. I would guess that hereabouts it must be worth at least seventy or eighty taels of silver. That horse that I customarily ride was lamed yesterday, so in order to come to the yamen this morning I had to send a note to borrow this horse from a relative of mine. It's been most inconvenient."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you don't have a horse at the moment, I've got a sorrel at home that I could let you have."

Judicial Commissioner Hsia raised his hand in acknowledgment and said, "If my colleague will deign to help me out, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

"There's no need to haggle over it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As soon as I get home, I'll send someone over with it."

When the two of them reached the western end of Lion Street, Hsi-men Ch'ing raised his hand in farewell and made his way home. As soon as he arrived there, he sent Tai-an to deliver the horse as he had promised.

When Judicial Commissioner Hsia saw it, he was delighted, rewarded Tai-an with a tael of silver, and gave him a note in reply, saying, "Thank you very much. I'll express my gratitude in person when I arrive at the yamen tomorrow."

After two days had gone by, it being the middle decade of the tenth month, Judicial Commissioner Hsia, having prepared some homemade chrysanthemum wine¹³ and engaged the services of two boy actors, invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over for a chat, as a means of expressing his gratitude for the gift of the horse. Hsi-men Ch'ing, after eating his noonday meal at home and taking care of some business, set out for Hsia Yen-ling's house to attend the party.

It so happens that the judicial commissioner had provided an elaborate feast for the delectation of Hsi-men Ch'ing alone. When he saw that he had arrived, he was:

Unable to contain his delight,¹⁴

hastened down the steps to welcome him, and ushered him into the reception hall, where they exchanged salutations.

"My colleague," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need was there for you to go to so much trouble?"

"This year I've had some chrysanthemum wine made in my humble abode," said Hsia Yen-ling. "Being at leisure, I thought I'd see if you would condescend to come by for a chat. I haven't presumed to invite any other guests."

Thereupon, having exchanged the customary amenities, they discarded their formal clothes and sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host. After tea had been served, they played a board game together and then took their places at the table, where they proceeded to drink wine and chat, while the two boy actors entertained them, playing their instruments and singing by their side. Truly, it is a case of:

Wine is presented in golden goblets,
brimming with fragrant foam;
Ivory clappers accompany the psaltery,
as they sing "Partridge Sky."

We will say no more about Hsi-men Ch'ing's participation in the drinking party at Hsia Yen-ling's home.

Let us return to the story of P'an Chin-lien. When she observed what a long time it had been since Hsi-men Ch'ing had paid a visit to her quarters, every day:

Her halcyon hued coverlet felt cold;¹⁵
Her hibiscus bed curtains were chill.¹⁶

That night she left the postern gate ajar, while inside her bedroom:

She brightly lit the silver lamp,
Leaned against the standing screen,
And idly strummed her *p'i-p'a*.

She kept up her vigil until the second or third watch and sent Ch'un-mei out to look several times, but there was nothing to be seen. Truly:

She who is wont to diligently strum her *p'i-p'a*
late into the night;
When all alone in her deserted chamber can scarcely
bear to play it.¹⁷

Picking up her *p'i-p'a* and laying it across her lap she gently played a song to the tune "River Water, with Two Variations" in order to dispel her languor. Unable to fall asleep on the bed with her clothes on, what was she to do?

Languidly I lean against the standing screen,
Or force myself to lie down in my clothes.

Suddenly she heard the wind chimes on the eaves of her room:

Make a peal of sound.

Thinking it was Hsi-men Ch'ing who had come and was making the racket with the door knocker, she hastily sent Ch'un-mei out to take a look. But she reported, "Mother, you're mistaken. The wind has come up outside and it's started to snow." The woman then continued to accompany herself as she sang:

I hear the roaring of the wind,
I see the snow blowing against the casement.
Let the frozen flakes flutter!

Before long:

The lamp grew dim and the incense burnt out.¹⁸

She thought to herself that she ought to trim the wick and relight the incense, but, seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing hadn't come, she felt no inclination to move. She sang:

Too lazy to trim the precious lamp,
Too listless to relight the incense burner;

Truly:

Each day was like three months of autumn;
Each night seemed like half a summer.



P'an Chin-lien on a Snowy Evening Toys with Her P'i-p'a

Even if I last through this night,
I'll only be afraid of the morrow.
The more I think about it, the more I wonder,
when will this botheration ever end?

"You fickle scoundrel!" she thought to herself. "When I think of all the things you said to me at the start, how can I help feeling hurt?"

Coda:
Whenever I think of it, and especially tonight,
it really burns me up!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.

"Who would have thought you'd land me in such a fix, with no place to go?" she cursed¹⁹ at him.

From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through!²⁰

To resume our story, around the time of the first watch, Hsi-men Ch'ing left the drinking party at Hsia Yen-ling's and set out for home. The sky was overcast the whole way and the precipitation, which was half rain and half snow, melted as soon as it landed on his clothes. All he could do was whip his horse toward home, lighted along the way by a servant carrying a lantern.

When he arrived, he didn't go into the rear compound but headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she met him at the door and brushed the snow and sleet off his clothes. Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a white satin riding outfit emblazoned with a blue silk mandarin square that featured an embroidered lion,²¹ a "loyal and tranquil hat,"²² black boots, a palmetto cloak, and a sable scarf. After Li P'ing-erh had taken his outer garments, he sat down on the bed, wearing only a loosely cut satin robe, and asked, "Is the young fellow asleep yet?"

"The little fellow's been playing for some time," Li P'ing-erh replied, "but he's just fallen asleep."

"Let the child sleep," Hsi-men Ch'ing directed her. "We'll have to avoid any heavy movements or we may startle him awake."

Ying-ch'un then brought them some tea. When they had finished drinking it, Li P'ing-erh asked, "How did you happen to come home from your drinking party so early today?"

"It's all because of that horse I gave him the other day," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that Hsia Yen-ling went to the trouble of laying on a feast today, entirely on my account. He also engaged the services of two young actors. After I'd enjoyed his hospitality for quite a while, I noticed that it had started to snow, so I came home early."

"Would you like some wine?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I can get the maidservant to decant some for you. You must be chilled from making your way home through the heavy snow."

"If there's still some of that grape wine around," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can decant some of that for me. The wine he served at his place today was a chrysanthemum wine he had made for himself. It tasted pretty insipid to me, so I didn't really have a lot to drink."

Ying-ch'un then brought out a table with several saucers of marinated chicken appetizers, fancy fruit and vegetable delicacies, and the like. Li P'ing-erh sat down on a stool to one side and ordered a small brazier to be placed underneath the table.

While the two of them were having a drink together in Li P'ing-erh's bedroom, P'an Chin-lien, all by herself in her deserted quarters, was sitting on the bed fondling her *p'i-p'a*. On her table:

The lamp grew dim and the candle guttered out.

At one and the same time, she wanted to go to sleep but was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might turn up after all, and she wanted to stay awake but kept nodding with fatigue. And on top of everything else, it was cold. There was nothing for it but to remove her headdress:

Carelessly coil her raven tresses,
let down one side of her bed curtains, and:

Sit there all wrapped up in her coverlet.

Truly:

Leaning languidly against the embroidered bed,²³

she's too depressed to sleep;

Inside the hanging brocade bed curtains

the embroidered coverlet is empty.

"It's all too obvious that my fickle lover

has lightly abandoned me.

How could he bring himself to thus betray

my ever loving heart?"

Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:

I hate my fickle lover for lightly abandoning me.

Depressed and apart, I give way to idle annoyance.

She called Ch'un-mei over to her once more, saying, "Go outside and take another look to see if your father's showed up or not; and report back to me right away."

Ch'un-mei went out and returned after some time, saying, "Mother, you still delude yourself into thinking Father hasn't come home, do you? When Father came home he couldn't be bothered coming in here. Who's that drinking wine in the Sixth Lady's rooms if it isn't him?"

Nothing might have happened if the woman had not heard these words, but having heard them:

It was just as if she were being stabbed in the heart
with one knife after another.

She cursed him a number of times for a fickle scoundrel, and, before she knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow

from her eyes. Putting her *p'i-p'a* high out of reach, she continued her song:

They say, "Murder may be excused;
But reason cannot be evaded."²⁴
"No fickle deed escapes the eye of Heaven."

"Just thinking about it reminds me how much I love him, on the one hand, and how much I hate him, on the other."

"The pain of heartache is hard to dispel."
"In a sorrowful breast depression feeds on itself."

"You lousy, heartless lover!" she cried out. "What's she got that I haven't got?

This salt is just as salty;
This vinegar just as sour.²⁵
This brick is just as thick;
This tile just as thin.²⁶

Then, one fine day, you:
Abandoned the old in favor of the new."²⁷

You've, "Cast off a sweet peach,
To seek out a sour date."²⁸

"I never should have fallen for you in the first place."

While I've completely, "Misread the stars
on your steelyard."²⁹

Coda:

Whenever I think of it,
it really burns me up!

You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.

From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:

You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through.³⁰

Truly:

If you're going to be a human being,
don't be a woman;

Or your every joy and sorrow will be
dependent on another.³¹

It's the old story of the, "Fond female
and the fickle fellow";³²

If only she hadn't taken him so seriously
to begin with.

Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:

I'll always remember the first time we met;
When I fondly imagined we'd grow old together.

"Who would have thought that today he'd have a change of heart; that one fine day he'd lightly cast me aside and pay me no further heed? It's just like those times when:"

The Ch'u peak was shrouded in clouds;³³
The Blue Bridge was inundated by water;³⁴
The male and female phoenixes were driven asunder.

"So that now:

Though we talk, face to face,
Our hearts are separated by a thousand mountains.³⁵
Though divided by a single wall,
Those few feet prevent our seeing each other."

Our hearts are distant, though the road's not far.

"Our love has dissolved:
Like salt falling into water;
Like water falling upon sand."

Our feelings are estranged, so letters are few.

"In vain do I find myself:
Possessed of a plaint without a place to lodge it."

The Earth is thick and Heaven is high.³⁶

"In vain do I find myself:
Lacking a dream to take me to the Radiant Terrace."³⁷

My dreams are interrupted, my soul is troubled.³⁸
My handsome lover, at the critical juncture,
has had a change of heart.

Coda:
Whenever I think of it,
it really burns me up!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.
From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through.³⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine with Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom when he suddenly heard the sound of someone playing the *p'i-p'a* in a nearby dwelling. "Who's playing the *p'i-p'a*?" he asked.

"It's the sound of the Fifth Lady, over there, playing her *p'i-p'a*," replied Ying-ch'un.

"So the Fifth Lady hasn't gone to bed yet," said Li P'ing-erh. "Hsiu-ch'un, run over there and ask the Fifth Lady to come have a drink of wine. Say, 'It's Mother who invites you.'"

When Hsiu-ch'un had gone, Li P'ing-erh hastily directed Ying-ch'un, "Put another place at the table and set out a wine cup and chopsticks."

Some time later, Hsiu-ch'un came back and reported, "The Fifth Lady has already taken down her hair. She won't come."

"Ying-ch'un," said Li P'ing-erh, "You go and ask the Fifth Lady again. Say, 'Mother and Father both invite the Fifth Lady.'"

Not long afterwards, Ying-ch'un came back and reported, "The Fifth Lady has locked the postern gate. She says she's already blown out the lamp and gone to bed."

"Don't you believe a word that little whore says," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's go over there, the two of us, and drag her here, by main force if necessary. It would be fun to play a board game with her."

Thereupon, he and Li P'ing-erh went over together and knocked at her postern gate. They had to knock for some time before Ch'un-mei came out and opened the door for them. Hsi-men Ch'ing, pulling Li P'ing-erh behind him, went right into her bedroom, where they found the woman sitting inside the bed curtains with the *p'i-p'a* lying beside her.

"You crazy little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come you have to be asked two or three times, and still refuse to come?"

Chin-lien just sat there on her bed:

Without turning a hair,⁴⁰

and pulling a long face. It was some time before she spoke. "It's only appropriate that someone so out of favor should be relegated to this desolate chamber. As long as you're determined to let me:

Fend for myself,

what's the point of coming around to pay me any further attention? Don't waste your affections here; save them for someplace they'll be better appreciated."

"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"An eighty-year-old crone may lack teeth,

But she's still got plenty of lip.

Sister Li is inviting you over to her place to play a board game with her. She's been waiting all this time and you still haven't come."

"What's wrong, Sister?" said Li P'ing-erh. "We've already set out the pieces over in my room. We've both got time on our hands. Come play a game and we'll wager a cup of wine on it."

"Sister Li," said Chin-lien, "the two of you go right ahead. I've already taken down my hair. You wouldn't understand, but I'm really not interested in anything at the moment. I'm going to go to bed. I don't feel free and easy like the rest of you. These last few days I've barely been hanging on. Not even a drop of:

Saffron soup or plain water,
has crossed my lips. It's all I can do nowadays to put a good face on it and go through the motions."

"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're perfectly fine. What's the matter with you? If you haven't been feeling well inside, why haven't you told me about it, so I could call in a doctor to examine you?"

"If you don't believe me," said Chin-lien, "just ask Ch'un-mei to bring me my mirror. Let me take another look. These last few days I've gotten so thin I hardly seem human."

Ch'un-mei actually brought the mirror and handed it to the woman, who looked at herself by lamplight. Truly:

Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror,
and retouch her powdered makeup;
She has wasted away on her lover's account,
losing the freshness of her complexion.
Closing her door, she is no longer concerned
with the idle breeze and moonlight;
Henceforth she will leave it to the plum blossoms
to do whatever they please.⁴¹

Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:

Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror;
Too listless to paint in my moth eyebrows;
Secretly, my spirits have wasted away,
My good looks have become ravaged,
I am utterly emaciated and none too well.

Hsi-men Ch'ing snatched the mirror out of her hands and looked at himself, saying, "Am I any less emaciated than you are?"

"Who can be compared to you?" demanded Chin-lien. "Every day, what with:

Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,⁴²
you're forever fattening yourself up, only the better to give other people a hard time."

At this point, Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Without permitting any further explanation,
sat down unceremoniously on the bed right beside her, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss. Exploring underneath the quilt with his hand, he ascertained that she had not yet undressed, whereupon he stuck both hands into her waistband and said, "My child, it's true you've lost a little weight."

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Your hands are ice-cold! I'm freezing to death. Did you think I was only trying to fool you? Truly:"

The fragrance has faded from the begonia's beauty;
The clothing is slack around the willow waist.

Pearly tears cascaded over her fragrant cheeks as she continued her complaint, "Nobody knows the troubles I endure. All I can do is:

Consign my tears to my stomach."⁴³

Depression only augments my boredom,
Do what I will to dispel it;
And now, even my store of pearly tears
is utterly exhausted.

Coda:

Whenever I think of it,
it really burns the hell out of me!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.

From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't follow through.⁴⁴

After a brief altercation, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally succeeded in dragging her off:
Willy-nilly, dead or alive,⁴⁵

to Li P'ing-erh's bedroom, where they played a board game and drank together for a while. When she got up to go, Li P'ing-erh noticed the sour expression on her face and persuaded Hsi-men Ch'ing to go over to her place to spend the night.

Truly, it was a case of:

When her waist is thin you can be sure
she's upset about something;
Traces of tears indicate the depth of
the sorrow of separation.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Ever since their separation, she has lost
the freshness of her complexion;
Tossing and turning a myriad or a thousand times,⁴⁶
she is too listless to leave her bed.⁴⁷
It was only due to the intercession of P'ing-erh,
who chose to do her a favor;
That the Goddess of Witches' Mountain was able
to have her tryst with King Hsiang.⁴⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 39

HSI-MEN CH'ING HOLDS *CHIAO* RITES AT THE TEMPLE OF THE JADE EMPEROR; WU YÜEH- NIANG LISTENS TO BUDDHIST NUNS RECITING THEIR SACRED TEXTS

Emperor Wu of the Han ordained lustral rituals,
erecting an altar at night;
Pouring libations of numinous water, he offered
chiao rites to the immortals.
In front of the palace halls Jade Maidens
arranged the incense tables;
At the edge of the clouds brazen colossi
elevated dew-catching pans.¹
When will the crimson standards of the goddess
ever reappear in his dream?
Where are the peaches of immortality that might
enable him to mount the phoenix?²
In his tomb at Mao-ling the buried armaments
are shrouded in mist and rain;
The stone horses that mark the site are silent,
the spreading creepers are cold.³

THE STORY GOES that on that occasion Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in P'an Chin-lien's quarters. The woman's only regret was that she couldn't:

Bore her way into his belly.⁴
Beside the pillow she:
Played up to him a thousand ways,
Ensnared him with a myriad wiles;⁵
Wiping away her tears with mermaid silk,
Responding to him with warm compliance;

hoping thereby that she could engross her lover's heart. How could she have known that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already initiated an affair on the outside with Han Tao-kuo's wife, Wang Liu-erh?

For this woman he had laid out a hundred twenty taels of silver to purchase a house on the east side of the stone bridge on Lion Street. The house consisted of a twelve-foot-wide frontage and four interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. The second courtyard was occupied by a passageway in addition to a nine-foot-wide reception room. The third courtyard consisted of a three-foot-wide anteroom for the display of Buddhist effigies and ancestral tablets, a six-foot-wide living apartment, in the interior of which there were the usual recessed k'ang frame and, across from it, a fire pit for burning charcoal, all of which had been newly replastered. The fourth courtyard, in addition to a six-foot-wide kitchen, contained a three-foot-wide storage room for charcoal and space in the rear for a latrine, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Ever since they moved into their new house, the neighbors in the area were all aware that Han Tao-kuo was a manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing. In addition, noticing the fact that he wore an outfit of tailored damask clothing and swaggered his way along the street, and that his wife constantly did herself up till her head was aglitter with gold and made herself conspicuous by standing at the front gate, they did not dare to be remiss. All of them sent boxes of tea and presents to celebrate the housewarming. Those of middling social standing addressed them as Brother Han and Sister-in-law Han, while those of lower status addressed them as Uncle and Aunt.

Whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing came to visit, Han Tao-kuo would spend the night at the shop, leaving his wife to entertain him, so they could:

Enjoy themselves to their heart's content.

Mornings and evenings succeeded one another, and the neighbors all became aware of what was going on, but they were afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who possessed both money and influence, so who would have dared to cross him? It was observed that, in the course of a month, Hsi-men Ch'ing would come to pay her a visit three or four times; that he and Wang Liu-erh were:

As hot for each other as burning charcoal;⁶
and that the clothes she wore and the household furnishings were no longer what they had been in the past.

Before anyone knew it, the twelfth month came around, and Hsi-men Ch'ing found himself busy at home preparing

New Year's gifts to be sent to people in the Eastern Capital, the officials of the local prefecture and district, the local army and guard units, and the yamen of his own Embroidered Uniform Guard. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor sent a disciple of his to deliver four boxes of presents to him. One box contained pork, one box contained whitebait, and two boxes contained stuffed steamed-shortcake pastries. He also delivered the texts of the memorials to Heaven and Earth customarily burnt on New Year's Eve, new spring talismans consisting of auspicious couplets to be pasted up on either side of the front gate on New Year's Day, and a writ thanking the Kitchen God for his good offices, to be burnt on the eve of his annual departure, on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth month, to report to the Jade Emperor on the conduct of the family during the preceding year.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the master suite eating a meal when Tai-an brought in his card, which read, "Respectfully presented by the humble Taoist prelate of the Temple of the Jade Emperor, Wu Tsung-che." Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the boxes to take a look and said, "He is someone who has left home to become a priest, yet I have put him to the trouble of sending me these generous gifts."

He then instructed Tai-an, "Go immediately and get Shu-t'ung to seal up a tael of silver and send a card to him in reply."

Yüeh-niang, who was at his side, responded to the situation by saying, "He is someone who has left home to become a priest, yet at:

The head of the year or the tail of the festival,
you are always accepting presents from him. It appears that you have forgotten the vow you made some time ago, when Sister Li bore her child, to sponsor a performance, of such and such a magnitude, of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal. You might as well have him perform it."

"It's lucky you mentioned it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I vowed to sponsor a performance of a hundred twenty degrees of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, but I completely forgot about it."

"You're just an inveterate chatterbox!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Whose vow was it, that you should forget it so easily? If you make a vow, in which:

The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it,⁷
the gods will all remember it. No wonder the child is forever:

Moaning and groaning.⁸
It so happens that this unfulfilled vow is oppressing him. It's all your doing."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll fulfill my vow by arranging to have the *chiao* rites that I promised celebrated during the first month of the new year at Abbot Wu's temple."

"Yesterday," Yüeh-niang said, "Sister Li reported that the child was suffering from aches and pains and asked if there were any place where we could go to seek the protection of a religious name for him."

"Why should we go anywhere else to seek a religious name for him?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well arrange a naming ceremony for him in Abbot Wu's temple."

Then, turning to Tai-an, he asked, "Who is it who came from the temple?"

"It's his second disciple, Ying-ch'un, who delivered the presents," replied Tai-an.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon stepped outside to see him, Ying-ch'un hastily strode forward and kowtowed, saying, "My master bids me express his respects to Your Honor on his behalf. Having nothing else fit to offer on this occasion, he has sent me to deliver these memorials to Heaven and Earth, and some insignificant gifts for you to give away to someone if you like."

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned only half a salutation to him, saying, "Many thanks to your master for his generous presents."

Upon being offered a seat, the disciple demurred, saying, "How could I presume to be seated?"

"Sit down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's something I want to say to you."

The Taoist acolyte was wearing an informal skullcap on his head, his body was clad in a long black cotton gown, while below he wore sandals and white socks. Only after declining several times did he move a chair over and sit down to one side.

After drinking the new tea that Hsi-men Ch'ing called for, he asked, "What are Your Honor's commands?"

"During the first month of the new year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I would like to fulfill a vow that I have made by troubling your master to perform a number of *chiao* rites in your temple. On the same day, I would like to enroll my young son under your master's protection by having him bestow a religious name upon him. But I don't know whether your master will be free or not."

The acolyte hastily stood up, saying, "If Your Honor were to ordain such a thing, no matter what ceremonies anyone else might commission, my master would not presume to undertake them. Permit me to ask Your Honor, on what date would you like the ceremony to take place?"

"You might as well arrange it on the ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the birthday of His Lordship. Make it that day."

"That is, indeed, the birthday of the Jade Emperor, the Lord of Heaven," responded the acolyte, "as is clearly recorded in the *Register of the Jade Casket*.⁹ Ritual authorities have declared it a suitable day for celebration. The gods of the five blessings will be in conjunction. That is a most auspicious time for the celebration of a fast or the performance of *chiao* rites.¹⁰ On that day we will open up the main hall of the temple in order to set up an altar on Your Honor's behalf. May I inquire of Your Honor, how elaborate would you like the rites to be?"

"Earlier this year, during the sixth month,"¹¹ said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "upon the occasion of siring a young son, I swore a

vow to sponsor the performance of a hundred twenty degrees of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal. Up until now, I have been too distracted to undertake it, but I might as well arrange to fulfill the vow next month. I'll turn my young son over to your master so he can dedicate him to the protection of the Three Treasures¹² and solicit the conferral of a religious name upon him."

"May I ask," said the acolyte, "how many officiants you would like to employ on the day of the ceremony?"

"Have your master engage the services of sixteen priests," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When they had finished speaking, his attendants provided a table and served another round of tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing first sealed up fifteen taels of silver to pay for the ceremony and then sealed up another tael as recompense for the Abbot's festival gifts.

He then went on to say, "There is no need for your master to lay out anything in the way of compensation for the celebrants. I'll see to the provision of everything required in the way of paper money, incense, candles, and so forth."

This pleased the acolyte so much he was ready to:

Fart ferociously and pee in his pants.

As he prepared to take his leave, he thanked him again and again and kowtowed more than once.

When the eighth day of the first month came round, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an ahead to deliver a picul of white rice, a carrier-load of paper money, ten catties of government-grade candles, five catties of aloeswood, sandalwood, and mirabilite for the making of incense, and twelve bolts of porous ramie fabric, to provide for the needs of the celebrants. He also sent two bolts of capital brocade, two jugs of southern wine, four fresh geese, four fresh chickens, a pair of pig's trotters, a leg of lamb, and ten taels of silver, as a gratuity for Kuan-ko's naming ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing had also sent out invitations, inviting his brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Hua Tzu-yü, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him for the ceremony. The same day, Ch'en Ching-chi also rode out on donkeyback to make an obeisance on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf.

On the ninth, Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to the yamen but got up bright and early, donned his official cap and girdle, set off on his large white horse, followed by a retinue of servants:

Clamoring in front and crowding behind,
and proceeded out the East Gate in the direction of the Temple of the Jade Emperor. From a distance he could see the bunting and pennants and the temporary arches spanning the street, with their announcements of the nature of the ceremony. He had proceeded no more than about five li outside the gate when he arrived at the Temple of the Jade Emperor and dismounted outside the gate. When he opened his eyes wide and took a good look, truly, it was an imposing temple edifice, resembling a celestial palace in its construction. Behold:

The verdant pines are luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses are dense.¹³
Gilt nails emboss vermilion gates,¹⁴
Jade arches cast shadows within the sacred halls;
Azure tiles bedeck sculpted eaves,¹⁵
Embroidered drapes hang over jeweled balustrades.¹⁶
The forty-two-foot-wide great hall,
Displays an imperial plaque in gold characters;
The two long colonnades flanking it,¹⁷
Exhibit colorful frescoes of gods and generals.
Amid the shadows of auspicious clouds,
The gateways with their entablatures
 reach high into the azure skies,¹⁸
Under the light of a propitious haze,
The Yü-lo Terrace of Grand Veil Heaven¹⁹
 soars straight into the milky way.
In their golden palaces,
Are arrayed the presiding deities
 of the Thirty Two Heavens;²⁰
In the White Jade Capitoline,²¹
They emit a myriad rays of light
 from between their eyebrows.²²
Outside the gates of the Three Heavens,²³
Li-lou and Shih-k'uang manifest
 their bellicosity;²⁴
Beside the stairs, to left and right,
The White Tiger and Green Dragon show
 their intrepidity.²⁵
Before the main hall, immortal consorts
 and Jade Maidens,
Attired in roseate shawls present
 offerings of tulips;
Beneath the jade steps, the four ministers

and nine chamberlains,
 Shod in red shoes do homage before
 vermilion phoenix gates.
 On a nine-dragon throne sits the
 indestructible golden body,²⁶
 Of the supreme patriarch of the
 myriad heavens,
 The Jade Emperor and prime deity,
 surnamed Chang.²⁷
 On his head he wears the royal crown
 with twelve tassels;²⁸
 His body is clad in an azure-hued
 imperial dragon robe;
 His waist is bound by a girdle adorned
 with Indigo Field jade.²⁹
 Correlating himself with the eight
 trigrams and nine palaces,³⁰
 Grasping in his hands a tablet
 of white jade,
 He monitors compliance with the three refuges
 and five precepts.³¹
 When the metal bell is struck,
 The sentient beings of three chiliocosms³²
 all confess their allegiance.
 When the jade chime is sounded,
 The myriad phenomena in their diversity³³
 unite to worship the ultimate.
 In the Homage to Heaven Pavilion,
 Empyrean breezes waft down the sound
 of pacing the void.³⁴
 On the Altar for Ritual Performance,
 Moonlit nights make audible the tinkle
 of immortal pendants.
 Just such as this must surely be the
 true Purple Elysium;³⁵
 What need is there to seek elsewhere
 the Isles of the Blest?³⁶

As Hsi-men Ch'ing entered through the main gate, he noticed that, suspended from either side of the first entablatured gateway, there was a pair of seven-foot-long vermilion tablets on which were inscribed in large characters these parallel statements:

The shining zodiac is revealed in the sky,
 Auspiciously opening the celestial portals
 of the Nine Heavens,
 As we greet golden chariots with their halcyon canopies
 and acquire grace.
 The mysterious altar is bathed in sunlight,
 Brightly illuminating the heraldic pennants
 of the myriad sages,
 As we incant the holy scriptures in their jeweled cases
 and preach salvation.

When he reached the main hall, there was suspended a twenty-four-character announcement of the ritual to be performed, written in a large script, which read:

Numinous Treasure³⁷ ritual altar erected in order to:

Recompense Heaven and compensate Earth,³⁸
 Requite the state for benefits received,
 Enact nine recitations of the *Jade Pivot*,³⁹
 Fulfill the covenant by conferring a name,
 And universally bestow auspicious fortune.

To either side there hung the following parallel statements:

Anterior Heaven⁴⁰ establishes the ultimate;
 Looking up to the loftiness of the Great Tao,
 We are able to display our utmost sincerity.
 The Supernal Emperor accords his presence;

Scrutinizing the sedulousness of the rituals,
By means of which we requite his vast favor.

Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to the front of the incense table in the altar space, where a young attendant offered him a basin and towel. When he had finished washing his hands, a verger knelt down and requested him to offer incense. A rug was laid for him on which he completed the ceremony of paying homage to the altar.

It so happens that Abbot Wu's personal name was Tsung-che, and his religious name was Tao-chen. He was of imposing stature and had a full beard, an uninhibited temperament,⁴¹ a wide circle of acquaintances, and a charitable disposition. At present he was serving as the abbot of the Temple of the Jade Emperor. For this reason many persons of high status and prominent officials chose to patronize him. The *chiao* rituals and other ceremonies that he presided over were sure to be all that they should be, and, in:

Welcoming visitors and treating guests,⁴²
his manner was congenial. He also had three to five disciples and acolytes⁴³ who were:

At his beck and call.⁴⁴

The members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's brotherhood of ten frequently had *chiao* rites performed there and on birthdays and festivals did not fail to supply donations for the services performed. How much more was this true of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had become an officer in the judicial system and had provided lavish gifts in order to sponsor a ritual performance and enroll his son under his protection through the bestowal of a religious name. Abbot Wu could not help but treat him with respect, and on that day he had undertaken to act as chief celebrant in presiding over the ceremony.

On his head he wore a ninefold-yang thunder cap⁴⁵ adorned with a jade ring, his body was clothed in a wide-sleeved ultramarine vestment on which were represented the constellations of the twenty eight lunar mansions, and his waist was enclosed with a silken sash.

Hastening down from the lectern, he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, saying, "This humble Taoist has been the recipient of Your Honor's misplaced affection and repeatedly lavished gifts, to such an extent that it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept.

As for the bestowal of a religious name upon your son, it is only appropriate that I should respectfully entreat the Three Treasures to assure his well-being and prolong his life. It would hardly be a sufficient return for Your Honor's past kindness for me to do so. How can I consent to accept the additional generous gifts that you have seen fit to bestow upon me? It is truly embarrassing. The compensation you have provided for the performance of the ceremony is also overly munificent, which makes me even more uneasy."

"I have put you to a great deal of trouble and effort," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

"Without having anything to offer in return."⁴⁶

These paltry gifts are no more than an expression of my feelings."

When they had finished exchanging amenities, the Taoist priests on either side came up to salute him, and he was invited to retire to the abbot's outer quarters, an eighteen-foot-wide open chamber called Pine Crane Studio. It was embellished on all sides with translucent vermilion latticework and was a pleasant place to sit while being served tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the four walls were whitewashed, an ornamental rock formation was elegantly displayed, and the chairs and tables in the room were shiny. On the left and right sides were suspended the following parallel lines:

From the Yellow Crane Tower he ascends
in broad daylight;⁴⁷
Over the Tung-t'ing Lake he has passed
for the third time.⁴⁸

On the back wall were a pair of framed hanging scrolls displaying the following couplet in cursive calligraphy:

Raising two sleeves swelled by a clear breeze⁴⁹
we posture like cranes;
Facing a chamber suffused with bright moonlight
we expound the scriptures.⁵⁰

Hsi-men Ch'ing had no sooner sat down than he instructed his page boy, Ch'i-t'ung, "Take the horse and go to fetch Master Ying the Second. I fear he may not have a horse available, otherwise he ought to have been here by now."

"The donkey ridden by your son-in-law is still here," said Tai-an.

"That will do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he ordered Ch'i-t'ung, "Mount it quickly and go to fetch him."

Ch'i-t'ung then led the donkey out the temple gate, mounted it, and went straight off on his errand.

Abbot Wu, having finished with the scripture he was reciting, came down from the lectern, offered his guest a cup of tea, and sat down to chat with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Cognizant as I am of the:

Single-minded sincerity,⁵¹

with which Your Honor reveres the gods," he said, "I could hardly presume to offend you by being remiss. The entire clerical staff got up at the fourth watch and reported to the altar in order to commence the task of incanting the various sacred texts and the *Scripture on the Deeds of the Jade Emperor*.⁵² Today we will perform in their entirety the rituals of the three audiences and the nine recitations of the *Jade Pivot*. I have also prepared a document containing the eight

characters that determine your son's horoscope and presented it before the Three Treasures, conferring upon him the religious name Wu Ying-yüan, and invoking the wish that:

The Grand Monad, the Director of Destiny,
And T'ao K'ang, whose cognomen is Ho-yen,⁵³
Shall eternally guarantee his longevity,
And maintain his wealth and distinction.

In addition, I have taken it upon myself to augment the program with twenty-four degrees of ritual expressing gratitude to Heaven and Earth, twelve degrees in praise of the Sovereign Deity, and twenty-four degrees for the salvation of the departed, making a *chiao* ceremony of one hundred eighty degrees in all."

"You have gone to a lot of trouble," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long the ritual drum began to sound and Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to enter the altar space and peruse the documents. Changing into his scarlet ceremonial robe with its variegated mandarin square featuring an embroidered lion, and wearing a girdle round his waist decorated with a plaque of gilded rhinoceros horn, Hsi-men Ch'ing entered the altar space, where a lector, who was standing by in his crimson mantle of descent,⁵⁴ proceeded to declaim the text of the announcement, laying out the nature and purpose of the ceremony, as follows:

In order to uphold the Way and invoke grace, fulfill the *chiao* rites and ensure well-being, the faithful office holder Hsi-men Ch'ing, resident of such and such a precinct and subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho district in Shantung province of the Great Sung Empire, who was born at midnight on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month in the year *ping-yin*; joined by his wife, née Wu, who was born at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the year *wu-tien*.

"Are there any other relations of yours that I have failed to include?" the lector interrupted his recitation to ask.

"Just add my spouse, née Li," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "who was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei*, and our son, Kuan-ko, who was born at 4:00 P.M. on the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the year *ping-shen*."

On behalf of myself and my aforesaid dependents, I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, wish on this occasion to express my sincere devotion, and invoke your vast magnanimity. Insignificant creature that I am, a representative of the least of the Three Powers,⁵⁵ in my comings and goings, rising and repose, I am constantly aware of the protection of dragon kings and devas; as the seasons of cold and heat alternate, I am forever conscious of the support vouchsafed by deities and sages. By office enrolled in the ranks of military officials, I am fortunate to have been attached to the Palace Guard. Basking in the gracious light of imperial favor, I enjoy the disposition of generous emoluments. Ever since my appointment to office in the judicial system, I have sought a means to repay my debt of gratitude for the glorious age in which I have been born and the protection and support on which I rely. For this reason I am sponsoring the performance of a *chiao* rite of twenty-four degrees, to requite Heaven and Earth for their vast favor, and repay the imperial sovereign for his liberal beneficence. In addition I am sponsoring a *chiao* rite of twelve degrees, on this occasion of the birthday of the Lord of Heaven, in praise of the various sovereign lords and perfected lords, and to solicit the extension of the five blessings, and invite the descent of the heavenly worthies. Also, on the twenty-third day of the sixth month of last year, my secondary wife, née Li, gave birth to a son, Kuan-ko, and in order to pray for:

An untroubled accouchement, and
A fortunate parturition,

I promised to entrust my aforesaid son, Kuan-ko, to the protection of the Three Treasures, under the religious name of Wu Ying-yüan, in the hope that he would reach maturity in safety. Moreover, I vowed before Heaven and Earth to sponsor the performance of a *chiao* rite of one hundred twenty degrees, to ensure the continuation of my paternal line, and prolong the life of my child. Also, in order to pray for the salvation of the souls of the departed ancestors of the Hsi-men household for the past three generations, my grandfather Hsi-men Ching-liang, my grandmother, née Li, my father Hsi-men Ta, my mother, née Hsia, my deceased wife, née Ch'en, together with the souls of those who died before and will die after them, whether they should have ascended to Heaven or fallen into Hell, I have sponsored the performance of a *chiao* ceremony of twenty-four degrees, in the expectation that with the merciful assistance of the power of the Tao, they will all be entitled to rebirth in a higher sphere. The entire program thus consists of a *chiao* ceremony of one hundred eighty degrees, which I beseech you in your transforming mercy to acknowledge as the fulfillment of my vow. On this, the ninth day of the first month of the third year of the Hsüan-ho reign period,⁵⁶ on the propitious occasion of the birthday of the Lord of Heaven, I have reverently engaged the services of these duly ordained Taoist officiants to perform a plenary, day and night, Numinous Treasure ritual, in order to recompense Heaven and compensate Earth, requite the state and fulfill the covenant, glorify the spirits and ensure well-being, confer a religious name and recite the scriptures, and universally bestow auspicious fortune. I hereby invoke the presence of the presiding worthies of the Three Realms and invite the participation of the deities of the myriad heavens, that I may daily derive joy from exposure to their pure radiance, as

they go in and out through the Golden Gate; and in the hope that they will periodically bestow desirable posts upon me, and vouchsafe me patents of nobility that will enhance my prestige, that my entire household may ever enjoy equal well-being, and that in all four seasons their public and private undertakings shall prosper. It is only by respectfully invoking the power of the Tao that such great blessings may be anticipated. Such is my reverent intent.

When the text of the announcement had been declaimed, a large number of documents and talismans were laid out, which the lector invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to examine one by one.

Opening up the first of these, he said, "This is the text of the announcement of your son's election to quit the world and devote himself to a Taoist vocation, and a petition of invocation addressed to the Sovereign Deity who presides over the Three Realms of the Three Heavens, the Perfected Lords of the Ten Directions, the Three Officers and Four Sages, the executive officers of the Great Mystic Metropolis, the celestial official the Perfected Lord of August Satisfaction, the celestial official the Perfected Lord of the Bureau of *Chiao* Rites, and the celestial official the Perfected Lord of the Bureau of Divine Descent, requesting their presence in the altar space in order to validate and superintend the proceedings."

Opening up the second document, he said, "This is a petition of invocation addressed to the Great Heaven-reaching Life-governing Sacred God of the Eastern Peak, the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons, the Sacred Mother Goddess *Who* Superintends Birth and Safeguards Confinement, as well as the gods who received your prayer on the occasion when you first made your promise, asking them to clear your account by accepting today's ceremony as the fulfillment of your original vow. The officiants will burn perpetual incense to the numinous deities of the three religions to ensure that they clear the account created by Your Honor's original vow, and also issue a summons to the functionaries of the seventy-five bureaus of the underworld, requiring their attendance in the altar space to accept the prayers for the salvation of the souls of the departed members of your family and escort them to rebirth in Heaven.

"This lot consists of orders authorizing the submission of memorials to the gates of the Three Heavens by the Jade Maidens, numinous officers, gods and generals, functionaries of the Merit Sections who transmit talismans, tutelary gods, and other relevant deities.

"This one is a potent talisman summoning the myriad gods of the Heaven of Jade Clarity and requiring them to take cognizance of the official documents dispatched by the high priest.

"This one is a talisman addressed to the Great General of the Bell of Fluid Gold and Fire,⁵⁷ the concretization of the Yang Rays of the Nine Stars of the Big Dipper, commanding him to open the Gates of Heaven."

When they had finished looking at the material there, the lector conducted Hsi-men Ch'ing to another table, where he opened up the first document and said, "This is an invocation issued at the morning audience, inviting the Unflattering Grand Guardian Marshal K'ang, the Bearer of Efficacious Talismans from the Nine Heavens and Inspector of the Rites, to exercise strict supervision over the ceremony, and monitor the kitchen facilities.

"This document is an invocation inviting the Protectors of the Orthodox Way, the Four Great Marshals Ma, Chao, Wen, and Kuan,⁵⁸ and the Four Great Celestial Lords Ts'ui, Lu, Tou, and Teng,⁵⁹ to oversee the altar space and guard the portals; and inviting the Four Potent Divine Lords of the Mysterious Altar, and the Nine-headed Phoenix, the General-in-chief Who Purges Pollution,⁶⁰ to cleanse the altar space and dispel pollution in order to attract the Perfected Lords.

"This lot consists of a memorandum dispatched at the morning audience, invoking the presence of the Five Masters, and another memorandum dispatched at the evening audience thanking the Five Masters.

"This lot consists of true writs ordaining the recreation of the two cosmic entities, yin and yang, the raising of the curtain,⁶¹ and the transformation of the altar.

"This lot consists of a yang missive inviting the General-in-chief of the Divine Empyrean Who Dispels Pollution to sound the metal bell, and a yin missive inviting the General-in-chief of the Divine Empyrean *Who* Seals the Altar to strike the jade chime.⁶²

"This lot consists of invocations in seal script addressed to the Perfected Beings *Who* Preside over the Five Directions, i.e., the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Eastern Heaven of the Nine Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Southern Heaven of the Three Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Western Heaven of the Seven Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Northern Heaven of the Five Pneumas, and the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Central Heaven of the One Pneuma, inviting these sovereign deities, the Five Ancients, to preside over the boundaries of the altar space, in order to validate and superintend the proceedings. Each of them is drawn in the color appertaining to the direction in question.⁶³

"This lot consists of nine memorials, i.e., the one submitted at the time of the first recitation of the scripture during the morning audience to the Jade Clarity Perfected Ruler of the Most Exalted Divine Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of Long Life of the Southern Apogee; the one submitted at the time of the second recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Azure Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of Verdant Efflorescence Who Nurtures Life of the Eastern Apogee; the one submitted during the third recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Emerald Empyrean, the Celestial Worthy of the Thunderclap of Universal Salvation That Resonates with the Primal Essence of the Nine Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the fourth recitation during the noon audience to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Jade Empyrean, the Great Sovereign Ancestor of Thunder of the Nine Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the fifth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Alabaster Empyrean, the Upper Clarity Great Celestial Emperor of the Grand Monad in the Azure Jade Palace of Purple Tenuity; the one submitted at the time of the sixth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Cosmic Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of the Cavernous Depths of the Six Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the seventh recitation during the evening audience to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Purple Empyrean, the Celestial Monarch and Sovereign Lord

of the Subaqueous Realm; the one submitted at the time of the eighth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Luminous Empyrean, the Suzerain and Perfected Lord of the Blue Citadel and the Bureau of Merited Supplementary Longevity; and the one submitted at the time of the ninth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Crimson Empyrean, the Perfected Lord and Investigation Commissioner of the Nine Heavens.⁶⁴ These nine memorials are accompanied by memoranda addressed to the four bureaus in charge of undeserved emolument, retribution, concealed injustice, and cumulative accomplishment, and thanking the said four bureaus for their attention.

"This lot consists of orders authorizing the high priest to respectfully submit a memorial before the jade steps of the Three Heavens during the noon audience, accompanied by the Princess of Yellow Purity,⁶⁵ and the Red-robed Guardian,⁶⁶ and requiring the relevant functionaries of the Merit Sections on duty this day, those responsible for dispatching the edicts and talismans generated by the *chiao* ceremony, and their armored escorts, to take cognizance thereof, and transmit them safely to the Hall for the Reception of Memorials.

"This lot consists of various Numinous Treasure talismans addressed to the General-in-chief of the Three Heavens Who Holds the Precious Registers, along with the Golden Dragon and Scaly Dragon Mounted Couriers, the Messenger Boys of the Ministry of Fire, and so forth, too many to be enumerated in full.

"This lot consists of a benedictory memorial to be presented at the evening audience, rendering thanks for favors received and expressing sincere devotion, as well as orders for the distribution of quantities of imitation cloud-crane patterned brocade, paper money,⁶⁷ and paper effigies of the gods⁶⁸ appropriate for the one hundred eighty degrees of the *chiao* ceremony, including the presentations of memorials, and the recitations of scripture."

Moving to yet another table, the lector continued, "This lot consists of the documents conferring a religious name upon your son and entrusting him to the protection of the Three Treasures, along with an amulet on its cord, and the authorization papers that go with it. As for the rest, there is no time to examine them all in detail. I trust that you will be so good as to express your gratitude to His Reverence the High Priest, who is really exerting himself on your behalf today."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon lit some incense in front of the principal altar table⁶⁹ and put his signature to the documents. His attendants then presented a bolt of silk to Abbot Wu in return for his signing the papers. Only after repeatedly refusing to accept the proffered gift did he direct a young attendant to put it away.

After this, a Taoist acolyte in a corner of the hall began to strike the ritual drum with a rub-a-dub-dub that sounded like a roll of spring thunder, and the entire group of celebrants joined in to produce a peal of music. Abbot Wu, clad in a crimson Taoist robe with variegated cloud-patterned embroidery, shod in red cloud-heeled flying-duck shoes,⁷⁰ and holding an ivory tablet in his hands, prepared to dispatch the documents, take his place at the altar, and summon the generals. As bells were sounded on either side, a verger ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing into the altar space, where he offered incense before the altar of the Three Treasures and the deities whose effigies were ranged on left and right. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look, truly, the altar space was laid out in an imposing fashion. Behold:

The stations accord with the five directions,
The altar space is divided into eight stages.
On the top level homage is rendered to,
The Three Pure Ones and the Four August Ones,⁷¹
The Perfected Lords of the Eight Poles,
The Nine Empyreans, the Ten Directions,
And the various sages of the cloud palaces.
On the middle level homage is rendered to,
The deities of the Five Peaks and the Four Rivers,
The tutelary gods of the soil and of walls and moats,
The dwellers in the blessed abodes and grotto heavens,
And all the spirits of the broad and massive earth.
On the bottom level homage is rendered to,
The officers of the dark realm of the nether regions,
The underworld courts of Mount Lo-feng,⁷²
The gods of the rivers, lakes, and seas,
And the denizens of the watery kingdom of the grave.
The twin ranks of officiants at the rites are in place,
The officers and marshals in the hall are duly arrayed.
As an auspicious nimbus of incense arises,
A thousand painted candles disperse their light;
Amid clustering blossoms on the brocade mat,
A hundred silver lamps diffuse their brilliance.
In the Pavilion of Heaven and Earth,
To left and right, the Golden Lads and Jade Maidens,
Pair after pair, lift high their feather flabella;
In the Hall of the Jade Emperor,
On either side, holding basins and presenting swords,
Rank after rank, teem pennants with divine effigies.
The breeze is clear, from the Three Worlds are heard

sounds of pacing the void;
 The moonlight is cold, from the Nine Heavens descend
 veils of nocturnal mist.
 When the metal bell is struck,
 The high priest proffers his memorial, presenting
 it to the Sovereign of the Void;
 When the jade pendants tinkle,
 The chief cantor advances to the altar, doing his
 homage before the Jade Emperor.
 On the crimson silk robe, stars and
 constellations glitter;
 On the hibiscus-petal cap, golds and
 greens blend their hues.
 The divine marshals who guard the altar
 manifest their bellicosity;
 The duty officers of the Merit Sections
 display their intrepidity.
 The Taoist priests collectively declaim
 the sacred litanies,
 Ascending the Jade Terrace, they pour
 libations and proffer flowers;
 The Perfected Beings join in incanting
 the numinous texts,
 Holding their ritual swords, they tread
 the stars and pace the dipper.
 The Green Dragon imperceptibly advances
 along the shining zodiac;
 The white crane with a flutter descends
 from the Purple Palace.⁷³

No sooner had Hsi-men Ch'ing finished making the rounds of the various altar tables in order to light incense than he was invited by the attendants to return to his seat in a compartment of the Pine Crane Studio, where:

The floor was covered with brocade carpets, and
 The brazier was burning animal-shaped briquettes.

Before long, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta appeared.

After greeting him with a bow, each of them produced a sealed mace of silver in lieu of the customary present of tea, saying, "The truth is that we had intended to bring you some tea, but it would have taken us too far out of our way. We hope these paltry gifts may serve, instead, to alleviate the cost of a cup of tea."

Hsi-men Ch'ing rejected their offerings with the words, "You needn't have bothered. I only invited you in order to keep me company for a while, you didn't have to go to all this trouble. My brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, will provide tea. Everything is already taken care of. There's no need for you to come up with anything like that."

Ying Po-chüeh hastily made another bow, saying, "If Brother is really in earnest, we might as well take them back."

Then, turning to Hsieh Hsi-ta, he continued, "It's all your doing. I told you Brother would never accept anything from us. And now that we've come up with something, we've only elicited a good scoffing for our pains."

After some time, Wu K'ai and Hua Tzu-yü appeared, each of them bringing two boxes of fancy tea and assorted delicacies as gifts for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that these be turned over to Abbot Wu. When they had finished their tea, a vegetarian repast was laid out for everyone on two tables, replete with salty main courses, vegetarian specialties, sweetmeats, soup, and rice, lavishly and spotlessly prepared. Hsi-men Ch'ing then discarded his formal clothes and sat down to share the morning meal with his guests.

It so happens that Abbot Wu had engaged the services of a professional storyteller who regaled them with the episode known as "The Banquet at Hung-men" from the *P'ing-hua on the Western Han Dynasty*.⁷⁴

When Abbot Wu had finished dispatching the documents required by the *chiao* ceremony, he came over to keep them company and asked, "Will your son be coming today, or not?"

"The fact is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the youngster is still very frail, and my wife was afraid that he might be disturbed having to come such a distance, so he won't be here. At noontime, we can present some clothes of his before the Three Treasures for their acceptance and blessing. It will amount to the same thing."

"I had thought of that myself," said Abbot Wu. "That will be fine."

"Everything else about him is all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he is somewhat timid. We've got three or four maidservants and waiting women at home, who take turns looking after him, but he's still afraid of things. They don't even dare let cats or dogs come near him."

"It's no easy thing to raise a child to adulthood," opined Abbot Wu.

As they were talking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter have sent Li Ming and Wu Hui here to deliver gifts of tea."

"Tell them to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Li Ming and Wu Hui came in carrying a pair of boxes, knelt down, and opened them up for inspection. They were filled with cream puff pastries, pine pollen pastries, little molded cakes sprinkled with crystallized sugar with the character for long life embossed on their surfaces, and rose hip flavored pastry rolls. All of these, at Hsi-men Ch'ing's direction, were turned over to Abbot Wu.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Li Ming and asked, "How did you know that I was sponsoring a *chiao* ceremony here today?"

"This morning," replied Li Ming, "I happened to run into Uncle Ch'en Ching-chi on the road, riding a donkey. It was only after I asked where he was headed that I found out you were sponsoring a ritual performance here today. When I got home I told Li Kuei-chieh and Aunt Li the Third about it and said to them, 'Why don't you act quickly and buy some presents for the occasion?' Later they got in touch with Wu Yin-erh, and so we are here. They asked us to convey their best wishes to you, and to say that they would have come in person but didn't know if it would be appropriate. These boxes of inferior tea things are only for you to give away to someone if you like."

"The two of you must stay a while and have some vegetarian fare," directed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Abbot Wu conducted the two young men out of their presence to a place where they could sit down. Even the porters who had come with them were all enabled to eat their fill.

To make a long story short, when the time came for the noon audience, after the memorials had been dispatched, Abbot Wu showed them a large portable table⁷⁵ on which there had been prepared:

Cone-shaped piles of fruit, ingot-shaped cakes, and

High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery,

together with forty saucers and bowls containing different kinds of steamed and fried vegetarian dishes ingeniously made to counterfeit nonvegetarian fare, sweetmeats, soup, and rice, as well as a jug of Chin-hua wine. Also prepared for Kuan-ko there were a jet satin gold lamé Taoist cap, a jet silk Taoist robe, a little undergown of green cloud-patterned satin, a pair of little white damask socks, a pair of little blue Lu-chou pongee shoes with stitched facings, a sash of yellow wool yarn, a yellow cord bestowed upon him under the aegis of the Three Treasures, a locket on a purple cord bestowed upon him under the aegis of the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons,⁷⁶ a silver amulet to be worn around the neck, on which were incised the words:

Gold and jade fill up the hall,⁷⁷

Long life, wealth, and success,⁷⁸

and a talisman of yellow damask designed to dispel pollution, on which were written in vermilion ink the eight characters:

The Grand Monad, the Director of Destiny,

And T'ao K'ang, whose cognomen is Ho-yen,

and which was attached to the aforesaid yellow cord. The above objects were all displayed on the table in square trays, along with four trays of preserved fruit.

A young attendant was instructed to take the texts of the various documents and petitions written on safflower red paper,⁷⁹ and an itemized program, in sequential order, of all the rituals performed during the three audiences, out of the scripture cases in which they had been put, and show them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they were packed up with the other gifts enumerated above, making eight carrier-loads in all, and sent ahead to the Hsi-men residence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was extremely pleased and promptly dispatched Ch'i-t'ung to accompany them home, with instructions to reward the acolyte in charge of the consignment with two handkerchiefs and a tael of silver.

To resume our story, that day was P'an Chin-lien's birthday, and Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, Aunt Yang, and Big Sister Yü had all forgathered in the master suite, where they were sitting with Wu Yüeh-niang and the other female members of the household. When they heard that a vegetarian repast had been delivered from the temple, together with lots of preserved fruit, and a portable table for the display of gifts, so much, in fact, that not even four tables could accommodate it, they all bustled out to see for themselves.

"Sister Li," exclaimed P'an Chin-lien, "why don't you hurry out and see what's here? Your son's master from the temple has sent it all for him. There are lots of things, including a little Taoist cap, a Taoist robe, and, my, just look at this, even a pair of little shoes."

Meng Yü-lou then stepped forward, picked them up, and examined them, saying, "Elder Sister, look at this. How clever the Taoist priests are. These little shoes have white damask soles, which have been backstitched in a pattern of interlocking lozenges. This ornamental cloud-pattern is also very well done. My guess is they must have wives to help them, otherwise they would never be able to produce such fine stitchwork themselves."

"Needless to say," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "as people who have left home to become priests, how could they have wives? Surely they must have hired someone to make them."

P'an Chin-lien, picking up where Yüeh-niang left off, said, "If that is evidence that Taoist priests have wives, it follows that Buddhists like Nun Wang and the abbess, here, who are good at embroidering handkerchiefs, must have husbands."

"Taoist priests," said Nun Wang, "can disguise themselves by putting a hat over their topknots and go anywhere they want. We Buddhist members of the Sangha, on the other hand, can be readily recognized whatever we do."

"I have heard tell," said Chin-lien, "that the Taoist Temple of Mystic Illumination is located right behind the Kuan-yin Nunnery where you reside. As the saying goes:

If a male convent lies next to a female convent,

Though nothing need occur, something may occur.”
“This Sister Six,” said Yüeh-niang, “is prone to indulge in such:
Ridiculous blatherskite.”

“And this,” said Chin-lien, continuing with the inventory, “is the locket on a purple cord bestowed upon him when his name was consecrated under the aegis of the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons. And here is a silver amulet to be worn around the neck, on which there are eight characters incised. It ought to look very good when he has it on. And his name is engraved on the back, Wu something or other yüan.”

“That’s the name chosen for him by the master,” said Ch’i-t’ung, “Wu Ying-yüan.”⁸⁰

“So that’s the character ying, is it?” said Chin-lien. “Elder Sister, these Taoists are impertinent. What reason could there be to change the child’s surname?”

“Now see here,” said Yüeh-niang, “you just don’t understand the ritual involved.”

Then, turning to Li P’ing-erh, she said, “Why don’t you go fetch your son and bring him here so we can try out this Taoist costume on him and see what it looks like, how would that be?”

“I’ve just put him down for a nap,” said Li P’ing-erh. “Do I need to get him up and bring him out again?”

“It won’t do any harm,” said Chin-lien. “Just pat him until he wakes up.”

Li P’ing-erh did, in fact, go after him.

Now P’an Chin-lien knew how to read, and, picking up a red paper envelope and pulling out one of the petitions that had been sent from the temple, she noticed that under Hsi-men Ch’ing’s name it read, “joined by his wife, née Wu,” after which there were only the words, “and his spouse, née Li,” without mention of anyone else.

More than a little incensed by this, she showed it to the others, saying, “Just you tell me if that lousy ruffian, sorting people so differentially into:

Three classes and nine categories,
is practicing favoritism or not. The only one whose name is written on here is the one who bore the child. The rest of us simply don’t count. We’ve all been:

Relegated to the realm of the superfluous.”⁸¹

“Is Elder Sister’s name there, or not?” asked Meng Yü-lou.

“If Elder Sister’s name were not there,” said Chin-lien, “that would really be laughable.”

“That’s enough,” said Yüeh-niang. “As long as one of us is there, it’s all the same thing. You don’t mean to say that if a family had a whole troop of women, their names should all appear. Wouldn’t that give the Taoist priests a laugh.”

“Are we all nothing but:

The ghosts of Liu Chan’s daughters?”⁸²
demanded Chin-lien. “Compared to whom is it alleged that we:

Don’t amount to anything?”⁸³

Which of us did not undergo ten months of gestation in the womb?”

As they were speaking, Li P’ing-erh came back from the front compound carrying Kuan-ko.

“Hand me his clothes,” said Meng Yü-lou, “so I can help him on with them.”

Li P’ing-erh held him while Meng Yü-lou fitted the Taoist cap onto his head and put the amulet around his neck, together with the two cords. The baby was so frightened at this that he closed his eyes tight and:

Hardly dared to breathe,⁸⁴
for some time.

When Meng-Yü-lou had finished fitting him into his Taoist costume, Wu Yüeh-niang said to Li P’ing-erh, “You ought to take these documents and petitions, along with a bundle of paper money, and go to the Buddhist chapel in the rear to burn them yourself.”

After Li P’ing-erh had departed on this mission, Meng Yü-lou, who was holding the baby and playing with him, said, “Dressed in these clothes, he’s just like a little Taoist priest.”

Chin-lien picked up on this, saying, “A little Taoist priest, my eye! He’s more like a little god.”

This sally provoked a serious reprimand from Wu Yüeh-niang, who said, “Sister Six, what kind of talk is that? You mustn’t speak that way about the child.”

Chin-lien was at a loss for words and had nothing more to say.

After a while, the baby, who was frightened by the new clothes he was wearing, began to cry and, when Li P’ing-erh hurried over to take him and change his clothes, produced a diaperful of shit.

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, “What a fine Wu Ying-yüan! It seems that even when he shits, he’s good for a trayful.”

Yüeh-niang hurriedly directed Hsiao-yü to fetch some absorbent grass paper and wipe up the mess. Before long the baby reclined on Li P’ing-erh’s breast and fell asleep.

“Little Brother,” said Li P’ing-erh, “you seem to be tired. Mother will take you back up front and put you to sleep.”

Wu Yüeh-niang then distributed the place settings of gifts that had been sent from the temple and invited Wu K’ai’s wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P’an, and the others to come into the outer room and enjoy a vegetarian repast. As they did so, it gradually grew late.

It so happens that, on the eighth day of the month, because Hsi-men Ch’ing was going to participate in the *chiao*

ceremony on the following day, he was expected to abstain from meat and wine. For that reason the eve of Pan Chin-lien's birthday had not been celebrated in the customary way, and it was not until he returned home on the evening of the day itself that he would be able to offer her a congratulatory cup of wine. She went out and stood by the main gate in expectation of his arrival, but how could she have anticipated that at sunset time all she could see was Ch'en Ching-chi returning home on his donkey.



Hsi-men Kuan-ko Tries on His Taoist Vestments

"Is Father on his way?" Chin-lien asked.

"I'm afraid Father will not be able to make it," said Ching-chi. "The *chiao* ceremony is not over yet. They've just begun the ritual of penance, which is likely to go on until the first watch. How likely are Taoist priests to:

Let anyone lightly out of their clutches?⁸⁵

And after that, still to come, are the ceremony of dismissing the generals and a banquet."

When Chin-lien heard this, without saying another word, she went back to the master suite in a huff and said to Yüeh-niang, "It seems that:

Blindman Chia, the masseur, unaware of the time,
Got up at the fifth watch for nothing.
If you throw your guts over the wall,
You must resign yourself to your fate.
If the string on your waistband breaks,

On what can you depend?

Just now, I stood for a while at the gate, and all I saw was Ch'en Ching-chi coming along on his donkey. He said that Father would not be able to make it because the *chiao* rites were not yet over and had elected to send him back in his stead."

"If he's not coming home, so be it," said Yüeh-niang. "That leaves us free this evening to listen to the abbess and Nun Wang recite tales of karmic cause and effect, and sing Buddhist songs.

As she was speaking, what should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who lifted aside the portiere and came in, already half inebriated, saying, "I've come to kowtow to the Fifth Lady."

Turning to his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, he said, "If there's a goblet around, find it, and fill it with wine, so I can offer her a drink."

"Where would I find a goblet?" said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "All you need to do is kowtow to the Fifth Lady. If it comes to that, I'll offer her a drink on your behalf. Just listen to that drunken voice of his. It's just as though the *chiao* rites today were only for your benefit, that you've come home in such a befuddled state."

"Is your father really not coming home?" enquired Yüeh-niang. "Is that slave, Tai-an, not returning either?"

"Father saw that the *chiao* rites were not over yet," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and fearing that there was no one at home to look after the place, sent me ahead for that purpose. He's retaining Tai-an there to wait on him. The Taoist priests were importunate in their unwillingness to release me.

Willy-nilly, dead or alive,

they insisted on my drinking two or three big bumpers before letting me go."

"Who all are there with him today?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Today there are your elder brother, Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Hua the Elder from outside the gate, Uncle Ying the Second, Uncle Hsieh Hsi-ta, and also Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy actors. Now that night has fallen, who knows how long they'll carry on. Only your elder brother, Wu K'ai, has gone home today. Father insisted that Hua the Elder from outside the gate remain with them. It looks like it will be an all-night affair."

Chin-lien, noticing that Li P'ing-erh was not present, said, "Son-in-law Ch'en, even you persist in calling him Brother-in-law Hua. How he is entitled to claim such a relationship only her dead husband knows. If he were really any brother-in-law of ours, it would be appropriate to refer to him as Brother-in-law Li. How can you refer to him as Brother-in-law Hua?"

"Fifth Lady," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you ought to emulate:

The country girl who brings herself to marry Cheng En,⁸⁶

By keeping one eye open, and one eye shut.

If a son is born too soon after the wedding,

Who knows whose account he should be chalked up to?

All you can do is split the difference."

"You lousy jailbird!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Hurry up and perform your kowtow. The sooner you go up front and sleep it off the better. That's enough of your delirious nonsense."

Ch'en Ching-chi thereupon asked Chin-lien to assume the position of honor and then proceeded to kowtow to her four times before staggering off for the front compound.

Before long, the room was lighted with lamps and candles, a table was set up and spread with viands, and Old Mrs. P'an, Aunt Yang, Wu K'ai's wife, and the others were all assembled. After drinks had been offered in celebration of the occasion, they all sat down and consumed the birthday noodles. When the wine ran out, the utensils were put away, and the table removed from the room.

Yüeh-niang then ordered Hsiao-yü to close the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds. After this, a small table was placed on the k'ang, and they all gathered around it, the two nuns occupying the center, where they burnt incense and set up a pair of wax candles, so they could listen to them recite a tale of karmic cause and effect.⁸⁷

The abbess began the recitation as follows:

I have heard tell that, in the *Great Buddhist Canon*, a story is told of the Buddhist Dharma, relating how the Thirty-second Patriarch⁸⁸ of the Western Heaven descended to the world to be born in the Eastern Land and transmit the mind-seal of the Buddha.⁸⁹ It was in former days, during the third year of the Hsien-heng reign period⁹⁰ of Emperor Kao-tsung of the T'ang dynasty,⁹¹ but we will not elaborate on national affairs in the Central Kingdom. To resume our story, in P'ao-tu village of Ling-nan township, there was a certain householder, named Chang, whose family was very well-to-do, possessing quantities of gold and silver, with slaves and maidservants at their beck and call.⁹² This householder had taken unto himself eight wives, who enjoyed themselves day by day, basking in diurnal luxury, enamored of romance, and neglectful of good works. It happened one day that Master Chang went out the gate for a stroll when he came upon a crowd of true believers, carrying incense, lamp-oil, polished rice, and such things, and reciting Buddha's name. Approaching them, he asked, "Where are you believers going?" One among them answered, saying, "In the first place, we are going to share a vegetarian repast, and in the second place, we are going to listen to the scriptures." The householder went on to ask, "What merit will accrue to you for fasting and listening to the scriptures?" To which the crowd of believers replied, "For humans living in this world,⁹³ the Buddhist Dharma is hard

to hear,⁹⁴ human existence is hard to obtain.⁹⁵ As the *Lotus Sutra* puts it so well, if human beings who are fortunate, and who worship Buddha, do not give alms in this life, from whence can they expect to receive glory and luxury, wealth and honor⁹⁶ in the life to come? As a man of yore has told us:



Ch'en Ching-chi Kowtows to His Light of Love

A dragon, upon hearing the Dharma,
achieved enlightenment;
A python, upon hearing the litany,
was reborn in Heaven.⁹⁷

How much the more should this be true for human beings." When Householder Chang returned home, he ordered a page boy to go into the interior of the house and invite his eight wives to come into his presence. Before long, they were all assembled in the hall, where the householder addressed them, saying, "Ladies, I am presently going to go to the Huang-mei Temple to embark upon the religious life. I will divide the family property into eight parts, and allow each of you to fend for yourselves. It seems to me that at the present time you and I are preoccupied with the pleasures of the moment, with no consideration for the life to come."⁹⁸ If we do not take up religious practice, in hope of escaping the fiery pit, we are sure to fall into the three evil paths and the five forms of suffering." One of his wives, upon hearing these words, said, "Sir, you possess the eight-treasured body of an arhat. What karmic impediment could you be encumbered by? Your situation is not to be compared to that of us womenfolk, who in the process of giving birth to boys and girls inevitably offend the purity of the gods. You can engage in your religious practices at home, and the eight of us will take the burden

of your guilt upon ourselves. There is no need for you to leave.” Truly:

When his wife undertook to dissuade
her husband;
The householder laughed sardonically
several times.

The abbess having recited for a while, it was time for Nun Wang to continue with a gatha, and Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, as well as Yü-hsiao, all chimed in by reciting the Buddha's name in unison. Nun Wang then continued with a gatha in decasyllabic verse:

All eight of his, womenfolk,
asked him to stay;
Saying to him, “Don't go away.
Practice at home.
Now if you, are so cruel,
as to leave us;
The little ones, will be distraught,
'twill break your heart.
We sisters here, will be forlorn,
with nowhere to go;
How will we, one and all,
get through the day?
Since our youth, we've been mates,
partnered for life;
If on the way, we're left behind,
who can we trust?”
Boy tugs at dad, girl tugs at mom,
beat breast stamp feet;⁹⁹
The whole house, old and young,
cry out in pain.

To the tune “Sutra in Letters of Gold”:

When his wives heard these words,
they wept unceasingly;
Urgently trying to deter their husband
from entering the cloister.
“Think of your home;
Remain ever united with your children.
Don't go far away;
Practice at home, it all amounts
to the same thing.”

Prose:

The householder then said, “I wish to thank all of you eight wives. In the future, when I am dead in the world of the shades, you can take the burden of my guilt upon yourselves. Today I will offer you a cup of wine, in the hope that tomorrow, when you appear before King Yama, you will undertake this responsibility, as promised.” As they drank wine together, the householder decided to play a trick, saying, “Wives, will one of you trim the wick of the lamp for me?” While the householder thereby fooled his wife into trimming the wick, he blew the lamp out, causing all eight of his wives to turn pale and call hastily to a maidservant, “Quickly, relight the lamp.”

The householder had pulled out
a steel-bladed sword;
Which frightened all eight of
his wives half to death.

Gatha in decasyllabic verse:

The old householder, called a maidservant,
to relight the lamp;
With the steel blade, held in his hand,
he pointed at his wives.
“Which of you, took the bright lamp,
and blew it out;
Coveting my wealth, taking my life,
to marry someone else?
If you don’t confess, with a single stroke,
your head will fall”;
Each one of them, was sore afraid,
falling to the ground.
All eight of his, elderly wives,
hastily knelt down;
“We beg you sir, temper your rage,
spare our poor lives.
It’s clear you, with one breath,
blew out the lamp;
In your cups, flushed with wine,
waving your sword.
If you really, kill us all,
eight of your wives;
In Hell itself, we’ll tell King Yama,
to seize your soul.”

Prose:

The householder laughed sardonically, and then said to his eight wives, “You’re fooling me. If you won’t even acknowledge that you blew out the lamp right in front of my eyes; when I am in the world of the shades, how could you take the burden of my guilt upon yourselves? You eight womenfolk are merely fooling me. It’s enough to give anyone possessed of age and virtue a laugh.” This speech reduced his wives to silence. The householder thought to himself, “Wealth and success in this life are all the results of religious practice in former lives.”¹⁰⁰ Then he called in a page boy and told him, “Quickly, go and load several carts with incense, lamp-oil, rice, and flour, together with every kind of vegetarian fare, cash, valuables, and such things. I am going to go to the Huang-mei Temple in order to commit myself to fasting on vegetarian fare and listening to the scriptures.”
To the tune “Sutra in Letters of Gold”:

“Ladies, listen to my explication
of first things.
The Brahman prince, Sakyamuni,
forsook his realm.
Ridding himself of desires,
He sought a means of salvation for all men.
For which he gave away everything,
Attaining immortal fame for all time
in the world of men.”

The householder departed that very day
to take up the religious life;
All his relatives and neighbors assembled
to see him off upon his way.

After Nun Wang had recited for a while, Wu Yüeh-niang said, “Our preceptors must be hungry. Pray set the scripture aside for the moment, and have something to eat.”

She then told Hsiao-yü to set out four vegetable dishes, two salty main courses, and four saucers containing sugar crisps, steamed-shortcake pastries, chrysanthemum-flavored cakes, and twisted crullers, of which she invited Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, and Old Mrs. P'an to partake, in company with the two nuns.

"We really shouldn't," said Wu K'ai's wife. "We've all just eaten our fill. Offer something to Aunt Yang though. She's been on a vegetarian diet."

Yüeh-niang hastened to take small lacquer dishes adorned with gold tracery and fill them with a sample of each of the delicacies.

Offering them first to the two nuns, she then offered one to Aunt Yang, saying, "Won't you have a little something to keep our two preceptors company?"

"My Lord Buddha!" the old lady said. "I really oughtn't to. I've had enough to eat already."

"And take this dish of pork ribs away," she went on to say. "I'm afraid I might get some into my mouth by mistake."

This provoked a hearty laugh from everyone present.

"My good lady," said Yüeh-niang, "This is counterfeit nonvegetarian fare sent over from the temple just now. Eat as much as you like. It won't do any harm."

"So long as it's really vegetarian fare," said Aunt Yang, "I'll have some of it. My eyes must really be deceiving me. I was sure it was meat."

As they were eating, Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu, came in.

"You lousy little stinker!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come, like the rest of you, to hear the song singing," said Hui-hsiu.

"The ceremonial gate is closed," said Yüeh-niang. "How did you get in?"

"She was in the kitchen banking the fire," said Hsiao-yü.

"No wonder you're in such a state," exclaimed Yüeh-niang.

"Your nose is dingy,

Your mouth is sooty.

What would an:

Inveterate mischief-maker,¹⁰¹

like you want to listen to any scriptures for?"

Thereupon, the group of maidservants and womenfolk gathered around the two nuns as they consumed the assorted delicacies, after which the tea things were cleared away, and the lectern for the scripture recitation was wiped clean. Yüeh-niang trimmed the wicks of the lamps and candles anew and lit some incense, while the two nuns struck up their hand chimes and proceeded with the recitation in a loud voice.

They told how Householder Chang devoted himself to religious practice in the Huang-mei Temple; by day:

Kneeling upright to listen to the scriptures;

and, by night:

Engaging in meditation in the lotus position.¹⁰²

How the Fourth Ch'an Patriarch¹⁰³ recognized that:

This was no ordinary person,

but, surely:

A true monk born into this world.

How he enquired as to the location of his native place, and what his name might be. To which the householder responded by relating the preceding events, "Your disciple has abandoned his family property, his wives, and children; sincerely desiring to escape samsara by leaving his home." How the fourth patriarch accepted him as a disciple under his tutelage, instructing him to plant trees by day, and to pound rice by night. How after six years his regimen of austerities was complete, startling the celestial deva and protector of the Dharma, Wei-t'o, and awakening the attention of the Fourth Patriarch, who instructed him to seek a place to:

Achieve security and fulfill his destiny.¹⁰⁴

How he bestowed upon him three treasures, a hooded cloak, a rain cape, and a crooked date-wood staff, and sent him south to the banks of the Turbid River¹⁰⁵ in order to:

Enter the womb and take an abode,¹⁰⁶

thereby securing a new habitation for himself. "After three hundred sixty days:

The fruit of your practice will be complete.

You are now well advanced in years, and your habitation is too dilapidated to permit you to transmit the true wonderful Dharma, or accomplish the salvation of the multitude of living beings."

The recitation continued to the point where the Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold was washing clothes by the bank of the Turbid River with her sister-in-law, when she encountered a monk who asked her if she could lend him a habitation. Though she ought not to have, she responded to him, whereupon the old man jumped into the river.

At this point, P'an Chin-lien, who was drowsy with boredom, went off to her room to sleep. In a little while, Hsiu-ch'un came from Li P'ing-erh's quarters to say that Kuan-ko was awake, and she too left, leaving only Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Old Mrs. P'an, Sun Hsüeh-o, Aunt Yang, and Wu K'ai's wife, who elected to remain.

They heard how a large fresh peach came floating along in the river, and how the virgin, though she ought not to

have, ate. it, returned home, and, finding herself pregnant:
Bore the fetus in her womb for ten months.¹⁰⁷
Nun Wang then sang a song to the tune “Playful Children”:

The numinous soul’s true nature¹⁰⁸
enters into her womb.
Who is there who is cognizant
of these tidings?
No one grasps the meaning of the
coming from the west.¹⁰⁹
With no more than a squeak¹¹⁰
she bears a child,
Who, acknowledging his mother,
wears the iron-visage,
That, alone, enables him to see
the glory of paradise.
From the summit of Mount K’un-lun
he makes chiliocosms spin;
Venerable Amitābha, who allocates
the four directions.¹¹¹

The recitation continued:

The Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold came into her sister-in-law’s room, and said, “It’s all because the two of us went to wash our clothes by the bank of the Turbid River that I encountered that old man who asked me if I would lend him a habitation. When he jumped into the river that way, he startled me so that my heart was in a state of trepidation. Then I ate an immortal peach. And now I suffer from a feeling of congestion, and am greatly disturbed. The state of my belly indicates that I have become pregnant.” Truly:

For ten months, within her belly,
the mother bore the fetus;
Tears wet the cheeks of the Virgin Worth
a Thousand Pieces of Gold.

Gatha in decasyllabic verse:

The Virgin said, “In my boudoir,
I have become pregnant.
Ruefully I must, swallow my anger,
and keep my own counsel.”
In one month, the fetus is,
just like the dew.
In two months, the fetus is,
still without form.
In three months, the fetus is,
like a blood clot.
In four months, the fetus has,
just formed its joints.
In five months, the fetus is,
sexually defined.
In six months, the fetus has,
all six sense organs.
In seven months, the fetus has,
all seven apertures.
In eight months, the fetus has,
the form of a human.
In nine months, the fetus is,
nearly complete.
In ten months, the fetus is
ready to be born.

To an unnamed tune:

The Fifth Patriarch enters the womb¹¹²
in his mother's belly,
In order to save the multitude of living beings.
The men and women of this sahā world¹¹³
are loath to repent.
The Ancient Buddha descends to this world
transformed into a mortal body.
Borrowing a womb and emerging from his integument,
In the future he will save his mother, conveying
her to the celestial palace.
The Fifth Patriarch with his Buddha nature,
Enters the womb inside his mother's belly.
Residing there temporarily for ten months,
He becomes a mortal to save living beings.

When the recitation had continued to this point, Yüeh-niang noticed that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had gone off to bed, that her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was sprawled out asleep on the bed in the inner room, that Aunt Yang also was yawning, and that the two wax candles on the table had burnt themselves out.

"What time has it gotten to be?" she asked Hsiao-yü.

"It's already the fourth watch," said Hsiao-yü. "The cock has crowed."

Only then did Yüeh-niang tell the two nuns to put their sacred texts away. Aunt Yang went off to sleep in Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and Big Sister Yü spent the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound, leaving only the two nuns. Yüeh-niang arranged for the abbess to share a bed with Li Chiao-erh, and for Nun Wang to join her in sleeping on the k'ang in the master suite. The two of them waited for Hsiao-yü to heat up a cup of tea before going to bed. Wu K'ai's wife was sleeping on the bed in the inner room, together with Yü-hsiao.

Yüeh-niang took the occasion to ask Nun Wang, "Later on, when the Fifth Patriarch grows up, how does he reap the true fruit?"

"The girl's father and mother," said Nun Wang, "on seeing that she was pregnant, told her elder brother, Chu Hu, to drive their daughter, the Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold, out of the house, with the intent of killing her. Fortunately, her second brother, Chu Lung, had a benevolent heart, and let her escape with her life. She found her way under a weeping willow tree, where she tried to hang herself, which attracted the attention of the god Li Chin-hsing of the Great White Planet Venus, who taught her how to:

Seek after tea and beg for rice,
Accept one's lot and live one's days.¹¹⁴

Before she knew it:

The ten months of her pregnancy were fulfilled,¹¹⁵
and she came upon a temple in the Village of the Immortals, where she gave birth to the Fifth Patriarch.

Purple mist and red light,¹¹⁶
filled the hall of the temple. The Virgin, on seeing that no sooner was her child born than he:

Folded his legs in the lotus position,
was fearful at heart, realizing that this was:
Something out of the ordinary.¹¹⁷

Later, she made her way to T'ien-hsi village, where she was asleep on the threshing floor of a householder named Wang, when a fire broke out. When she was apprehended and brought to see the householder, he was so struck by her beauty that he offered to keep her as a concubine, at which both mother and son bowed down to him, which had the immediate effect of causing the householder and his wife to faint dead away.¹¹⁸ The household retainers and the gardener seized the mother and son, but when the householder later recovered consciousness, he said, 'I imagine they are innocent people,' and chose to keep them in his home. Only after he had been nurtured there for six years did the Fifth Patriarch start to talk, on which, without asking his mother's consent, he went straight to a hollow tree on the bank of the Turbid River, recovered his three treasures, and headed straight for the Huang-mei Temple, in order to hear the Fourth Patriarch expound the Dharma, as a result of which he reaped the true fruit. Later he also accomplished the salvation of his mother, so that she was reborn in Heaven."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she became an even firmer believer in the Buddhist Dharma. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Hearing the Dharma and heeding the scriptures,
she is afraid of death;
The red lotus-blossom tongue of the preacher
emits rays of light.¹¹⁹
Who is responsible for leaving us the empty words
of Ch'an Buddhism;

Only to provide nuns and bonzes with an excuse
to beg their bread?

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 40

HOLDING HER BOY IN HER ARMS LI P'ING-ERH CURRIES FAVOR; DRESSING UP AS A MAIDSERVANT CHIN-LIEN COURTS AFFECTION

Good works must be done because you want to;
Without the intent they accomplish nothing.
Whatever merit accrues to good works you do;
Cannot be shared by anyone except yourself.
Though sacred texts pile up like mountains;
Without karmic affinity you won't read them.
Money and goods heaped higher than the walls;
When danger comes cannot be taken with you.
The dead to whom you tender devout offerings;
Are quite incapable of rising up to eat them.
Though sons and grandsons overflow your halls;
Once you are dead they cannot take your place.¹

THE STORY GOES that Yüeh-niang slept on the same k'ang with Nun Wang that night.

"Why is it," Nun Wang took the occasion to ask, "that you haven't thus far shown any indication of a happy event?"

"Now that you bring up the subject of a happy event," said Yüeh-niang, "in the eighth month last year, because we had bought the house of Mr. Ch'iao across the street, for no good reason, we all went over to take a look at it. While I was climbing the stairs over there, my foot slipped, and the wrench I suffered resulted in the miscarriage of a fetus I had been carrying for six or seven months. From that time until now, there haven't been any indications of another child."

"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "in six or seven months it would already have assumed recognizable shape."

"In the middle of the night," said Yüeh-niang, "I evacuated the fetus into the commode, and when the maidservant and I examined it, it turned out to be a boy."

"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "what a pity. How did you manage to wrench yourself, or was it just that the embryo was not properly seated in the womb?"

"All I was doing," said Yüeh-niang, "was climbing their stairs, which were narrow and steep, when, somehow or other, one of my feet slipped out from under me. Fortunately, Sister Meng the Third caught hold of me with one hand. Otherwise, I would have fallen all the way down."

"If you were to bear a son," said Nun Wang, "it would do you more good than it would anyone else. Just look at the case of the Sixth Lady in the front compound. She had hardly crossed the threshold any time at all when she gave birth to a son, and now she is treated with such favor."

"Whether any of us bear children or not is up to Heaven," said Yüeh-niang. "That's all there is to it."

"It doesn't matter," said Nun Wang. "A colleague of mine, Reverend Hsüeh, is adept at producing efficacious spells and potions. Year before last there was the case of the wife of Dr. Ch'en, who had reached middle age without any children, having suffered from a series of miscarriages that prevented her from carrying her pregnancies to term. But after taking a fertility potion provided by Reverend Hsüeh, she has given birth to a real armful of handsome baby boy, and the whole household is as happy as can be. The only thing is that the formula requires an ingredient that is hard to obtain."

"What ingredient is that?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"It requires the afterbirth of a firstborn child," said Nun Wang. "It must be washed in wine, burnt to ashes, and mixed with the potion. Then, selecting a *jen-tzu* day:²

Unbeknownst to humans,

Unperceived by ghosts,³

you must take it with some rice wine on an empty stomach. If you calculate the date correctly, you will be sure to conceive within the month."

"Is this person a monk or a nun," asked Yüeh-niang, "and where does the reverend reside?"

"She's a nun like myself," said Nun Wang, "and she's more than fifty years old. Originally she lived in the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, but recently she has moved to the Lotus Blossom Nunnery in the southern quarter, where she is currently the abbess. She is known for her exemplary conduct, and for her knowledge of any number of scriptures. In addition, she can explicate the *Chin-kang k'o-i*, or *Liturgical Exposition of the Diamond Sutra*, as well as every kind of 'precious scroll' relating tales of karmic cause and effect. She can go on for a month without exhausting her repertoire, and constantly frequents prominent households where they ask her to stay for ten days or a fortnight before letting her go."

"Why don't you ask her to come here for a visit sometime soon," said Yüeh-niang.

I'll take care of it," said Nun Wang, "at the same time that I solicit the potion that I spoke of, on your behalf. But that one ingredient is hard to obtain, and there's no place to look for it around here. Unless, thus and so, you were to take advantage of the occasion by digging up the afterbirth of that child from the front compound and using it for the purpose."⁴

"How could I bear to:
Harm someone else,
To benefit myself?"⁵

said Yüeh-niang. I'll give you some silver so you can seek one elsewhere at your leisure."

"This is something that one can only obtain from a midwife," said Nun Wang. "If I succeed in preparing this potion for you, and you take it in the prescribed manner, I guarantee that you will conceive a child. If you should be fortunate enough in the future to bear him another son, no matter how many rivals you may have:

Even ten twinkling stars,
Are no match for the moon."

"Don't tell anyone what you're about," Yüeh-niang admonished her.

"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "I'm not so foolish as to say anything about it."

After they had talked for a while, they each fell asleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the temple. Yüeh-niang had just gotten up and was combing her hair. After Yü-hsiao had taken his outer garments, he sat down.

"Last night," Yüeh-niang took the occasion to say, "Sister Six was waiting up for you to help celebrate her birthday. Why didn't you come home?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her all about how the *chiao* ceremony was not over, how their kinsman Abbot Wu had gone to such trouble to lay on an elaborate feast that evening, how his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, had left early, but how the abbot had kept him, along with Brother Hua the Elder, Brother Ying the Second, and Hsieh Hsi-ta, to be entertained by the playing and singing of the two boy actors.

"We continued drinking for half the night. This morning, I was the first to leave and come into the city. Brother Ying the Second and the other two are still at it. Yesterday our kinsman Abbot Wu really put himself out and spent a great deal of money."

Yü-hsiao brought him a cup of tea, and after drinking it, instead of going to the yamen, he went to his studio in the front compound, sprawled out on the bed there, and went to sleep.

Sometime later, after having combed their hair, P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, the latter holding her baby in her arms, made their way to the master suite to join Yüeh-niang in a cup of tea.

"Father has been back for some time," Yüeh-niang said to Li P'ing-erh. "He's gone to the front compound. I wanted him to have something to eat with his tea, but he wouldn't take anything. The maidservants have prepared a meal for him. Why don't you dress your little Taoist priest in his vestments and take him up front to show to his father."

"I'll go too," said Chin-lien. "Let me put the vestments on the Taoist priest for you."

Thereupon, she fitted the gold lamé Taoist cap onto his head, dressed him in his Taoist robe, hung the amulet on its cord around his neck, and pulled his tiny shoes and socks on for him.

Chin-lien was going to take the baby herself, but Yüeh-niang said, "You'd better let his mother carry him. Especially since that honey yellow drawnwork skirt of yours won't take dirt. If it should be soiled however slightly, it will be ruined."

Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh carried Kuan-ko in her arms, with P'an Chin-lien trailing behind her, as they made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's studio on the western side of the front courtyard. When Shu-t'ung saw the two women lifting aside the portiere to come in, he promptly got out of the way.

When Chin-lien saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying on the k'ang frame with his face to the wall, she pointed to the child and said, "What a slugabed you are, you old beggar! The little Taoist priest has come in person to summon you. A meal has already been laid out in the First Lady's room, ready for you to eat, but you refuse to get up promptly and continue to play possum."

Now Hsi-men Ch'ing was a person who had been drinking all night. No sooner did his head hit the pillow than he became oblivious to:

Heaven above and earth below,⁶

and was soon:

Snoring thunderously.

Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh sat down, one on each side of the bed, and placed the child right in front of his face. How could anyone have withstood such pestering? In no time at all they managed to awaken Hsi-men Ch'ing, who opened his eyes to see what was going on and observed Kuan-ko right in front of his face, wearing the gold lamé Taoist cap on his head, dressed in the tiny Taoist robe, with the amulet on its cord around his neck. He was so delighted:

His eyebrows arched and his eyes lighted up,⁷

as he hastily picked him up, sat him on his lap, and gave him a kiss.

"What a clean mouth to kiss a baby with!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Little Taoist priest, Wu Ying-yüan, you ought to throw up in his face. Tell us, where were you yesterday:

Driving a water buffalo to plow the land,⁸

that you should be so exhausted today as to insist on going to sleep in broad daylight? Yesterday you kept your Fifth Lady waiting for you all day. You've got some nerve not to have come home to kowtow to your Fifth Lady on her birthday."



Holding Her Boy in Her Arms Li P'ing-erh Curries Favor

"Yesterday the *chiao* rites went on rather late," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and in the evening there was the ceremony of dismissing the generals. In addition, the abbot had prepared a banquet, and we ended up drinking all night long. Today, late as it is, I'm trying to catch a nap while I can, because I still have to go to Provincial Graduate Shang's place to attend a party."

"Why don't you skip it?" said Chin-lien.

"His household sent an invitation yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If I don't show up, they'll be sure to take offense."

"If you go," said Chin-lien, "come home a bit earlier tonight. I'll be waiting for you."

"The First Lady has had a meal laid out for you," said Li P'ing-erh, "and prepared some broth with marinated bamboo shoots. She invites you to come and have something to eat."

"I don't feel particularly like eating anything," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'll go and have some broth."

Thereupon, he stood up and went off to the rear compound.

When P'an Chin-lien saw that he was gone, she plumped her posterior down in the middle of the bed, rested her feet on the rim of the recessed brazier below, and said, "So this is a bed frame with a k'ang underneath it."

Reaching out her hand to feel the bedding, she said, "The k'ang has certainly been heated until its boiling hot."

Noticing that on a table to one side there was a warmer, with a cover of brass wire, used for heating ink stones, she

casually picked it up in one hand and said, "Sister Li, the ivory box on the incense stand over there contains pellets of sweet-smelling incense. Hand it to me, will you."

On the one hand, she opened the box and put some pellets into the warmer, while, on the other hand, she inserted it into her crotch and wrapped her skirt tightly about it, so that it would warm her body and fumigate her clothes at the same time.

After they had sat there for a while, Li P'ing-erh said, "Let's go back inside. I imagine Father has finished his meal and will be coming out again before long."

"What if he does?" said Chin-lien. "Are you afraid of him?"

Thereupon, the two of them, carrying Kuan-ko with them, went back to the rear compound.

After some time, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished eating, he instructed an orderly to prepare his horse and set off, sometime after noon, to attend the party at the home of Provincial Graduate Shang. Old Mrs. P'an had already departed before he did.

To resume our story, that night, when Nun Wang was about to return home, Yüeh-niang surreptitiously gave her a tael of silver and said to her, "Don't tell the abbess anything about it, but, whatever you do, contrive to go see Nun Hsüeh and bring a dose of that potion for me."

Nun Wang accepted the silver and said to Yüeh-niang, "After I leave now, I won't be able to come back before the sixteenth, but I'll endeavor to locate that ingredient for you."

"That's fine," said Yüeh-niang. "If you manage this affair successfully for me, I'll provide you with another expression of my gratitude."

Thereupon, the nun bade her farewell and departed.

Gentle reader take note: Generally speaking, the heads of prominent households should not patronize monks, or nuns, or go-betweens of this sort. In your:

Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
they establish intimacy with the womenfolk on the pretext of preaching about Heaven and Hell:

Expounding scriptures and explicating texts;
while, behind your back, they:

Name articles and cite clauses,⁹

On passion's heats and chills.

There is no telling what they will do. In nine cases out of ten, you will end up suffering calamity at their hands. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Black-robed Buddhist nuns are the most
unspeakable of creatures;
In vast courtyards and secluded mansions
they deceive beauties.
If persons of this ilk were really capable
of attaining Buddhahood;¹⁰
The Western Paradise would remain forever
a realm immersed in murk.¹¹

To resume our story, that evening when Chin-lien was getting ready to go to Yüeh-niang's room in order to visit with the rest of the company, she approached the mirror stand, took off the fret enclosing her chignon, and did up her hair in two curled knots on either side of her head. She then made up her face until it was snow white, painted her lips bright red, put on a pair of gold lantern earrings, applied three beauty patches, adorned herself with a purple gold lamé headband, and donned an outfit consisting of a jacket of scarlet brocade over a blue satin skirt. The idea was to present herself in the guise of a maidservant in order to have some fun with Yüeh-niang and the others.

When she asked Li P'ing-erh over to take a look, she:

Rocked backward and forward,
with laughter, saying, "Sister, you're the spitting image of a maidservant. Let me go back ahead of you. I've got a red cotton kerchief in my room I can put over your head to serve as a veil. I'll give them a scare by announcing that Father has found himself another maidservant, and they'll be sure to fall for it."



Dressing Up as a Maidservant Chin-lien Courts Affection

As they set off for the rear compound, with Ch'un-mei carrying a lantern ahead of them, they ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who said with a laugh, "I wonder who this can be? It can only be the Fifth Lady up to some trick or other."

"Son-in-law," exclaimed Li P'ing-erh, "come over here and let me explain. You go in first, and when you see them, do:

Thus and thus, and

So and so."

"I'll know what to do," said Ching-chi. "Leave it to me."

Thereupon, he proceeded into the master suite, where everyone was sitting on the k'ang, drinking tea.

"Mother," said Ching-chi, "take a look at this. Father, for no good reason, has engaged the services of Auntie Hsüeh to buy a twenty-four-year-old girl who knows how to play and sing from another household. She's just been delivered to our door by sedan chair."

"Really?" said Yüeh-niang. "Why didn't Auntie Hsüeh come and tell me about it beforehand?"

"She was afraid you'd give her a hard time," said Ching-chi, "so, no sooner did the sedan chair arrive than she took off, leaving the servants to bring her inside."

Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, didn't say anything, but Aunt Yang said, "His Honor has all of you ladies at his disposal already. What does he need another one for?"

"My dear lady," said Yüeh-niang, "how can you stop him? If he's got the money to do it, he can buy a hundred and it wouldn't be too many for him. We're like:

Women serving in the army:

Merely taking up space,
in these rooms here, that's all."

"Let me go take a look," said Yü-hsiao.

What should she see coming forward under the moonlight but a figure, wearing a veil over her head and dressed in red clothing, while Ch'un-mei, who had originally been carrying the lantern, had turned it over to the page boy Lai-an and was following in her wake, along with Li P'ing-erh. The situation created such a stir that Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh also came out to survey the scene.

In due course, they came into the room, where Yü-hsiao led her up to Yüeh-niang's side and said, "This is your mistress. Aren't you going to kowtow to her?"

So saying, she lifted the veil off her head, and Chin-lien proceeded to kowtow:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
but couldn't help breaking into a titter of laughter as she did so.

"Some maidservant you are!" said Yü-lou. "First you forget to kowtow to your mistress, and then you break out laughing."

Yüeh-niang also laughed, saying, "This Sister Six is such an inveterate prankster that she managed to fool all of us."

"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "I was not deceived."

"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "how did you manage to see through it so as not to be deceived?"

"When Sister Six has kowtowed in the past," explained Yü-lou, "she has always done it that way; first touching her forehead to the floor, and then getting up and retreating two steps before making her bow."

"It took you to see through it," said Aunt Yang. "As for me, I would have fallen for it."

"I fell for it too," said Li Chiao-erh. "Just now, if she hadn't taken off her veil and then started to laugh, I wouldn't have recognized her."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying Hsi-men Ch'ing's felt bag and reported, "Father has come home."

"You go stay out of sight in the parlor," Yü-lou said to Chin-lien. "When Father comes in, we'll have some fun with him."

It was not long before Hsi-men Ch'ing came in. Aunt Yang and Wu K'ai's wife had already gone elsewhere in anticipation of his coming. When he entered the room, he sat down on a chair.

Yüeh-niang, who was situated to one side, had nothing to say, but Yü-lou said to him, "Today Auntie Hsüeh brought a maidservant in her twenties from someone else's household over here by sedan chair, saying that you had told her to deliver her here because you wanted her. Old as you are, and with an official career in hand, it seems you remain as insatiable as ever."

"Since when did I tell her to buy any maidservant for me?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could you believe that old whore? She was pulling your leg."

"Just ask Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "if it isn't so. The maidservant in question is right here. I'm not fooling. If you don't believe me, I'll call her out for you to see for yourself."

Thereupon, she told Yü-hsiao, "Go drag that new maidservant in here to meet her master."

Yü-hsiao put her hand over her mouth and laughed, scarcely daring to do as she was told.

After venturing into the other room, she came back, saying, "She refuses to come."

"Let me go drag her in here," said Yü-lou. "What an impudent slave!"

Before being able to so much as shake her head,
she's defying her master. She's the sort who will never take instruction from anybody."

After she had proceeded into the parlor, the rest of them heard a voice saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! I'm not going in. All you seem to be able to do is drag me around. You're dragging me so fast:

My limbs can hardly touch the ground."

"A fine slave you are!" laughed Yü-lou. "Whoever taught you to be so unmannerly as to refuse to come in and kowtow to your master?"

And with that she dragged her into the other room. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look under the lamp light, he saw that it was P'an Chin-lien with her hair done up in two curled knots so as to look like a maidservant, which made him:

Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared.¹²

Chin-lien sat down on a chair next to him, and Yü-lou said, "What an impudent maidservant! For someone who's:

Newly come and just arrived,¹³
how can you be so:

Discourteous and ill-bred,¹⁴

as to sit down, as cool as you please, in front of your master, and splash muck on him to boot?"

Yüeh-niang laughed and said, "Take the occasion of your master's return home to kowtow to him."

Chin-lien made no move to comply but went into Yüeh-niang's inner room, took the pins out of her hair, put the fret back on her chignon, and came out again.

"What a wanton you are!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Whoever gave you permission to affect a fret on your chignon?"

Everyone laughed at this sally for a while longer.

Yüeh-niang then addressed herself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Today our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's family sent Ch'iao Tung over with six invitations, inviting us to a lantern-viewing party. Tomorrow we ought to send them some gifts in return."

She told Yü-hsiao to show the invitation card to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who saw that the text read as follows:

On the twelfth instant, our humble household has prepared a meager potation. If you deign to mount your elegant equipage and condescend to attend, our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.

The above is addressed to the dressing table of the venerable consort of our eminent kinsman of great virtue and renown, Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Cheng, of your humble kinsman of the Ch'iao family.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the invitation, he said, "Tomorrow morning, tell Lai-hsing to buy four appropriate delicacies and a jug of southern wine to send over to them. That ought to suffice. At the same time, we should send out invitations of our own for the fourteenth. We can invite Ch'iao Hung's wife, Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung's wife, His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's wife, and our kinsman Chang Kuan's wife. Our sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, will not have to return home in the interim. We'll get Pen the Fourth to hire a fireworks specialist to make several racks of fireworks for us, and engage the troupe of actors maintained by Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to put on a performance of *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. While you're at home enjoying the lanterns and drinking wine, I'll invite Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join me for a drink on the second floor of the house on Lion Street."

After he had finished speaking, it was not long before a table was set up and wine was served. P'an Chin-lien offered him a cup of wine and the other sisters followed suit, as they caroused for a while.

Now Hsi-men Ch'ing had been struck by the vision of Chin-lien disguised as a maidservant, and he observed under the lamplight that she was:

Alluringly dressed and heavily made up.

As a result, before he knew it, he was:

Carried away by lecherous desires,

and winked at her so incessantly, that she had no trouble knowing what was on his mind. Consequently, she continued to drink with the company for a while and then went off to her quarters in the front compound, where she doffed her headgear, did her hair up into a casual chignon in the Hang-chou style, and proceeded to:

Retouch her powdered face, and

Rerouge her ruby lips.

It so happens that she had long since set out a table for a drinking party, complete with fancy fruit and vegetable delicacies, in the expectation that Hsi-men Ch'ing would come to her room, so she could offer him a cup of wine.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing actually showed up. When he saw that her hair was still done up in a cloud-shaped chignon, his heart was filled with delight. He embraced her, and the two of them sat down on the same chair together and proceeded to laugh and talk with each other. It did not take long for Ch'un-mei to serve the wine and delicacies, and the woman once again offered him a cup of wine.

"Little oily mouth!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You already offered me one earlier, and now you're going to the trouble all over again."

"That drink amidst a crowd of people doesn't count," laughed Chin-lien. "This one represents my personal undertaking to offer you a cup of wine on my own behalf. Year after year I have put you to considerable expense. I hope you don't regret it."

This speech caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to:

Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,

and he promptly pulled her onto his lap and sat her on his knee, while Ch'un-mei poured the wine and Ch'iu-chü served the dishes.

"Let me ask you," said Chin-lien. "On the twelfth, did the Ch'iao family ask all of us to go, or only the First Lady?"

"Since they sent invitations to all of you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why shouldn't you go? When the day comes, I'll have the wet nurse take the child along, so he won't cry after his mother if left at home."

"The First Lady and the others all have appropriate clothes to wear," said Chin-lien. "Old fogey that I am, all I've got is that limited number of outdated things. I don't have anything really worth looking at. *Why* don't you take some of those newly purchased fabrics from down south and distribute a few pieces of them to the members of your family so they can be made up into something to wear? Are you hoarding them in the expectation that they'll propagate themselves, or what? That way, when the day comes for us to entertain the wives of all those officials, we'll be fit to be seen, and not just a laughingstock. I'm always reminding you of this, but you act oblivious to the problem."

"If that's the way it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow I'll call in Tailor Chao to make up some new clothes for all of you."

"There are only two days left," said Chin-lien. "If you wait until tomorrow to set the tailor to work, by the time he

finishes the job, it will be too late.”

“I’ll tell Tailor Chao to bring some additional helpers along with him,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “As long as they can make up a few items for each of you in a hurry, it will suffice. Whatever work is left over, they can do at their leisure, and it won’t be too late.”

“As I’ve urged you before,” said Chin-lien, “whatever you do, see that they make two first-class outfits for me. I’m not to be compared to the others, who all have wardrobes of their own. You haven’t had any formal clothes made especially for me.”

“You lousy little oily mouth!” laughed Hsi-men Ch’ing. “You’ve got to have your finger in every pie.”

The two of them continued to talk and drink together until the first watch before going to bed. The pair of them were like:

Mandarin ducks beneath the quilt;¹⁵
Phoenix mates within the curtains.¹⁶
The swallows twittered in the boudoir;
As their cloudy passions intermingled.

It was some time before they were willing to call a halt, as they kept at it for fully half the night.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch’ing returned from the yamen, he had the chests opened up and took out a bolt of block printed tussore fabric from the Imperial Silk Manufactory in the south. He then dispatched a page boy to call in Tailor Chao to make up full-sleeved robes of figured material for each of his womenfolk: one outfit of brocade, and one of figured fabric for each of them. Only Yüeh-niang was to get two scarlet full-sleeved brocade robes, and four outfits of figured material.

Hsi-men Ch’ing was in the summerhouse when he dispatched Ch’in-t’ung to fetch Tailor Chao. The tailor was at home, eating his dinner. When he heard that he was being summoned to Hsi-men Ch’ing’s residence, he hastily dropped his rice bowl, picked up his scissors and rule, and set forth. A contemporary composed several lines of verse to commemorate the strong points of this tailor:

I’m a tailor whose surname is Chao,
On call to my patrons each month.
Thread and needle I’m never without,
Rule and scissors are stuck in my boot.
Pleats and folds I find time to produce,
Faulty cuts I can fix in a trice.
Who cares if my clothes do not fit,
The lapels and the collars too tight?
Each day I eat meat at three meals,
And insist on two servings of wine.
Fabric samples I sell at my door,
Temple fairs I attend thrice a month.
When I’ve money my wife’s mouth is sleek,
When I’ve nothing the children all cry.
No matter whose clothes they may be,
In the pawn shop I put them to rest.
Though you pester me for them all day,
I’ve a ready excuse in my mouth.
If you claim you must have them at once,
I’ll put others in pawn in their stead.
If you ask what it is I do best,
I remain once for all on the take.

Before long the tailor arrived, found Hsi-men Ch’ing sitting at the upper end of the room, and made haste to kowtow to him, after which he spread out a strip of felt on the table, took out his scissors and rule, and set to work.

To start off with, he made Yüeh-niang a full-sleeved scarlet jacket of variegated figured brocade, a satin robe emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch’i-lin* being worshiped by the other animals, a robe of jet variegated silk with an edging of gold brocade featuring a pattern of phoenix mates traversing flowers inside a gourd-shaped border, an outfit consisting of a full-sleeved jacket of scarlet satin brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch’i-lin*, over a wide trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue brocade, and an outfit consisting of an aloeswood-colored jacket of figured silk brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square, over a trailing scarlet skirt sprigged with gold-stemmed and green-leaved flowers.

For the others, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P’an Chin-lien, and Li P’ing-erh, he made a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated satin with a figured pheasant motif, and two outfits of figured tussore fabric for each of the four of them. For Sun Hsüeh-o he only made the two outfits but did not make a robe.

In no time at all he had cut out the patterns for some thirty articles of clothing. Hsi-men Ch’ing paid him five taels of silver for his services and engaged ten or more other tailors to make up the garments as fast as possible in his own home. But no more of this. Truly:

Golden bells and jade earrings disguise
the sheltered virgin;
Brocaded silks and pearl headgear adorn
the beauteous maiden.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 41

HSI-MEN CH'ING FORMS A MARRIAGE

ALLIANCE WITH CH'IAO HUNG;

P'AN CHIN-LIEN ENGAGES IN A QUARREL

WITH LI P'ING-ERH

Equally endowed with wealth and distinction,¹
his inheritance is ample;
Streams of officials, in crimson and purple,
congregate at his door.
His office is high and his position important,
like those of Wang Tao;²
His family is prominent and his estate affluent,
like those of Shih Ch'ung.³
Amid painted candles and brocade curtains,
he whiles away the moonlit night;
Surrounded by silk clothing, rouge, and powder,
he is drunk in the spring breeze.
As indulgence in pleasure, by day and by night,⁴
continues year after year;
How can he ever make the effort to remain
constant from beginning to end?

THE STORY GOES that the clothes for his womenfolk that Hsi-men Ch'ing had engaged the tailor to come to his home to make were all finished before two days were over.

On the twelfth, the Ch'iao family sent someone to remind them of the invitation to their lantern viewing party. That morning Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent appropriate presents over to their place. That day Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, along with her sister-in-law, the wife of her eldest brother Wu K'ai, set out together in six sedan chairs, leaving Sun Hsüeh-o behind to look after the house. They were accompanied in two smaller sedan chairs by the wet nurse, Ju-i, carrying the infant Kuan-ko, and Lai-hsing's wife, Huihsiu, whose job it was to wait on them and fold their clothes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home, where he looked on as the fireworks specialist hired by Pen the Fourth prepared the racks of fireworks, and lanterns were hung in the main reception hall and the summerhouse. He also sent a page boy with a calling card to the mansion of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to engage the services of his troupe of actors, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

That afternoon he paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. Chin-lien was not at home, but Ch'un-mei waited upon him, serving him with tea and something to eat, and setting up a table at which he could have some wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Ch'un-mei, "On the fourteenth, when we are entertaining the wives of the various officials, it would be a good idea if the four of you senior maidservants would all get dressed up and assist your mistress in serving wine to the guests."

When Ch'un-mei heard this, she leaned nonchalantly on the table and said, "If you call on anyone to do that, call on the other three. As for me, I'm not going to do it."

"Why won't you do it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The ladies of the household have all had new clothes provided for the occasion," said Ch'un-mei, "so they will look good when entertaining the wives from the official families. As for us, each and every one looks just like a scorched pastry roll. Why should we have to put in an appearance for no good reason, only to make laughingstocks of ourselves?"

"Each of you have clothing and jewelry for yourselves," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can come out in full dress, with your cloud-shaped chignons sporting ornamental flowers bedecked with pearls and kingfisher feathers."

"I guess I can make do with my head ornaments," said Ch'un-mei, "but how can I wear that couple of old rags of mine, the only ones that amount to anything? I'd be ashamed to be seen in them."

"I understand you, little oily mouth," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The ladies of the household have had new clothes made for them, which has put you all in a huff. It doesn't matter. I'll get Tailor Chao to come and make up three articles of clothing for each of the four of you, and my daughter, Hsi-men Tachieh, into the bargain. Each of you shall have an outfit consisting of a satin jacket and skirt and a brocade vest."

"I'm not to be compared to them," said Ch'un-mei. "I demand a white satin skirt to wear, along with a vest of scarlet brocade."

"If that's what you want," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it doesn't matter. But I'll have to provide one for Hsi-men Ta-chieh as well."

"The young lady already has one, but I don't," said Ch'un-mei. "She's got nothing to complain about."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon procured the key, opened the door to the second floor room, and selected five outfits of satin clothing, two brocade vests, and a bolt of white satin, out of which two white satin jackets that opened down the middle were to be made. Only

Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Ch'un-mei were to have vests of scarlet brocade, while those of Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all of blue, their outfits consisting of scarlet satin gold lamé jackets that opened down the middle, to be worn over trailing skirts with kingfisher-blue borders. It added up to seventeen items of clothing in all.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent for Tailor Chao and had them all duly made to order. Ch'un-mei also demanded that a bolt of yellow silk be used to make the linings for the skirt waists, all of which were to be of Hang-chou silk. Only then did Ch'un-mei profess satisfaction and agree to spend the rest of the day drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing. But let us put the situation at home aside for the moment and say no more about it.

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives duly proceeded on their way to the home of Ch'iao Hung. It so happens that on that day Ch'iao Hung's wife had invited the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang Hsiao'ang, the wife of her next-door neighbor Censor Chu, her husband's elder sister Mrs. Ts'ui, her nephew Ts'ui Pen's wife Big Sister Tuan, and her niece Third Sister Cheng, the wife of Wu Shun-ch'en, and had also engaged two singing girls to entertain the gathering.

When she heard that Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, along with Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of her elder brother Wu K'ai, had arrived, she hastened out to the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard and ushered them into the reception hall in the rear compound, where the usual amenities were observed. She addressed Yüeh-niang as Aunt, and Li Chiao'erh and the others as Second Aunt, Third Aunt, and so forth, adopting the terms of address she had heard employed in the home of Wu K'ai's wife. When the newcomers had finished exchanging greetings with the wives of Provincial Graduate Shang and Censor Chu, Big Sister Tuan and Third Sister Cheng came forward to pay their respects, and everyone sat down in order of precedence.

When the maidservants had finished serving everyone with tea, Ch'iao Hung himself came out to greet them, and to thank them for their presents, after which his wife invited her guests into the master suite where they could loosen their formal clothing and relax. A table was set up for tea, at which the fare consisted of fancy steamed and deep-fried appetizers, stuffed pastry treats, preserved fruits, sweetmeats, and every kind of delicacy, all set out in a most elegant fashion. The guests were invited to sit down and partake of the repast, while the wet nurse, Ju-i, and Hui-hsiu looked after Kuan-ko in another room, where they were separately entertained.

In a little while, after the guests had finished their tea, they moved into the reception hall, where:

Screens display their peacocks' tails, and

Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.

There were four tables arranged along the upper end of the hall. Yüeh-niang was seated in the place of honor, followed in order of precedence by the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Wu K'ai's wife, the wife of Censor Chu, Li Chiao'erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing'erh, while Ch'iao Hung's wife assumed the role of hostess. Another table was set up to one side to accommodate Big Sister Tuan and Third Sister Cheng, making a party of eleven in all.

The two singing girls, situated to one side, played and sang for their entertainment. After soup and rice had been served, the chef came out to present the first course, which was jellied goose, and Yüeh-niang rewarded him with a tip of two mace of silver. The second course was slow-boiled pig's trotters, for which Yüeh-niang rewarded him with a tip of another mace of silver. The third course that he presented was roast duck, for which Yüeh-niang rewarded him with yet another mace of silver. Ch'iao Hung's wife then left her place in order to serve wine to her guests. After serving Yüeh-niang first, she went on to serve Provincial Graduate Shang's wife.

At this point, Yüeh-niang got up and retired to the inner room to change her clothes and redo her makeup. Meng Yü-lou also followed suit. When they arrived in their hostess's bedroom, what should they see but the wet nurse Jui who was looking after Kuan-ko. She had put him down on a little sleeping mat that was spread out on the k'ang frame, where he was lying right next to Chang-chieh, the newborn daughter of their host. The two of them were playing happily at:

You hit me a blow and I'll hit you one back,

which tickled Yüeh-niang and Yü-lou no end.

"The two of them are just like a couple," they exclaimed.

On seeing Wu K'ai's wife come in after them, they said to her, "Come and take a look. The two of them are really like a little couple."

"That's true," said Wu K'ai's wife with a smile. "The way the children on the k'ang are:

Reaching out their hands and kicking their feet,

playing at:

You hit me and I'll hit you,

makes them look like a predestined little couple."

When Ch'iao Hung's wife and the other female guests came into the room, Wu K'ai's wife repeated what she had said, thus and so.

"Distinguished kindred, listen to me," responded Ch'iao Hung's wife. "Such mean folk as ourselves would hardly dare aspire to a marriage alliance with the household of such a one as our aunt."

"My dear kinswoman, how can you say such a thing!" Yüeh-niang protested. "What sort of person do you take my elder brother's wife to be? What sort of person is Third Sister Cheng? It is wholly appropriate that you and I should:



The Interplay of Two Infants Leads to a Marriage Alliance

Cement the bonds of affection with the bonds of marriage.

After all, the little boy from my household is unlikely to disgrace the daughter of your house. How can you say such a thing?"

Meng Yü-lou nudged Li P'ing-erh, saying, "Sister Li, what have you got to say?" But Li P'ing-erh only smiled.

"If my kinswoman, Mrs. Ch'iao, does not consent," said Wu K'ai's wife, "I'll be upset."

The wife of Provincial Graduate Shang and the wife of Censor Chu chimed in, saying, "Mrs. Ch'iao, in response to the generous sentiments of your kins-woman, Mrs. Wu, you really ought not to decline."

They then went on to ask, "Your girl Chang-chieh was born in the eleventh month of last year, wasn't she?"

"Our little boy was born on the twenty-third day of the sixth month," said Yüeh-niang, "so he is the older by five months. They truly would make a couple."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, the whole group insisted on dragging Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, and Li P'ing-erh to the front reception hall, where the matrons of the two households formalized the betrothal of the children by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses,⁵ while the two singing girls played and sang to entertain them.

Once the situation had been explained to Ch'iao Hung, he brought out boxes of candied fruit, along with the customary three strips of red bunting, and proceeded to serve his guests with wine. Yüeh-niang, for her part, ordered Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to return home immediately in order to let Hsi-men Ch'ing know about it, and they subsequently returned bearing two jugs of wine, three bolts of satin, artificial flowers made of stiff velvet and gold thread, with red petals and green leaves, and four boxes, inlaid with mother-of-

pearl, containing candied fruit.

The members of the two families then proceeded to hang up the red bunting and celebrate the occasion with a drinking party.
Within the reception hall:

Painted candles are elevated on high,
Decorated lanterns flare resplendently,⁶
The fragrance of musk is luxuriant,
The sound of joyous laughter resounds.

In front of the gathering, the two singing girls:

Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,
Lightly plucked their jade mandolas, and
Casually grasped their balloon guitars,

as they sang the song suite that begins with the tune “Fighting Quails.”⁷

Inside kingfisher-hued window gauze,
Underneath mandarin duck azure tiles,
Hidden by peacock-adorned silver screens,⁸
Amid hibiscus-decked embroidered couches,
Curtains of gossamer silk are rolled up,
Incense smolders in duck-shaped censers,⁹
Lamps are suspended above,
Blinds are lowered below.
This is the residence of a Minister of the Department of State Affairs,
The son-in-law of the reigning emperor.

To the tune “Prelude to Purple Blossoms”

The soldiers in his entourage are clad in red, bearing painted halberds;
The officers of his command wear “Hooks of Wu” hanging from brocade belts;¹⁰
The guest at his feast sports an embroidered cap adorned with palace flowers.¹¹
The entertainment accords with that of the Music Office,
The extravagance compares with that of the Palace Garden.
The tempo is provided by clappers of red ivory,¹²
The strains of a classic melody are about to be performed.
Two rows of beauties as pretty as pictures stand to either side.
Powdered faces about silver psalteries,
Jade fingers pluck at balloon guitars.¹³

To the tune “Golden Plantain Leaves”

All I can see is crimson candles burning brightly in silver candlesticks,
As slender fingers raise aloft jade goblets.
Noting that his demeanor is both dignified and elegant,
I go over under the lamplight so I can take a good look at him.

To the tune “Flirtatious Laughter”

This gentleman is surely someone I have seen somewhere before.
Can it be that my eyes are deceiving me?
Ah! Putting my hand to my teeth,¹⁴ I try to remember.
Once having set eyes on him, I can't help being disturbed at heart.
Could he turn out to be my adversary in delight¹⁵ from five hundred years ago?¹⁶
Before whose house has he tethered his horse to the green willows?¹⁷
It must have been no more than a dream vision of clouds and rain in Witch's Gorge.¹⁸

To the tune “Impatiens Blossoms”

Having played through the melody on the jade flute¹⁹ under the verdant peach trees,
A single moment was worth a thousand pieces of gold.²⁰
Under the lamplight he is looking me over out of the corners of his eyes,
In such a way that my face is suffused with the glow of sunset clouds.
My master is afraid I am remiss in letting your wine cup remain empty.
I am just seventeen, and have not been betrothed,
A budding peony, delicately nurtured²¹ by my master.

To the tune “The Spectral Triad”

He has uttered but a handful of disconsolate words,
Which cause my tears to fall in incessant cascades.
I cannot control the monkey of my mind and the horse of my will.²²
I am no more than a delicate Lo-yang flower,
In danger of becoming a target of romantic gossip.²³
These words may sound like a joke, but they're not a joke;
This allegation may seem to be false, but it isn't false.
That one is trying to pull up the trees to investigate the roots,
While this one is pointing to a deer and calling it a horse.²⁴

To the tune “Shaven-Pated Rascal”

My efforts to admonish him are as futile as trying to immerse a melon in water;²⁵
His staring at me is about as effective as gazing at flowers in a mirror.
It is said that young scholars have always been frivolous in their affections;
And here he is flirting with a dainty maiden from a good family.

To the tune “Sacred Bhairava-Rāja”

How am I to rescue the situation?
My master is difficult to placate.
As in the receptions of Kung-sun Hung, there is a hubbub in the Eastern Vestibule.²⁶
The feast on tortoiseshell mats is disrupted.
The parrot-beak-shaped conch goblets are discarded.
The silver candlesticks and crimson silk lamp shades have been kicked over.
He has drawn his three-foot sword from its scabbard.

CODA

It has always been true that scholars possess lustful daring as big as the sky,²⁷
Which frightens this fainthearted Cho Wen-chün half to death.²⁸
It's a case of a too hot-tempered Cho Wang-sun,
And an overly ardent Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju of the Han.²⁹

Thereupon, the assembled guests saw to it that Wu Yüeh-niang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Li P'ing-erh stuck the artificial flowers in their hair, while red bunting was hung up, drinks were offered to them, and they formally saluted each other. When this ceremony was completed, the feasting was resumed, and everyone sat down to continue drinking together.

The chef first presented a course consisting of little molded cakes of glutinous rice flour, with a sweet stuffing, and the character for long life embossed on their surfaces, along with a lotus pod soup filled with auspicious ingredients, such as double-headed lotus blossoms, that suggest the beauty of a summer pond, after which he proceeded to carve a dish of roast marbled pork.

Yüeh-niang, who was seated in the place of honor, was utterly delighted by all this and, calling Tai-an over, instructed him to award the chef with a bolt of crimson fabric, and to give one to each of the two singing girls as well, for which gratuities they all kowtowed in gratitude.

Ch'iao Hung's wife was still unwilling to let her guests go, but invited them back to the rear hall to sit down a while longer. A profusion of serving dishes, along with partitioned boxes of assorted delicacies, were laid out for them there. The party continued until the first watch before Yüeh-niang finally said her farewells and prepared to go home.

“Kinswoman,” she said to her hostess, “tomorrow, whatever you do:

Deign to drop in on our humble abode,
and visit with us for a while.”

“Kinswoman,” replied Ch'iao Hung's wife, “I appreciate your generous hospitality. But my husband has said that it might not be appropriate for me to join you on this occasion. I'll come and visit you another day.”

“My dear kinswoman,” protested Yüeh-niang, “it's not as though there will be anyone else there. You're just being standoffish.”

She then suggested that her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, should remain overnight, saying, “If you don't go home today, you can accompany Kins-woman Ch'iao to our place tomorrow.”

“Kinswoman Ch'iao,” said Wu K'ai's wife, “it doesn't matter if you don't go on any other day, but you surely mustn't fail to pay a visit on the fifteenth, which is your new kinswoman's birthday.”

“If the fifteenth is my kinswoman's birthday,” said Ch'iao Hung's wife, “how could I presume not to go?”

“If my kinswoman fails to come,” said Yüeh-niang, “I've turned the responsibility over to you, Sister-in-law, and I'll hold you accountable.”

Thereupon, after insisting that Wu K'ai's wife remain behind, Yüeh-niang and her entourage said goodbye and got into their sedan chairs. Two orderlies preceded them, holding large red lanterns, and shouting to clear the way, while two page boys, also holding lanterns, brought up the rear. Wu Yüeh-niang's sedan chair went first, followed by those of Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yülou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, in single file, while the chairs of Ju-i and Hui-hsiu followed in their wake. Inside her sedan chair, the wet nurse saw to it that Kuan-ko was tightly wrapped in a little red satin coverlet, to protect him from the cold, while she propped her feet on a brass warmer below. With the two page boys following behind, they arrived in due course at the front gate and dismounted from their sedan chairs.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine in the master suite when Yüeh-niang and the others came in, exchanged salutations, and sat down, after which the maidservants came in and kowtowed to them. Yüeh-niang wasted no time in telling him all about the betrothal that had been arranged at the feast that day.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard her out, he asked, “Who were the other female guests at the party today?”

“There were the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang,” said Yüeh-niang, “along with the wife of Censor Chu, our host's elder sister, Mrs. Ts'ui, as well as her two nieces.”

“If you've made a betrothal,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “I guess that's that. But it's not an entirely appropriate match.”

“The fact is, it was all my sister-in-law's doing,” said Yüeh-niang. “When she saw their newborn baby daughter and our child reclining on the k'ang frame together, under the same coverlet, and playing at:

You hit me a blow and I'll hit you one back,
she thought they looked just like a little couple and called us over to see. She brought the possibility up, and right at the party:

Without premeditation or forethought,³⁰

we agreed to this marriage alliance. It was only then that I sent the page boys over to tell you about it, and to arrange for the delivery of the artificial flowers, red bunting, and boxes of candied fruit."

"Since you've made this betrothal, I guess that's that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. But it's not an entirely appropriate match. Although the Ch'iao family is wealthy enough at present, he is no more than a well-to-do householder in the district, of commoner status. Whereas, in our case, I currently occupy this official position and manage affairs in the yamen. In the future, at the betrothal celebrations, he will only be entitled to wear the informal skullcap of a commoner. How will he be comfortable associating with an official family such as ours? It really won't look right.

"Just the other day, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung sought the aid of our relative Chang Kuan of the local garrison, in repeatedly suggesting to me a marriage alliance with his family. He said that their daughter was just five months old, so that she would be the same age as our child. But I was concerned that she didn't have a proper mother, having been born to a concubine, so I refused the offer. I scarcely anticipated that we would end up making such a marriage alliance after all."

P'an Chin-lien, who was standing to one side, picked up on this, saying, "If you object to someone's having been born to a concubine, who among the parties involved was not born to a concubine? This child of the Ch'iao family was also born to a concubine. Truly:

When the Spirit of the Perilous Paths runs into the God of Longevity;³¹
If you refrain from commenting about my height,
I'll not complain about that shortness of yours."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was enraged and cursed at her, saying, "You lousy whore! Mind your own business. While we're talking here, for you to:

Stick your beak in and wag your tongue,
is completely out of place."

Chin-lien's face turned crimson with embarrassment, and she beat a hasty retreat, muttering as she went, "Whoever said I had the right to speak? It's obvious I haven't the standing to say anything."

Gentle reader take note: When Chin-lien observed the way in which Yüeh-niang and Ch'iao Hung's wife agreed to the betrothal at the party that day, with the result that Li P'ing-erh was draped in red fabric and had artificial flowers stuck in her hair, while wine was presented to her, she became very sore at heart. The fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing saw fit to curse at her this way on her return home only made matters worse, and she withdrew to Yüeh-niang's inner chamber to cry.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "How come your sister-in-law didn't come back with you?"

"Kinswoman Ch'iao," explained Yüeh-niang, "on learning that so many wives of officials would be at our place tomorrow, declined my invitation, and I suggested that my sister-in-law stay on at their place, so she could bring her along with her on the morrow."

"Just as I said," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the seating plan at the party tomorrow is going to be awkward to arrange. I don't know how we're going to handle it when we get together in the future."

They talked for a while longer, after which Meng Yü-lou came into the inner room and found Chin-lien crying there.

"What are you so upset about?" she asked. "Let him have his say, and forget about it."

"Fortunately you were there to hear it with your own ears," said Chin-lien. "What did I say that was disparaging of him? But I had a point to be made. He said that the other family's child was born to a concubine. I said, 'Was the Ch'iao family's child not born to a concubine? She was also born to a concubine.' Does he think that:

By wrapping it in a paper bag,
He can fool anyone?

You'll come to a bad end, you lousy ruffian! Then he opened his eyes wide and started cursing at me in a way that was so:

Unfeeling and unjustifiable.

Why shouldn't I have the right to say what I think? He's had a change of heart, and, in the days to come, he'll:

Suffer the consequences before my very eyes.³²

What I didn't say was that that infant relative of the Ch'iao family's at least came into this world with something of Old Man Ch'iao's spunk in her, whereas that child of your's:

Has strayed out of familiar territory.

Who knows whose seed he was sired by? If people want to play the game of seeking marriage alliances in order to enhance their social standing, what right does that give you to take out your annoyance on me? What's my cunt got to do with it that you should start in cursing me? How old is your son, anyway? He's nothing but a puny armload of a bladder's spawn. And you're already putting him on the marriage market for no good reason.

You've got so much money you don't know what to do with it.

If you tug on the sheet until it's torn, you'll have no cover.

The dog who bites the inflated bladder, will find his excitement deflated.

Right now the relationship may be wet enough, given the age of the parties involved, but, in the future, if you don't watch out, it may turn out to be no more than an arid pseudo relationship.

If you blow out the lamp and close your eyes,

You can hardly expect to see what is to come.

People may feel well disposed toward each other at the time they make such alliances, but, more often than not, they end up feeling differently three or five years later."

"As disingenuous as people may be nowadays," said Meng Yü-lou, "they seldom go in for this sort of thing. If you stop to consider it, it's early days yet. For children who are hardly out of the womb, what's the point of exchanging cuttings from your lapels? It's no more than playing the game of seeking marriage alliances in order to enhance one's social standing, that's all."

"Even if that wife of yours is so wantonly anxious to play the marriage alliance game," said Chin-lien, "what right does that give the lousy refractory ruffian to start cursing at me for no good reason? It seems that:

All you get for raising toads is dropsy.
What's the point of it all?"

"Whoever told you to blurt out your thoughts in such an imprudent way?" said Yü-lou.

"If he doesn't curse you,
Should he curse the dog instead?"

"It would have been awkward for me to say it right out," said Chin-lien. "Was I supposed to pretend that the child was not born to a concubine, but to the principal wife? Even though the Ch'iao family's child was born to a concubine, at least it came into the world with something of Old Man Ch'iao's spunk in her, whereas that child of your's:

Has strayed out of familiar territory.

Who knows whose seed he was sired by?"

When Yü-lou heard this, she sat for a while without saying another word, until Chin-lien went back to her quarters.

On noticing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone outside, Li P'ing-erh, once again:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,

kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Elder Sister, in this matter of the child today, I thank you for all the trouble you went to."

Yüeh-niang, with a smile, knelt down and returned her salutation, saying, "Congratulations to you."

"And to you, too, Elder Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.

When they had finished kowtowing to each other, Li P'ing-erh got up and sat down to chat with Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh.

What should they see at this juncture but Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who came in to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and greeted Li Chiao-erh and Li P'ing-erh in turn. Hsiao-yü served them with tea.

As they were drinking their tea, what should they see but Hsiu-ch'un, the maidservant from Li P'ing-erh's quarters, who came to fetch her mistress, saying, "The little fellow is looking for you in your room, and Father has sent me to ask you to return there."

"The wet nurse hurried off without anyone's knowing it," said Li P'ing-erh, "and carried him back to the room. It would have done just as well for us to go back together. As it is, there was probably no lantern for the child."

"When we came in the gate just now," said Yüeh-niang, "I told her to take him back to your room. I feared it was getting late."

"Ju-i took him back just a while ago," said Hsiao-yü. "Lai-an carried a lantern and escorted them on the way."

"That's all right then," said Li P'ing-erh, who, thereupon, took her leave of Yüeh-niang and returned to her quarters, where she found Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuan-ko, who was asleep in the arms of the wet nurse.

"So there you are," she said. "Why didn't you speak to me before carrying him off that way?"

"The First Lady saw that Lai-an was there with a lantern," said Ju-i, "so I took advantage of that fact to bring him home. The little fellow cried for a while, and I only now managed to pat him back to sleep."

"He clamored after you for some time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "before finally going to sleep."

When Li P'ing-erh had finished asking about the baby, she turned to him with a simpering smile and said, "Today the child has been betrothed, for which I'd like to express my gratitude to you with a kowtow."

Thereupon:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she knelt down and made him a kowtow. This pleased Hsi-men Ch'ing so much that his face became wreathed in smiles, and, hastening to help her to her feet, they sat down together, and she told Ying-ch'un to serve them with wine. The two of them then proceeded to drink wine together in her room.

To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien returned to her quarters in a huff and was not in the best of moods, knowing perfectly well that Hsi-men Ch'ing was at Li P'ing-erh's place.

As a consequence, when Ch'iu-chü was slow about opening the gate, no sooner was she inside than she boxed her ears twice and cursed her in a loud voice, saying, "You lousy slave of a whore! How is it that I've had to call all day long before you opened the gate? What have you been up to? I'll not have anything more to say to you today."

Thereupon, she went into her room and sat down.

When Ch'un-mei came in to kowtow to her and serve her with tea, the woman asked her, "That lousy slave! What was she doing in here?"

"She was just sitting in the courtyard," said Ch'un-mei. "When you called for her I urged her to get a move on, but she didn't pay any attention."

"I'm perfectly aware," said Chin-lien, "that when he and I have a falling out, it's just like the way:

Defender-in-chief Tang Chin learned to eat steamed dumplings,

By imitating the way other people did it.³³

She thinks she, too, can take advantage of me."

Chin-lien wanted to give her a beating there and then but was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in the adjacent quarters, would hear her, so she kept her anger to herself. Meanwhile, she took off her fancy attire, had Ch'unmei lay out her bedding, got into bed, and went to sleep.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone off to the yamen, the woman made Ch'iu-chü balance a flagstone on her head and kneel down in the courtyard until she had finished combing her hair. She then told Ch'unmei to pull down her trousers and bring her a heavy bamboo cane with which to flog her.

"What a filthy slave!" complained Ch'un-mei. "If you have me pull down her pants, it will only dirty my hands."

She then went up front and called for the page boy Hua-t'ung to come and pull down Ch'iu-chü's drawers for her.

The woman then proceeded to cane her, cursing as she did so, "You lousy slave of a whore! Since when did you become so uppity? Other people may see fit to favor you, but I'll never favor you. Sister:

You know it and I know it.

You'd do better to slack off a bit. What need is there for you to stick your neck out and put on airs for no good reason? Sister, you'd

better give up any such presumptions. From now on, I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where you're concerned."

As she vilified her, she continued to beat her, and as the beating continued, she gave vent to further vilification. The caning continued until Ch'iu-chü:

Howled like a stuck pig.



P'an Chin-lien Punishes Ch'iu-chü to Get at Li P'ing-erh

Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, had just gotten up and looked on as the wet nurse suckled Kuan-ko and then put him back to sleep. He was startled back awake, however, by the commotion next door. She overheard perfectly clearly everything that Chin-lien had to say while caning her maidservant, as she blurted things out:

Without any consideration for the consequences.

Rendered quite speechless, in her consternation, she merely covered Kuanko's ears and told Hsiu-ch'un, "Go over and say to the Fifth Lady, 'Don't beat Ch'iu-chü any more. The baby has just had some milk and has gone back to sleep.'"

When Chin-lien heard this, she beat Ch'iu-chü all the harder, cursing as she did so, "You lousy slave! You'd think someone were sticking ten thousand knives into you, the way you scream for mercy. Well, it's just my temperament, but the more you scream, the harder I'll beat you. You've already succeeded in arresting the attention of a passerby, who's come to contemplate the sight of a maidservant being beaten. Well, my good Sister, you can always tell your husband about it, and get him to give me a hard time."

Li P'ing-erh, from her vantage point next door, understood perfectly well that Chin-lien's abuse was really directed at her. She was so upset by it that her two hands turned cold, but she chose to:

Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel.

Though she dared to be angry,
She dared not speak.

That morning she didn't even have a drop of tea but clasped Kuan-ko in her arms and went back to sleep on the k'ang.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the yamen, he came into her room to see Kuan-ko and found that Li P'ing-erh was lying on the k'ang, and that her eyes were red with weeping.

"How come you still haven't combed your hair or straightened yourself up?" he asked. "The lady in the master suite would like to have a word with you. What have you been rubbing your eyes for, until they're so red?"

Li P'ing-erh made no reference to the way in which Chin-lien had vilified her, but simply said, "I'm not feeling very well."

"Our kinfolk of the Ch'iao family have sent birthday presents for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "A bolt of fabric, two jars of southern wine, a tray of sweet-meats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, and four kinds of savories. They've also sent some holiday gifts for Kuan-ko, consisting of two trays of Lantern Festival dumplings, four trays of candied fruit, four trays of premium grade nuts, two beaded hanging lanterns, two folding-screen-shaped lanterns spangled with gold, two bolts of crimson government-grade satin, a black satin cap with gold pins representing the eight auspicious symbols³⁴ attached to it, two pairs of boy's shoes, and six pairs of women's shoes. Before we have even paid them a formal visit, they have sent these holiday gifts for our child.

"Right now, the lady in the master suite would like you to go and discuss the situation with her. They have sent the go-between, Auntie K'ung, to represent them, along with their servant, Ch'iao T'ung, who is in charge of delivering the gifts, and our sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, has come ahead to say that Kinswoman Ch'iao will not be able to come tomorrow but will pay a visit the following day.

"Their family also has a relation, Madame Ch'iao, who is the widow of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Ch'iao the Fifth. When she heard that they were forming a marriage alliance with us, she was pleased as could be, and she would also like to visit us on the fifteenth. We'll have to send her an invitation."

When Li P'ing-erh had heard all this, she finally got up, reluctantly, to comb her hair and set off for the rear compound to pay her respects to Sister-in-law Wu and Auntie K'ung. She found that tea was being served to them in Yüeh-niang's room, and that the presents were on display in the parlor. After looking them all over, she arranged to send back the boxes in which they had come, gave gratuities of two handkerchiefs and five mace of silver apiece to Auntie K'ung and Ch'iao T'ung, wrote a thank-you note, and also sent someone to deliver an invitation to Madame Ch'iao. Truly:

Only inclined to entertain their favorites with bells and drums,

Would they have herded with dogs and sheep for the nation's sake?³⁵

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Hsi-men Ch'ing, enjoying his singular wealth, is altogether too complacent;
Agreeing to a marriage alliance for his son, while he is still in diapers.
Not only does he squander his property as though it were mere muck;
But he ought to pay more attention to the fate of his posterity.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 42

A POWERFUL FAMILY BLOCKS ITS GATE

IN ORDER TO ENJOY FIREWORKS;

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS IN A HIGH CHAMBER

APPRECIATE THE LANTERNS

The moon and stars dominate the void
as a myriad candles blaze;
In the human realm, and in Heaven above,¹
there are two Lantern Festivals.
When music is performed in the spring
it sounds especially good;
As people return from the revels by night
even their horses are smart.
Do not waste the fullness of your youth,
so quickly does it pass;²
With total impartiality, white hair
does not let anyone escape.³
Since even a thousand pieces of gold buys
such a little time;
Let the watchman take his time striking
the watches of the night.

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off the representatives of the Ch'iao family, he came back to the master suite to talk things over with Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and Li P'ing-erh.

"Since their family has anticipated us by sending over holiday gifts for our child," said Yüeh-niang, "we can hardly avoid buying holiday presents of our own to send to their daughter, Chang-chieh. They can be regarded as being temporary equivalents of betrothal gifts. That way we won't be remiss in our social obligations."

"Our side of the family ought to select a go-between," said Sister-in-law Wu. "It would make the negotiations back and forth more convenient."

"They have chosen Auntie K'ung," said Yüeh-niang. "Who should we select for the job?"

"One guest does not trouble two hosts,"

said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well give the job to Old Mother Feng."

Thereupon, eight invitation cards were hastily written out, and Old Mother Feng was sent for. She was instructed to take a letter box containing the invitations and deliver them, along with Tai-an, inviting Kinswoman Ch'iao, Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, the wife of Censor Chu, Kinswoman Ts'ui, Big Sister Tuan, and Third Sister Cheng, along with Sister-in-law Wu, to a lantern viewing party on the fifteenth in celebration of Li P'ing-erh's birthday.

At the same time, Lai-hsing was sent off to the confectioner's with the necessary silver to place an order for steamed-shortcake pastries, which were to be served on large square trays. He ordered four trays of steamed pastries: two of stuffed moon cakes, and two of rose-flavored Lantern Festival dumplings. He also bought four trays of fresh fruit: one of prunes, one of walnuts, one of longans, and one of litchis; and four trays of casseroles: one of roast goose, one of roast chicken, one of pigeon, and one of dried whitebait. In addition there were two outfits of brocaded tussore clothing, one little crimson robe, a miniature fret of crepe and gold filigree, two translucent ramshorn lanterns from Yunnan, as well as a box of trinkets containing a pair of little gold bangles, and four gold rings set with precious stones.

Ying Po-chüeh happened to show up at this juncture in order to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing about the question of when the merchant contractors Li Chih and Huang the Fourth would receive payment for the consignment of goods they had undertaken to purvey for the use of the imperial household. When he saw the flurry of activity, he asked what it was all about.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him about the marriage alliance he had made with the household of Ch'iao Hung and went on to say, "On the fifteenth, whatever happens, I hope that your wife will be able to come and keep company with our new kinsfolk."

"If my sister-in-law so wishes," said Ying Po-chüeh, "my wife will be sure to come."

"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my wife is entertaining the wives of the various officials, so we can convene at the house on Lion Street."

That day, the fourteenth, when the presents had been packed, he had his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, accompanied by Pen the Fourth, dressed in his black livery, deliver the gifts. They were duly entertained by the Ch'iao household, who lavishly returned the compliment by sending the gift boxes back filled with numerous examples of needlework and footwear, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

To resume our story, that day Wu Yin-erh in the licensed quarter also brought gifts ahead of time in honor of Li P'ing-erh's birthday.

She had purchased a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, two roast ducks, a set of pig's trotters, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a pair of women's shoes for the occasion, in order to pay obeisance to Li P'ing-erh as her godmother and get herself acknowledged as an adopted daughter. Yüeh-niang accepted the gifts on her behalf and sent the sedan chair back home.

Li Kuei-chieh did not arrive until the following day, and when she saw that Wu Yin-erh was already there, she surreptitiously asked Yüeh-niang, "How long has she been here?"

Yüeh-niang told her, thus and so, "Yesterday she brought gifts and paid obeisance to the Sixth Lady in order to be acknowledged as her adopted daughter."

When Li Kuei-chieh heard this, she hadn't a word to say, but she was huffy with Wu Yin-erh all day long, the two of them refusing to speak to each other.

To resume our story, the troupe of twenty actors that Hsi-men Ch'ing had borrowed from Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, arrived in the front reception hall, carrying their trunks. They were under the supervision of two instructors and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing on their arrival. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that they should use an anteroom on the western side of the front compound as their green room, that they were to be provided with food and drink, and that when the female guests arrived they should welcome them in with a flourish of wind and percussion instruments.

In the main reception hall:

Tortoiseshell mats look spruce

Brocade carpets cover the floor.

The first guests to arrive were the wife of Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-chief Ching Chung's mother, Madame Ching, and the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, all of whom were in large sedan chairs, escorted by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, and attended by the wives of their household retainers. Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, all dressed in formal gowns, came out from inside to greet them and ushered them into the rear reception hall, where, after the appropriate salutations had been exchanged, they were invited to sit down and have some tea.

They were waiting for the arrival of the wife of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling before tea was to be served, but who could have anticipated that although they waited until noon, she had not yet come. Page boys were dispatched to urge her on her way two or three times, but it was not until early afternoon that she finally arrived, with escorts shouting to clear the way, bearers carrying her dressing cases, attended by the wives of her household retainers, and surrounded by a retinue of servants. After she had been escorted to the rear reception hall to the strains of martial music and exchanged amenities with the other female guests, they all sat down in order of precedence.

First tea was served to them in the summerhouse, after which they were invited to take their seats in the main reception hall. Refreshments were served and wine was poured by Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang, all of whom were adorned with cloud-shaped chignons, pearl necklaces, gold lantern earrings, brocade vests, scarlet satin jackets, and kingfisher-blue gold lamé skirts, with the exception of Ch'un-mei, who sported pendant earrings set with precious stones and a scarlet brocade vest.

That day the private troupe of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, performed *Hsi-hsiang chi*, or *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. We will say no more for the moment about how the party progressed:

Deeply secluded within the decorated hall:⁴

Amid clustering pearls and kingfisher ornaments,⁵

Song and dance and wind and string instruments,

but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

That day, after he had seen that the female guests in his home were offered tea, he mounted his horse and proceeded to the house on Lion Street, where he had arranged to meet with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta. He directed that one of the four racks of fireworks that he had ordered should be taken there, and that two of them should be set up for the entertainment of the female guests that night. On the second floor of the house on Lion Street standing screens and a table of refreshments were set up, lanterns were hung, a chef was engaged to relight the fire in the stove, two food boxes containing meat and vegetable dishes and two jars of Chin-hua wine were dispatched from home, and two singing girls, Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan, were engaged for the occasion.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had previously sent Tai-an to hire a sedan chair and invite Wang Liu-erh to join him at the house on Lion Street.

On seeing her, he said, "Auntie Han, Father has invited you to the house over there to enjoy the fireworks this evening."

"I'd be too embarrassed," the woman laughed. "How could I do that? Wouldn't your uncle Han be upset if he found out about it?"

"Father has already spoken to Uncle Han about it," said Tai-an. He wants you to get yourself ready as quickly as possible. He would have sent Old Mother Feng for you, but they are entertaining the wives of the various officials today, and the Sixth Lady has told her to help tend Kuan-ko, so she's over there looking out for herself. Father insisted on sending me instead. He has engaged two singing girls, and there is no one to keep them company."

When the woman had heard him out, she was still unwilling to make a move, but before long, who should turn up but Han Tao-kuo himself.

"Well, if it isn't Uncle Han," said Tai-an. "Auntie Han here won't believe what I tell her."

The woman turned to her husband and said, "Do you really want me to go?"

"The master has repeatedly remarked that there is no one to keep the two singing girls company," said Han Tao-kuo. "He has invited you over there to enjoy the fireworks tonight. He's waiting for you. Haven't you gotten yourself ready yet? He also told me, just now, to close up the shop and come visit with him myself this evening. Lai-pao has also gone home for the time being. It's his turn to spend the night at the shop this evening."

"Who knows how late it will be before the party breaks up," the woman said. "When you go over there, stay a little while and then come home. There's no one to look after the place, and you don't have to spend the night at the shop."

When they had finished speaking, she dressed up for the occasion and, accompanied by Tai-an, went straight to the house on Lion

Street. Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," had previously straightened up the bedroom and its k'ang frame, put out the ready-made curtains and bedding, lit some benzoin and aloeswood incense which exuded a pungent fragrance, hung up two gauze lanterns in the room, and ignited the charcoal in the brazier on the floor. The woman walked in and sat down on the k'ang. After a while, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," came in, bowed to her, saying, "Many felicitations," and served her with tea.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-ch'üeh, after having looked at the lanterns for a while, finally arrived at the house, where they sat down on the second floor to play backgammon together. There were six windows with suspended blinds on the second floor overlooking the Lantern Market below, where:

The merrymaking was at its height.

After they had played backgammon for a while, they put the game away and had something to eat. The two of them then proceeded to look down on the Lantern Market from inside the blinds. Behold:

The people from ten thousand households are attired in brocade;
Their perfumed carriages and fine steeds rumble like thunder.
Hills of lanterns soar into the heavens above the azure clouds;
From whence do revellers not congregate to take in the sights?⁶

Ying Po-ch'üeh happened to ask, "How many people from the Ch'iao household are coming to your place tomorrow?"

"Their relative Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, the distaff relative of the imperial family, is coming; but I won't be home tomorrow. In the morning I've got to go to the temple to attend the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal in celebration of the Festival of the First Prime, and after that, Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has invited me to a party."

As he was speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that, amid the throng of people below, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, and a man wearing a square-cut scholar's cap were standing beneath a lantern stall, looking at the lanterns.

Pointing them out to Ying Po-ch'üeh, he went on to ask, "Do you happen to recognize that man wearing the square-cut scholar's cap? What is he doing tagging along with them?"

"He has a familiar look about him," replied Ying Po-ch'üeh, "but I don't recognize him."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Tai-an, "You go down there and surreptitiously invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to come up here. But don't let Pockmarked Chu, or that other fellow, catch on."

Now the page boy Tai-an was the sort of knave of whom it could be said:

He doesn't miss a wink.

He went straight downstairs and insinuated himself into the midst of the crowd. Waiting until Chu Jih-nien and the other person had moved along, he stepped out from one side and gave Hsieh Hsi-ta a tug with his hand, which startled him into turning around to see who it was who had accosted him.

Tai-an said to him, "Father and Master Ying the Second are on the upper floor here and would like to have a word with you."

"You go ahead," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I understand. Wait until I've accompanied the two of them as far as the place where they're making artificial plum blossoms. I'll come to see your master after that."

Tai-an then disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Who would have thought that, no sooner did they arrive at the place where they were making artificial plum blossoms, than Hsieh Hsi-ta ducked into the crowd, leaving Chu Jih-nien and the other person to look for him in vain, and made his way upstairs to see Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-ch'üeh.

Upon seeing the two of them, he said, "Brother, if you were coming here to see the lanterns, why didn't you say something about it this morning to let me know your plans?"

"I didn't feel like mentioning it in front of everyone this morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I did send Brother Ying the Second to your place to invite you, but you were not at home. By the way, did Pockmarked Chu see that you were coming here just now?"

"And who was that fellow wearing the square-cut scholar's cap?" he went on to ask.

"The person wearing the square-cut scholar's cap," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "is Wang the Third, the son of Imperial Commissioner Wang. Today he came to my place with Pockmarked Chu to ask for my assistance in arranging a loan of three hundred taels of silver from the moneylender Hsü Pu-yü, or Reneger Hsü. He has asked me, along with Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, to be guarantors for the loan. He wants to pursue a career by purchasing a position in the Military School, but I can't be bothered to take an interest in his private affairs. Just now I was accompanying him for a stroll in the Lantern Market, when your esteemed servant summoned me, so I simply saw them as far as the place where they're making artificial plum blossoms and then, taking advantage of the crowded situation, gave them the slip and came to join you."

Turning to Ying Po-ch'üeh, he then went on to ask, "How long have you been here?"

"Brother initially sent me to your place, but you weren't at home," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "So I came here and have been playing backgammon with him for a while."

"Have you eaten yet?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have the page boy bring you something to eat."

"You must know," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "that after leaving your place this morning, I've spent the whole day with those two, so how could I have had anything to eat?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "Go down to the kitchen and prepare something for Master Hsieh to eat."

Before long, the table was wiped clean, and a platter of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres, two bowls of different kinds of soft-boiled fricassee, a bowl of blanched pork and vermicelli soup, and two bowls of white rice were placed before him. Hsieh Hsi-ta set to and polished it off all by himself, leaving the utensils spick-and-span, within and without; after which he poured the remaining gravy over his rice and gobbled it all up. When Tai-an had cleared the dishes away, Hsieh Hsi-ta sat to one side and looked on as the other two played backgammon.

What should they see at this juncture but the two singing girls who got out of their sedan chairs at the door and came in smiling, while the sedan chair bearers brought in their bundles of clothes.

Ying Po-chüeh, who had already spotted them through the window, said, "So, the two little whores are only now arriving." He then instructed Tai-an, saying, "Don't let them go into the rear of the house. Have them come upstairs to see me first."

"Which two have been engaged for today?" Hsieh Hsi-ta asked.

"It's Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan," replied Tai-an.

Then, hastening downstairs, he said to them, "Master Ying the Second wants to have a word with you."

The two of them refused to comply but proceeded straight back to the rear, where they were greeted by "The Beanpole" and ushered into a room where they encountered Wang Liu-erh.

On her head she sported a fashionable fret with a twisted center and a gold-spangled sheepskin headband; on her torso she wore a purple jacket of Lu-chou silk, a jet cloak with a stiff-standing, tilelike collar, over a white drawnwork silk skirt; beneath which appeared the upturned tips of her two golden lotuses, enclosed in black satin, flat-heeled shoes that were chain stitched with sand-green thread. Her temples were adorned with two long spit curls, she had a rosewood complexion, and she did not use much face powder, attempting to emulate the style of a person of middling status. From her ears dangled a pair of clove-shaped pendant earrings.⁷

On coming in the door, they made her an obeisance and then sat down on the edge of the k'ang. Little Iron Rod served them with tea, and Wang Liu-erh joined them in drinking it. The two singing girls could not take their eyes off her, looking her over from top to toe. After staring for a while, the two of them laughed awkwardly, not knowing who they were in the presence of.

Later on, when Tai-an came in, they surreptitiously asked him, "Who is that person in the room?"

Tai-an didn't know what to reply, merely saying, "She's the master's aunt, who's been invited here to see the lanterns."

When the two of them heard this, they returned to the room and began anew, saying, "We didn't realize, just now, that you were an aunt in the family, so we failed to show you proper respect. Please don't take it amiss."

Thereupon, as though inserting a taper in its holder, they kowtowed to her twice, which flustered Wang Liu-erh into hastily returning half a kowtow to them. Later on, refreshments were served, and they ate them together. The two of them then got out their instruments and sang for Wang Liu-erh's entertainment.

When Ying Po-chüeh had finished a game of backgammon, he came downstairs to relieve himself. Hearing the singing in the interior of the house, he beckoned to Tai-an and asked him, "Tell me. Just who are the two singing girls performing for back there?"

Tai-an merely smiled, without making a sound, and said, "You're like:

The intendant of the Ts'ao-chou Military Defense Circuit:

The area of your jurisdiction is broad.⁸

What's it to you whether they sing or not?"

"Why you lousy little oily-mouth!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you refuse to tell me, you needn't fear that I won't find out."

Tai-an laughed and said, "If you can find out, so be it. What are you asking me for?" After saying which, he headed straight into the rear of the house.

Ying Po-chüeh went back upstairs, where Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to play three more games of backgammon with Hsieh Hsi-ta.

Whom should they see at this juncture but Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two of whom suddenly came upstairs and kowtowed to them.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "The two of you have arrived in the nick of time. Where have you been, and how did you know we were here?"

Li Ming knelt down, deferentially covered his mouth with his hand, and said, "Wu Hui and I initially dropped by His Honor's residence, but the people there said that he was having a party with all of you at the house over here, so we came over to offer our services."

"That's fine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can stand up and wait in attendance."

Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "Go quickly across the street and invite your uncle Han to come join us."

Before long, Han Tao-kuo arrived, made a bow, and sat down. A table was then set up, a platter of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres suitable to accompany a drinking party was brought up from the kitchen, and Ch'in-t'ung stood at their side, decanting the wine from a brass warming pan equipped with a wire-mesh strainer. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta occupied the positions of honor, Hsi-men Ch'ing played the role of host, and Han Tao-kuo took a seat to one side. As soon as they were seated, wine was poured, and Tai-an was dispatched to the rear of the house to invite the singing girls to join them.

After a brief interval, Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh, the two of them:

Just as slow and easy as you please,
came up the stairs, and:

Neither correctly nor precisely,
kowtowed to the company.

Ying Po-chüeh took them to task, saying, "I wondered who they were, and it turns out to be these two little whores. Just now, you knew I was here, and that I was calling for you, so why didn't you come to pay your respects to me first? What a nerve! In the future, if I don't give you both something to remember me by, you'll get completely out of hand."

"Brother here," said Tung Chiao-erh with a laugh, "has been reduced to:

Making faces at me over the wall;

He's scaring me to death!"

"As we all know," chimed in Han Yü-ch'uan:

"The little darling, in flashing his animal mask over the ramparts;

Is just a child, displaying his ugliness."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "there's a downright redundancy around here today. Since we already have Li Ming and Wu Hui to sing for us, what do we need these two little whores for? You'd better send them packing as soon as possible. On the evening of a major festival like this, they can still pick up a few coins for themselves. If you wait until it's too late, there will be no one around to want them."

"Brother," protested Han Yü-ch'uan, "how shameless can you get? It's His Honor who called for our services. We're not here to

cater to you. Brother, how can you bring yourself to vent your spleen so aimlessly?"

"Why you silly little splay-legged whore!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You're here right now, and if you don't cater to me, to whom are you going to cater?"

Han Yü-ch'uan responded:

"When Fatty T'ang fell into the vinegar vat, Enough got splashed on you to turn you sour."

"Why you lousy little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's turned me sour, has it? Just you wait. When we break up and you're ready to go home, I'll have something to say to you. One way or the other, there are two different things I can do, so you needn't expect to escape."

"And what two things are those?" demanded Tung Chiao-erh. "Tell me about them."

"The first thing I can do," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is to report you to the police and have you arrested for violating the curfew. Then the next day I could send a card to Commandant Chou and have you subjected to a good finger-squeezing. Or, if you were really recalcitrant, it would only require three candareens worth of distilled spirits to get your chair bearers drunk enough to take advantage of you. Then, when you got home late, with no money to show for it, the madam would be sure to give you a beating for your pains, which would be no skin off my back."

"If it gets too late," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "we won't go home, but spend the night in His Honor's house here. Or else, we can get His Honor to send someone to escort us home."

Whether Dame Wang gets her hundred cash or not,

It's not up to you.⁹

What a rot-talking sl/imy kn/ave¹⁰ you are!"

"If I'm a slave," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the world, nowadays, must be topsy-turvy. The time has come to:

Call a spade a spade."

When they had talked and laughed together for a while, the two singing girls stood to one side and sang a song celebrating the beauties of spring. Only after that did the company proceed to devour the refreshments that had been provided for them.

At this juncture, who should appear but Tai-an, who came in to say that Master Chu had shown up; which news failed to elicit any response from the company.

Before long, Chu Jih-nien came up the stairs and, on seeing that Ying Pochüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were there, said, "So, the pair of you are feasting away, are you? What sort of conduct is that?"

"And as for you, Tagalong Hsieh," he went on to say. "If Brother invited you up here, you might have given me the word, instead of slipping off that way without anyone's knowing it, and leaving me to look for you in vain around the area where they make the artificial plum blossoms."

"I just happened to stray out of the way," explained Hsieh Hsi-ta, "and chanced to see Brother up here playing backgammon with Brother Ying the Second. When I came upstairs and saluted them, Brother asked me to stay."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Tai-an, "Go get a chair for Brother Chu, and give him a seat at the other end of the table."

Thereupon, Tai-an provided a place setting for him at the lower end of the table, and he sat down. Soup and rice were brought up for him from the kitchen, and he joined the others in consuming the refreshments.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had eaten only a single steamed bun, and swallowed a mouthful of soup, he noticed that Li Ming was standing beside him and gave the remainder of his food to him, to take off and eat by himself. Meanwhile, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, and Han Tao-kuo consumed a soup of eight ingredients served in a large, deep porcelain bowl decorated with a blue and white pattern and ate three large steamed buns apiece, as well as four steamed open-topped dumplings, the tops of which were adorned with peach blossoms. Only a single steamed bun was left to anchor the plate. After the servants had cleared away the soup bowls, wine was decanted and they proceeded to drink.

Hsieh Hsi-ta then asked Chu Jih-nien, "How far did you go with him before you managed to get away, and how did you know that I was here?"

Chu Jih-nien, thereupon, told him about it, thus and so, saying, "After looking around for you a while without success, I accompanied Wang the Third to Sun T'ien-hua's house, where we had agreed to meet, and then proceeded to Hsü Pu-yü's place to arrange a loan of three hundred taels of silver. But Blabbermouth Sun, the old oily-mouth, had composed a defective loan contract."

"Leave my name out of the contract," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I don't want any part of it. One way or the other, you and Old Sun can act as guarantors, and dun him for a guarantor's fee to spend on yourselves."

"What did he get wrong on the contract, anyway?" he went on to ask.

"I had told him," replied Chu Jih-nien, "to word the contract in somewhat slippery terms, stipulating three preconditions for the repayment of the loan; but he did not follow my suggestion, so I had to rewrite the document from scratch."

"So how did you word the contract?" asked Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Read it aloud for our benefit."

"This is the way I worded it," said Chu Jih-nien.

The contracting party, Wang Ts'ai, scion of the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang, (instead of "because he wants money to spend," amended to) wanting money to spend, has arranged, through the good offices of Sun T'ien-hua and Chu Jih-nien, to borrow the sum of three hundred taels of (instead of "silver," amended to) soft currency, and agrees to remit (instead of "interest," amended to) a "plum" of five hundred cash per month, and commits himself to repay the principal (instead of "next year," amended to) when three preconditions are met. These three preconditions are: firstly:

When the windblown axle of a windlass knocks a goose out of the sky;

secondly:

When the fish underneath the surface leap onto the shore;

and thirdly:

When the rocks submerged underwater dissolve into powder.

Only when these three preconditions are met will repayment of the loan become due. (He had written "In the year when the boundary stones nod their heads repayment of the loan will become due." But I pointed out that the precondition "when the boundary stones nod their heads" might be met if there should be an earthquake some year. Where would that leave you? So I amended it to read) If the borrower should lack the funds to repay the loan, the guarantors will make themselves scarce. Lest questions should arise in the future, this written contract as set down is hereby declared invalid. (At the end I also had him append the words "null and void.")

"If you word it that way," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "it could hardly be said not to be slippery enough. By the time the rocks submerged underwater have been reduced to powder:

Who knows whether the monk will still be around or not?"¹¹

"That's to put too good a construction on it," said Chu Jih-nien. "If someday there should be a drought and water levels are low, the court would order the dredging of the waterways, and the submerged rocks might be hacked to powder with two or three blows from a workman's mattock. Where would that leave you? In such a case you'd be unable to avoid paying back the loan."

As the group of them talked and laughed together for a while, it gradually became evening, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the lanterns should be lighted. Two translucent ramshorn lanterns of extraordinary intricacy were suspended under the eaves, one on either side.

Who could have anticipated that at this juncture Yüeh-niang, back at home, should have sent Ch'i-t'ung and an orderly to deliver four partitioned boxes of mouth-watering sweetmeats and fancy fruits for their delectation. There were:

Blazing yellow kumquats,
Fragrant red pomegranates,
Delectable bittersweet olives,
Verdant green apples, and
Redolently fragrant pears.

And there were also:

Honeysweet candied persimmons,
Sugar-soaked giant dates,
Butterfat pine nut pastries,
Elephant-eye-shaped sesame candy,
Domino-like deep-fried sweetmeats, and
Honey-basted chain-shaped crullers.

In addition there were:

Willow-leaf candy, and
Ox-hide taffy.

Truly, they were things:

Rarely found in this world,
Seldom seen in the universe.

Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Ch'i-t'ung to come forward and asked him, "Has the conclave of ladies at home broken up yet, or not? Are they still there drinking wine? And who sent you to deliver these treats here?"

"The First Lady sent me to deliver them," replied Ch'i-t'ung, "for you to enjoy here with your wine. The party has not broken up completely yet. After four scenes of the hsi-wen drama had been performed, the First Lady kept them for another round of drinks at the front gate, so they could enjoy the fireworks."

"Are there onlookers there?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The people who came to watch filled the street," replied Ch'i-t'ung.

"I told P'ing-an," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to retain four black-clad orderlies and station them at the gate, with staves in hand, to hold back the crowd if necessary, and not let any riffraff press too close."

"P'ing-an and I, along with the orderlies, were all there to oversee the fireworks display," said Ch'i-t'ung. "It was only after most of the company had left that the First Lady sent me here. There weren't any riffraff causing trouble."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he ordered that the leftovers remaining on the table be cleared away and replaced with the boxes of treats that had just arrived. A serving of stuffed Lantern Festival dumplings was brought up from the kitchen, and the two singing girls poured the wine.

On the one hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'i-t'ung to go home and look after things there, while, on the other hand:

More vintage wine was poured, and
Another feast of delicacies was spread.

Li Ming and Wu Hui were then asked to entertain the company with a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, to the tune "Fresh Water Song" in the *shuang-tiao* mode:

On this festive day in the metropolis we enjoy the Lantern Festival.¹²
Encompassing the hills of lanterns, auspicious clouds gather.
One gazes at the pure luster of the stars of the milky way,
And observes the moon's orb, high over the celestial moat.
The strains of a classic melody are struck up.
Tortoiseshell mats are spread,
In order to enjoy the revels.

To the tune "River-bobbed Oars":



A Powerful Family Blocks Its Gate in Order to Enjoy Fireworks

Decorated lanterns are suspended on either side,
 On top of which, a skyful of moon and stars¹³ shine bright.
 Everywhere we look, the pendants of embroidered sashes are flying in the wind,
 Jeweled canopies sway gently,
 On hills of lanterns, the lamplight is scintillating,
 Paper cutouts of spring moths quiver atop chignons.

To the tune “Seven Brothers”:

On the one hand, there is dancing,
 There is singing,
 And there is instrumental music.
 The astonishing vaudeville acts are truly marvelous;
 The terrifying aerial performances are utterly inimitable;
 The comical yūan-pen farces are truly comical.

To the tune “Plum Blossom Wine”:

Ah! On one hand, they do the dance of the old crone.
 The wellborn young ladies are dolled up to look their best,
 Displaying their seductiveness in a myriad ways,¹⁴
 With a hundred allurements and a thousand coquetties.¹⁵
 On the one hand, hoofers parade to the drum,

On the other hand, mummers parade on stilts.
It is truly a comical sight.
The fine haze is redolent of orchid and musk.
With broad smiles we drink the fragrant wine.

To the tune "Enjoying the South":

Ah! Today, in joyous abandon, we feast in order to celebrate the Lantern Festival.
Slender jade fingers gently strum the rosewood instruments.
The light of the lanterns and the bright moon illuminate each other,
Shining on towers and terraces, halls and chambers.



Distinguished Guests in a High Chamber Appreciate the Lanterns

Today is a time to relax, become intoxicated, and devote ourselves to pleasure.¹⁶

When the singing was over, they ate the Lantern Festival dumplings, and then Han Tao-kuo was the first to go home. Shortly thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Lai-chao to open up the twelve-foot-wide lower room, hang up the blinds, and carry the rack of fireworks outside. Hsi-men Ch'ing and his guests looked on from the second-story, while Wang Liu-erh, along with the two singing girls and Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," were able to watch the show from the floor below.

Tai-an and Lai-chao set up the rack of fireworks in the middle of the street and, moments later, proceeded to set them off. The bystanders on either side who crowded around to see the show:

Rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows,

Were incalculable in number.¹⁷

They all said, "When His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing chooses to put on a fireworks display here, who wouldn't come to see it. Truly, they have been set up just right. What fine fireworks!" Behold:

The rack of fireworks soars up fifteen feet high;
On all sides hill-shaped booths bustle with activity.
On the highest point there stands an immortal's crane,
Holding a vermilion edict suspended from its mouth,
Which turns out to be a "high-rising rocket."¹⁸
When it first takes off,
With a sudden rush, it creates a trail of cold light,¹⁹
Boring its way right up beside the Herd Boy and the Dipper.
Only after that,
In the middle distance, a "watermelon bomb" explodes into sight,
Showering sparks on the spectators in all four directions,
Pi po-po, a myriad thunderclaps all resound at once.
"Lotus-gathering boats" and "brighter than moonlights,"²⁰
One chasing after the other,
Are just like "golden lanterns"²¹ dispersing the "stars in the azure sky."
"Purple grapes,"²² by the thousands and ten thousands,
Resemble a cascade of "black dragon pearls," a "portiere of beaded crystal."
The "whips of the Hegemon-King"²³ crack everywhere;
The "earthbound rats"²⁴ scurry about under peoples' clothes.
"Alabaster cups" and "jade saucers,"
Whirl about in a way that is truly spectacular;
"Silver moths" and "golden cicadas,"
Display ingenuity that could scarcely be improved upon.
The "Eight Immortals bearing birthday gifts,"
Severally display their magic powers;²⁵
The "Seven Sages subduing demons,"²⁶
Appear completely shrouded in flames.
"Yellow sparklers"²⁷ and "green sparklers,"
Produce enveloping mists resembling a "myriad sunset clouds;"
"Quick- and slow-blooming lotus blossoms,"²⁸
Flare resplendently, vying to display a "montage of brocades."²⁹
"Ten-foot chrysanthemums"³⁰ and "smoky orchids"³¹ confront each other;
"Big pear blossoms"³² and "fallen peach blossoms" contest the spring.
"Towers and terraces," "halls and chambers,"
In but a trice cease to exhibit their lofty eminence;
The drumming of the "parading village mummers,"
Seems to subside, its joyful hubbub no longer heard.
The "peddler's basket,"
Above and below, shines crystal clear;
The "old crone's cart,"
Both head and tail, explodes to bits.
The "Five Devils plaguing the Assessor,"³³
With scorched heads and singed scalps³⁴ manifest their bellicosity;
As a result of the "tenfold ambushade,"³⁵
Horses collapse, men gallop away, and the outcome remains in doubt.
Despite the fact that infinite ingenuity may have been expended
In the end:
The fire burns out and the smoke dissolves,³⁶ leaving nothing but ashes.

The jade clepsydra with its bronze tanks should not hurry one along;³⁷

The starry bridges and trees of lanterns³⁸ will scintillate until dawn.³⁹

The ten thousand varieties of puppetry are nothing but illusions;
Providing an excuse for the revellers to return home with a smile.

Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ching was drunk, and when he went downstairs to relieve himself immediately after the fireworks were over, he noticed that Wang Liu-erh was there, so he took Hsieh Hsi-ta and Chu Jihnien by the hand and left without bidding his host farewell.

"Where are you off to?" asked Tai-an.

"My clever child," Ying Po-chüeh whispered into his ear, "it's that matter I asked you about before. If I were not to go, those others would stick around indefinitely, which would look as though I didn't know the score. When your master asks, just tell him that we've all left."

Later on, when Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that the fireworks were over and asked where Ying Po-ch'ieh and the others had gotten to, Tai-an said, "Master Ying the Second and Master Hsieh all went off together. I wasn't able to hold them back. They told me to convey their thanks."

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not inquire any further but summoned Li Ming and Wu Hui, rewarded each of them with a large bumper of wine, and said, "I won't pay you the fee for your performance right now, because I'd like the two of you to come and help out again, early on the sixteenth. I'll be entertaining those three, Master Ying the Second and the others, along with my managers and employees, for a drinking party at the front gate that evening."

Li Ming knelt down, and said, "I'm bound to report to Your Honor that on the sixteenth, I, along with the other three, Wu Hui, Tso Shun, and Cheng Feng, all have to report for duty at the installation ceremony for the newly promoted prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, His Honor Hu Shih-wen, so we couldn't show up before some time in the afternoon."

"In any case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we won't begin drinking until evening. Just be sure you don't fail to appear, that's all."

"We would never dare let you down," the two of them said.

Thereupon, they knelt down to consume the wine that was offered them and then prepared to go out the door and make their farewells.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to the two singing girls, "Tomorrow, I'm entertaining some female guests at home. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh will also be there. Be sure that the two of you come along as well."

The two boy actors and the two singing girls then went out the gate together. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, after ordering Lai-chao, Tai-an, and Ch'in-t'ung to see that everything was properly cleared away, and to put out the lamps and candles, retired to the bedroom in the rear of the house.

To resume our story, Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, had been outside watching the fireworks display when he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had withdrawn to the interior. Thereupon, he went upstairs, where he found his old man putting together a platter of leftover meat and other fare, along with a goblet of wine, and a few Lantern Festival dumplings, to take into their room. When he asked his mother, "The Beanpole," for some of it, she saw that he was still holding a singed firecracker in his hand and gave him a couple of slaps for his pains, but she did not prevent him from going into the rear courtyard to play.

Upon hearing the sound of laughter coming from the main room on the courtyard, he thought, "It must be the singing girls who haven't left yet." Noticing that the door was closed, he thereupon proceeded to peer inside through a crack and saw that the interior was brightly lit by lamps and candles. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wang Liu-erh were engaged in intercourse on the edge of the bed. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already the worse for wear, had bent the woman over the edge of the bed where, by the light of the lamp, he had stripped off her drawers, fastened the clasp on his organ, and was busy plucking the flower in her rear courtyard. Once he got started, he slammed away at her, back and forth, being good for no less than several hundred thrusts at a time. As he slammed away:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

The noise of their panting, and their back and forth movements, sounded, for all the world, as though they were engaged in breaking up the bed and could be heard everywhere. The little boy was too preoccupied by staring at this sight to notice when his mother, "The Beanpole," happened to come into the rear courtyard.

When she saw what her child was up to, she grabbed him by the tuft of hair on top of his head, dragged him back to the front of the house, gave him a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles, and scolded him, saying, "You lousy mischief-making little slave! All you need is to risk your life a second time by going and eavesdropping on him once again!"

Thereupon, she gave him several Lantern Festival dumplings to eat, refused to let him out of the room, and threatened him into getting onto the k'ang and going to sleep.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman kept at it for about the time it would take to eat two meals before finally calling it quits. Tai-an, who had taken care of providing food and wine for the chair bearers, then escorted her back to her home and returned to join Ch'in-t'ung in carrying lanterns as they accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing back to his residence. Truly:

Do not fear lest the bright moon should set,

It will be succeeded by a subtle fragrance.⁴⁰

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Enjoying the view from the Southern Tower, he forgets to go back;
However romantic the occasion may be, how long can it last?⁴¹
By his return, the bright moon will be down at the third watch;
Obsessed with pleasure, before he knows it, he is utterly sloshed.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 43

BECAUSE OF THE MISSING GOLD

HSI-MEN CH'ING CURSES CHIN-LIEN;

AS A RESULT OF THE BETROTHAL

YÜEH-NIANG MEETS MADAME CH'IAO

Scrutiny of the events of past and present
can only induce sorrow;
The exalted and the humble alike return
to a mere mound of earth.
Where are the occupants of the Jade Hall
of Emperor Wu of the Han?¹
Within the Golden Valley of Shih Ch'ung²
the river flows aimlessly on.
Light and darkness continue to alternate
as dawn turns into dusk;
The luxurious foliage of spring inexorably
gives way to that of autumn.
Since mundane affairs, like time itself,
will never come to an end;
One might as well become a sojourner in
the Land of Drunkenness.³

THE STORY GOES that it was already the third watch by the time Hsimen Ch'ing returned home. When he went back to the rear compound, he found that Wu Yüeh-niang had not yet gone to bed, but was sitting up with her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, and the others, having a chat. He also noticed that Li P'ing-erh was still in attendance, helping to serve the wine. As soon as Sister-in-law Wu saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, she moved into another room. Yüeh-niang, observing that he was inebriated, helped him off with his outer clothes and merely had Li P'ing-erh kowtow to him, after which they sat down together, and he asked a few questions about how things had gone at the party that day. After Yü-hsiao had served him with tea, because Sister-in-law Wu was there, he went to Meng Yü-lou's room to spend the night.

The next day, the chef arrived early in order to take care of the arrangements for the catered banquet. It was a day on which Hsi-men Ch'ing had to go to the yamen to perform the ceremonies of bowing before the imperial tablet and presiding over the general disposition of pending cases. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling saw him, he expressed his thanks for the pains he had expended for the entertainment of his wife the previous day.

"I fear the fare was extremely meager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Forgive me. Forgive me."

When he arrived home, he found that Ch'iao Hung's household had sent Auntie K'ung to escort a servant from Madame Ch'iao the Fifth's establishment, who delivered gifts of a jug of southern wine and four kinds of delicacies for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the gifts and saw that the servant was provided with food and wine. Auntie K'ung made her way to the rear compound where she was given a seat in Yüeh-niang's room. The sedan chair of Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, was the first to arrive, and after she had paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she joined the others in keeping Auntie K'ung company while tea was served.

Just at this juncture, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth showed up with the sum of a thousand taels of silver that they had received in payment for the consignment of incense and wax that they had purveyed for the use of the imperial household and had arranged with Pen the Fourth to convey to Hsimen Ch'ing's residence from Tung-p'ing prefecture. When Ying Po-chüeh got wind of this, he also hurried over to assist in seeing it duly transferred to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Ch'en Ching-chi was ordered to weigh it out with a steelyard in the reception hall, and when this process was completed, it was put away for safekeeping. They still owed Hsi-men Ch'ing five hundred taels of capital and a hundred and fifty taels of interest. On this occasion, Huang the Fourth brought out four gold bracelets, weighing thirty ounces altogether, as payment of the hundred and fifty taels of interest and proposed that they renegotiate the contract for the remainder of the debt.

"Wait until after the Lantern Festival is over," Hsi-men Ch'ing told the two of them. "You can come back and discuss it then. I'm tied up at home for the next few days."

At this, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth, reiterating, "Your Honor this, and Your Honor that," went out the gate with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.

Ying Po-chüeh, preoccupied with the thought that since they had promised him something in the way of a karmic encumbrance, this would be a good opportunity to ask them about it, wanted to follow after them, but Hsi-men Ch'ing called him to a halt in order to have a word with him.

"Yesterday," he proceeded to ask, "how come the three of you ran off that way, before anyone was aware of it, without telling me what you were doing? I sent a page boy after you, but he fell behind and was unable to catch up with you."

"Yesterday," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I fear we imposed upon you egregiously and consumed more than enough wine. When I saw that you were in your cups and recalled that your wife was entertaining today and must be waiting up to discuss things with you, I realized that if we didn't take ourselves off, there was no telling how late we would keep at it. As it is, my guess would be that you haven't made it to the yamen today. You've been wearing yourself out for days on end."⁴

"By the time I got home yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was already the third watch. Today I had to go to the yamen early to participate in the ceremony of bowing before the imperial tablet, take my place in court, and preside over the general disposition of pending cases, as well as spending some time on other public business. At the moment I'm preoccupied with the preparations for the party for the womenfolk here at home. And later today, after coming back from offering incense at the temple in connection with the *chiao* rites in celebration of the Festival of the First Prime, I've got to go to a party at the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu. Who knows what time it will be before I get home."

"It's a good thing you've got the temperament for it," said Ying Po-chüeh. Such great good fortune as yours, and I'm not just flattering you to your face, is something that nobody else could hope to handle."

The two of them talked for a while, and Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to keep him there to share a meal with him, but Ying Po-chüeh said, "I won't have anything to eat. I'm on my way."

"Why hasn't your wife shown up for the party?" Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask.

"The sedan chair for my wife has already been ordered," Ying Po-chüeh said. "She'll be here any minute now."

Whereupon, raising his hand in salute and saying goodbye, he went out the gate and hastened after Li Chih and Huang the Fourth. Truly:

Even if you command the art of driving the fog and mounting the clouds;⁵

You cannot hope to obtain fire by drilling ice⁶ without the aid of money.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off Ying Po-chüeh, he fondled the four blazing yellow gold bracelets in his hand, which he found to be very worthy of admiration.

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,

"This baby boy that Sister Li has borne is certainly starting out on a firm footing. No sooner was he born than I had this official position unexpectedly conferred upon me, and now I have formed a marriage alliance with the Ch'iao family, and made all this money to boot."

Thereupon, he secreted the four gold bracelets in his sleeve and, instead of going back to the rear compound, went straight into the garden, headed for Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

Just as he passed by the postern gate of P'an Chin-lien's quarters, Chin-lien happened to come out and, catching sight of him, called him to a halt, saying, "What's that you've got in hand there? Come over and let me have a look."

"Wait until I come back," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll let you see what it is then."

Whereupon, carrying his burden as before, he continued on his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

The woman, on seeing that she had failed to call him back, was more than a little mortified and said, "What sort of rare object could it be that he should be in such a frightful hurry over, refusing to let me see it? May he break his leg, the lousy three-inch good-for-nothing of a ruffian! When he sets foot on her threshold, may he come a cropper, fracture both his legs, and thereby:

Suffer the consequences before my very eyes."

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, carrying the gold bracelets in hand, went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and saw that she had just finished combing her hair, and that the wet nurse was holding the baby and playing with him. He went straight over to them and, putting the four gold bracelets into the baby's hands, encouraged him to play with them.

"Where did those come from?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I'm afraid they may be too cold for his hands."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her all about how Li Chih and Huang the Fourth had shown up that day in order to repay the silver they had borrowed from him, and that he had agreed to accept these gold bracelets in lieu of interest. Li P'ing-erh, fearful lest the baby's hands should be chilled, insisted on chafing the bracelets with a figured handkerchief before letting him continue to play with them.

Whom should they see at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and reported, "Manager Yün Li-shou has ridden over with two horses and is waiting outside. He'd like Father to go out and take a look at them."

"Where did Manager Yün come by these horses?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He says that his elder brother, Assistant Regional Commander Yün, sent the horses from his post on the frontier," replied Tai-an. "He claims that they can really step along pretty well."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou, accompanying Sister-in-law Wu, and her daughter-in-law, Third Sister Cheng, who had all come from the rear compound to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see Kuan-ko.

Hsi-men Ch'ing left the four gold bracelets behind and went out to the main gate to see the horses.

On observing that a crowd of visitors had arrived, Li P'ing-erh was so preoccupied by the need to greet them and offer them seats that she forgot what the baby was doing. He continued to play with the gold bracelets, pulling them about this way and that, until one of them got lost in the process.

At this juncture, the wet nurse, Ju-i, said to Li P'ing-erh, "Mother, did you happen to pick up one of the gold bracelets the baby was playing with? There are only three of them left, so one of them is missing."

"I haven't picked any of them up," said Li P'ing-erh, "but I wrapped them in a handkerchief for him."

"The handkerchief has also fallen on the floor," said Ju-i. "I've shaken it out, but the gold bracelet is nowhere to be found."

At this, consternation broke out in the room. The wet nurse interrogated Ying-ch'un, and Ying-ch'un, in turn, interrogated Old Mother Feng.

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" Old Mother Feng exclaimed. "I'm not so blind as to be unable to see anything. In all the years I've been here, I've never presumed to pick up so much as a broken needle. As Mother knows perfectly well, even if it were made of gold, it wouldn't be anything I'm enamored of. It's you two who are in charge of looking after the baby. You'd better not try to pin any unjust accusations on

me.”

“Just listen to the nonsense this old crone talks,” laughed Li P’ing-erh. “If the missing object weren’t gold, what would all the fuss be about?”

She also took Ying-ch’un to task, saying, “You lousy little stinker! Why are you making such a to-do about it for no good reason? When your father comes in, I’ll ask him about it. I imagine he may have picked it up, but I don’t know why he only picked up one of them.”

“Where did this gold object come from?” asked Meng Yü-lou.

“Father brought it in and gave it to the baby to play with,” replied Li P’ingerh. “Who knows where it came from?”

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch’ing would spend some time looking over the horses in front of the main gate. His managers and servants were all gathered there. He had page boys ride the horses back and forth and put them through their paces for two trial runs.

“Although these two horses may come from the Eastern Circuit,” opined Hsi-men Ch’ing, “their manes and tails are not much to look at, and they can’t really step along as well as they should. When it comes to trotting, they do all right, but that’s all.”

Turning to Manager Yün, he asked, “How much does your elder brother want for these horses?”

“He’s only asking seventy taels of silver for the two of them,” replied Yün Li-shou.

“That’s not a lot to ask,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “but they don’t seem able to really step along. You’d better take them back with you. If you happen to come up with any better horses in the future, ride them over. I won’t haggle about the price.”

When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch’ing came inside.

Whom should he see at this juncture but Ch’in-t’ung, who had come looking for him, saying, “The Sixth Lady would like to see you in her quarters.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing thereupon went into Li P’ing-erh’s quarters, where she asked him, “Did you, by any chance, take one of those gold bracelets with you? There are only three of them here now.”

“I left them behind when I went outside to look at the horses,” said Hsimen Ch’ing. “Who could have taken it?”

“If you didn’t take it,” said Li P’ing-erh. “Where could it have gotten to? We’ve been looking for it all this time, and it’s nowhere to be found. The wet nurse tried to blame it on Old Mother Feng, who is so upset that:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
all she can do is cry.”

“Who could actually have taken it?” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Let it be for now. You can search for it at your leisure.”

“I was going to start looking for it just now,” said Li P’ing-erh, “but because I was interrupted when the people from the rear compound, along with Sister-in-law Wu and her daughter-in-law, dropped in, I forgot all about it. I imagined that you must have taken it when you went out. Who could have known that you didn’t take it after all, so the matter has been doubly delayed. When I did start to search for it, it frightened everyone off.”

Thereupon, she returned the three remaining bracelets to Hsi-men Ch’ing for safe keeping.

Just at this juncture, Pen the Fourth arrived with a hundred taels of newly minted silver to turn over to Hsi-men Ch’ing, who went to the rear compound to see to weighing it out and putting it away.

To resume our story, when P’an Chin-lien heard that there had been a ruckus in Li P’ing-erh’s quarters over the disappearance of a gold bracelet that the baby was playing with:

Before she even got wind of anything,

She was ready for the rain,

and headed straight for the master suite to tell Yüeh-niang about it, saying, “Elder Sister, just see what that three-inch good-for-nothing has been up to! No matter how rich you may be, you ought not to give gold objects to children to play with.”

“Someone just told me about it,” said Yüeh-niang. “They say that her quarters have been turned upside down, and that they can’t find a gold bracelet. I really don’t know where this gold bracelet came from.”

“Who knows where it came from?” said Chin-lien. “You didn’t see it, but, a little while ago, he brought it in from outside, concealing it in the sleeve of his jacket, for all the world as if it were a case of:

The Eight Tribes coming to offer their tribute.

I asked him what it was and said, ‘Bring it over here so I can have a look at it.’ But, without even turning his head, he took off straight for her quarters as though his life depended on it. A little while later, pandemonium broke out, and it was claimed that a gold bracelet had disappeared. The way she explained it to that three-inch good-for-nothing, all he had to say was, ‘Let it be for now. You can search for it at your leisure.’

Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang,

That wouldn’t do.

A gold object like that must weigh some ten ounces at the least, and be worth fifty or sixty taels of silver. And you’d let it go at that, for no good reason!

If a pet turtle should escape from the jar,

It could only be with the connivance of someone at hand.

Who else would have had access to her quarters?”

As she was speaking, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch’ing, who came in after weighing and putting away the newly minted silver that Pen the Fourth had brought.

Turning over the three remaining gold bracelets to Yüeh-niang to be put away, he explained to her, “These are four gold bracelets that Li Chih and Huang the Fourth paid me in lieu of interest on a loan I made to them. I gave them to the baby to play with, but one of them has disappeared.”

Then he instructed Yüeh-niang, “I want you to call out the maidservants from each person’s quarters and subject them to an interrogation. I’ve sent a page boy out on the street to buy a wolf’s sinew.² If the missing object is promptly produced, I’ll leave it at

that. But if it is not, I'll start applying the wolf's sinew."

"If you consider the matter," said Yüeh-niang, "gold objects like these should not be handed over to a baby. They're heavy and might give him a chill. And what would you do if it should ever happen that his hands or feet should be crushed?"

P'an Chin-lien, from her vantage point to one side, picked up where Yüeh-niang had left off, saying, "You ought not to have given them to the baby to play with, indeed! Your only regret was that you couldn't get them into her quarters fast enough. When I called to you a while ago, you wouldn't so much as turn your head, but acted just like a red-eyed soldier protecting his loot, not wanting anyone to know what you were up to. And now that one of the gold bracelets has disappeared, it's a wonder you have the face to come and complain to Elder Sister, instructing her to interrogate the maidservants from each of our quarters. As for the maidservants from our quarters:

If they don't laugh at you with their mouths,
They'll certainly laugh through their cunts."

These few words upset Hsi-men Ch'ing so much that he strode forward, bent Chin-lien over Yüeh-niang's k'ang, and, brandishing his fist, cursed her, saying, "How hateful can you get! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, you little splay-legged whore, I'd finish you off with a few blows of my fist. You're never anything but:

Bad-mouthed and sharp-tongued.⁸

sticking your foot in where it's none of your business."

P'an Chin-lien, putting on quite a scene, began to cry, saying, "I'm well aware that:

Relying on your office to flaunt your power, and
Depending on your wealth to play the master,

you have hardened your heart against me. I seem to be the only person you take advantage of. No doubt the idea of taking a person's, or even half a person's, life doesn't carry any weight with you. Well, what's holding you back? Go ahead and beat me. I'm right here, at your disposal. No matter how badly you beat me, chances are I'll still retain a breath of life. But if I should die, never fear but that my frail old mother will demand that you pay the penalty. No matter how much money and influence your household may have, she'll lodge a complaint against you. You may think yourself immune as a judicial commissioner in the yamen, but what will that avail you? You're no more than an impoverished functionary, hiding under an empty shell of debt and the battered silk hat of an official. How many charges of murder do you think you can sustain? For that matter, even the emperor would hardly dare to murder his subordinates with impunity."

These few words, contrary to expectation, produced a guffaw of laughter from Hsi-men Ch'ing, who sputtered out, "Why you! This actually. You little splay-legged whore! What a wicked mouth you've got! You say I'm an impoverished functionary hiding under the battered silk hat of an official. Have a maidservant bring out that silk hat of mine. Just where does it show any signs of wear? You may ask around here in this district of Ch'ing-ho whether I'm indebted to anyone or not, though you say that I'm an empty shell of debt."

"How can you call me splay-legged?" Chin-lien demanded to know, lifting one of her legs into the air. "Just take a look at my leg here and tell me what's crooked about it. You may abuse me for being splay-legged, but there's nothing wrong with these legs of mine."

Yüeh-niang, from her vantage point to one side, laughed, saying, "The two of you are like:

A brass basin meeting up with a steel brush.⁹

As the saying goes:

One wicked person will be ground down upon encountering another;¹⁰

Upon encountering such another person he will be utterly undone.¹¹

It has always been true that:



P'an Chin-lien Exchanges Caustic Taunts with Hsi-men Ch'ing

It is the strongmouthed who get ahead.
 Luckily for you, Sixth Sister, you've got that mouth of yours. Otherwise, if you were slow of speech, you'd never make it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, realizing that he could not get the better of her, put on his outside clothes and started to leave, when he encountered Tai-an, who said, "Commandant Chou's household has sent someone to urge you on your way. The horse is ready for you. Let me ask, are you planning to go participate in the *chiao* ceremonies first, or are you going straight to Commandant Chou's place?"

"As for the *chiao* ceremonies," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "have my son-in-law go in my stead and then come right home after burning some incense. You can look to my horse. I might as well go straight to the party at Commandant Chou's place."

Turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Fetch my official cap and girdle."

As he was putting these on and fastening his girdle, what should he see but the two instructors from the dramatic troupe belonging to Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, leading the whole troupe in to kowtow to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Shu-t'ung to see that they were fed, and said to them, "All of you do your best to entertain the ladies today, and I will see that you are properly rewarded. There's no need for you to go before them and pass the collection box around."¹²

The two instructors knelt down and said, "If we don't do our best to entertain them, how could we expect a reward?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Shu-t'ung, "They will have been performing for two days. Including the gratuity, set aside five taels of silver as their remuneration."

"I understand," Shu-t'ung assented.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to mount his horse and set off to attend the party at Commandant Chou Hsiu's place.

Let us return to the story of P'an Chin-lien, who continued to sit in the master suite, keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu.

Wu Yüeh-niang then said to her, "You'd better go back to your quarters and redo your makeup, hadn't you? You've rubbed your eyes until they're all red. In a little while the guests will arrive, and you'll only make a spectacle of yourself. Whoever taught you to cross him that way? I actually broke into a sweat on your behalf. If I hadn't been there to dissuade him, even without any other funny business, you'd have suffered a few blows on your body for sure."

The male of the species has dog's hair growing on his face.¹³
But, just as though you:

Didn't know any better,¹⁴
you adamantly insisted on picking a quarrel with him. If a gold bracelet has disappeared, let it go at that. Whether to look for it or not is not up to you. After all, it wasn't in your quarters that it disappeared. Why should you stick your neck out and try to tough it out with him, for no good reason? You're just wasting your breath."

With these few words, she succeeded in reducing Chin-lien to silence, and she returned to her quarters to redo her makeup.

A little while later, Li P'ing-erh, along with Wu Yin-erh, both of them in formal dress, came into Yüeh-niang's room, and she asked them, "How did that gold bracelet come to disappear? Just now, it was the occasion for a real altercation between Father and Sister Six, in which they became so upset with each other they almost came to blows. I had to intervene between them, after which Father went off to attend a party at someone's place. He has ordered a page boy to buy a wolf's sinew, and when he gets home this evening, he's going to apply it to the maidservants from each of our quarters. What were the maidservants and Old Mother Feng in your quarters doing? If they were watching the baby play, how could a gold bracelet disappear just like that? After all, it's not as though it were a mere bauble, worth a candareen, or half a candareen, or anything like that"

"Father just happened, out of the blue, to come in carrying four gold bracelets," said Li P'ing-erh, "and gave them to the baby to play with. I was busy talking to Sister-in-law Wu and Third Sister Cheng, who had come for a visit along with the Second Lady. Who knows how one of the bracelets happened to disappear? Right now, the maidservants are blaming the wet nurse, and the wet nurse is blaming Old Mother Feng, who is so upset by it all that, weeping and wailing, she is threatening to commit suicide. It is one of those things that is:

Difficult to clear up without eyewitnesses.¹⁵
As things stand, whom would it be appropriate to blame?"

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Wu Yin-erh. I have played with the baby often enough. It's a good thing that today I was in another room of Mother's combing my hair and hadn't come over yet. Otherwise, I'd be implicated too. Even if Father and Mother were not to say anything about it, how could we help being ill at ease with each other? After all:

Who is there who doesn't care about money?
We denizens of the licensed quarter are particularly sensitive about such things. If such an imputation were to be noised abroad, it wouldn't bear listening to."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh, who came in carrying their costume bags with them.

With ingratiating smiles, they kowtowed first to Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and Li P'ing-erh, after which they stood up and made a bow to Wu Yin-erh, saying, "Sister Wu, you must have come yesterday, without returning home."

"How did the two of you come to know that?" asked Wu Yin-erh.

"Yesterday," said Tung Chiao-erh, "the two of us were singing in the house on the Lantern Market, and His Honor mentioned it. He told us to come and sing today, in order to entertain the ladies."

Yüeh-niang then invited the two of them to take a seat. In a little while, Hsiao-yü brought in two cups of tea, at which Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh hastily stood up to accept the tea and responded to Hsiao-yü with a bow.

Wu Yin-erh then asked, "How late did the two of you sing yesterday before the party broke up?"

"It was already past the second watch by the time we got home," said Han Yü-ch'uan. "We came back to the quarter along with your brother and Li Ming."

After they had chatted for a bit, Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "See to it that the tea is served as soon as possible. In a little while, I fear that we will have our hands full when the guests arrive."

A table was then set up, and two square containers, each holding four boxes of delicacies, were placed upon it.

Yüeh-niang then directed Hsiao-yü, "Go to the Second Lady's quarters and invite Li Kuei-chieh to come and have tea with us."

Before long, she appeared, accompanied by her aunt, and the two of them saluted the company, sat down, and joined them for tea, after which the tea things were cleared away.

Who should suddenly appear at this point but Ying-ch'un, all dressed up and carrying Kuan-ko, whose head was adorned with a gilt-ridged satin cap decorated with the eight auspicious symbols, whose body was clad in a loosely cut crimson robe, and whose lower limbs were dressed in white damask socks and satin shoes. On his chest an amulet on its cord was displayed, and on his hands he was wearing little gold bracelets.

When Li P'ing-erh saw him, she said, "Little gentleman, no one invited you. What are you doing here?"

Then, taking him from the maidservant, she placed him on her knee, from which vantage point he surveyed the roomful of people, looking uninterruptedly, first at one of them and then at another.

Li Kuei-chieh, who was sitting on Yüeh-niang's k'ang, smiled and, playfully teasing the baby for the fun of it, said, "The child keeps looking over here. It must be that he wants me to hold him."

Thereupon, she reached out to him with her hands, and the baby fell into her arms and allowed her to hold him.

Sister-in-law Wu laughed at this, saying, "Such a wee bit of a child, but he already knows how to demonstrate his affections."

Yüeh-niang, picking up on this, said, "Who is his father, after all? In the future, when he grows up, he's sure to be a little lady-killer."

"If he turns into a little lady-killer," said Meng Yü-lou, "his First Mother will have to give him a real spanking."

"My child," said Li P'ing-erh, "while your elder sister is holding you, see that you don't go wee-wee on her clothes, or you'll get the

spanking of your life, quick enough.”

“Ai-ya!” exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. “What is there to worry about? If he goes wee-wee, what of it? It doesn't matter. I just love holding Little Brother and playing with him.”

Whereupon, she continued to play with him, nuzzling him mouth to mouth.

Who should appear at this juncture but P'an Chin-lien,¹⁶ who came in to join the group.

Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan got up from their seats to greet her and then sat down, saying, “The two of us have been here some time already, but we haven't sung a single song to entertain the ladies, as yet.”

Then, turning to the maidservant, they said, “Sister Hsiao-yü, if you fetch our musical instruments, we can perform a song.”

Hsiao-yü then fetched a psaltery and a *p'i-p'a* and handed them over to the two of them. Thereupon, with Han Yü-ch'uan¹⁷ playing the *p'i-p'a*, Tung Chiao-erh playing the psaltery, and Wu Yin-erh chiming in from the side, they proceeded to sing the song suite, the second song of which begins with the words:

Luxuriant blossoms spread before my eyes.¹⁸

to the tune “A Golden Chain Hangs from the Phoenix Tree.” The very first line that they sang, truly possessed:

A timbre that causes dust to fall and lingers around the rafters:

A sound that causes rocks to split and sets the clouds in motion.

Kuan-ko was so frightened by the noise that he hid his face in Li Kuei-chieh's bosom:

Not daring to raise his head,¹⁹

or take another breath.

When Yüeh-niang saw what was happening, she called out, “Sister Li, you'd better take the child, and have Ying-ch'un take him back to your room. What a hopeless little rascal. Just see how frightened his face looks.”

Li P'ing-erh promptly took the child and said to Ying-ch'un, “Cover up his ears and take him into another room.”

Thereupon, the four entertainers, singing in ensemble, proceeded with the performance of the song suite on which they had embarked.

Luxuriant blossoms spread before my eyes;

My embroidered quilt pointlessly remains.

That wretched lover of mine has treated me altogether too cruelly.

In my last incarnation I must have owed him a love debt due in this life.²⁰

Neglecting to sleep, forgetting to eat;²¹

Lingering at the door I wait for him.²²

The bedchamber is silent;²³ how am I ever to endure it?

To the tune “Cursing One's Lover”:

Coldly deserted, the bedchamber is silent; how am I ever to endure it?

All by myself I lean against the screen.

Who knows what his feelings may be.

I recall how originally, we walked together, sat together,²⁴ and rejoiced together.

But now, left all alone, how am I to cope with the situation?

In my desolation, I am too listless to pour wine;

In my discomfiture, I am too lazy to wear flowers.

To the tune “Wen-chou Song”:

I am too lazy to wear flowers;

I am too listless to pour wine.

Now, though we make a swallow's tryst or oriole's assignation, he fails to come.

It must be that he is somewhere else, somewhere else, seeking gratification.

His keepsakes are here, but where is he?²⁵

In vain do I task my dreaming soul²⁶ to transport me to the Radiant Terrace.

All I can do is let the tears cover my cheeks.

To the tune “Moved by Imperial Favor”:

Ah! All I can do is let two streams of tears cover my cheeks.²⁷

It must be that it is something determined by fate.²⁸

No doubt your destiny is meager, and my allotment is shallow.

It must be that our fortunes are askew and the times out of joint.²⁹

How can we avoid the trouble caused by the gossip of idle folk;

Who employ artful schemes to frustrate us;

Tearing to shreds our girdle of communion;³⁰

Insistently separating the phoenix hairpins;

And inundating the Radiant Terrace of Ch'u?

To the tune “Needlework Box”:

The strings of my musical instruments are covered with dust.

The twin peaks of my eyebrows remain knitted.

My fragrant flesh is emaciated,³¹ due to this hopeless sorrow.

Too listless for embroidery,

I sit by my dressing mirror.

Beset by old resentment and new sorrow;³²
How am I ever to endure it?
My only fear is lest the butterfly ambassadors and bee go-betweens³³ not return.
Confronting the phoenix mirror, I ask, "If my pink cheeks were unaltered,³⁴
Would he already have had a change of heart?"

To the tune "Tea-picking Song":

My pink cheeks have been altered, my body has become emaciated.
Coldly deserted, how am I ever to endure it?
My only fear is that Liang Shan-po is no longer enamored of his Chu Ying-t'ai.³⁵
If he should perfidiously break faith and forget favor,³⁶ seeking a pretext to criticize me,
I'll bring up the oaths we swore by the hills and seas,³⁷ reiterating them in clear-cut terms.

To the tune "Relieving Three Hangovers":

He has utterly forgotten the oaths we swore by the hills and seas.
He has utterly forgotten the promised letters which he has not sent.
He has utterly forgotten the kindness and love shared at my pillow side.
He has utterly forgotten the intimate contact of our unclothed bodies.
He has utterly forgotten the thousands of times we bowed before the gods.
He has utterly forgotten my keepsake, a fragrant silk red embroidered shoe.
If I were to mention it, even bystanders would find their cheeks flooded with pearly tears.³⁸

To the tune "Crows Cry at Night":

Right now, having been disunited for three months, it feels like a separation of years.
If we are to meet again, on what day of what year³⁹ will it ever take place?
As for me, I am so utterly emaciated my body is like a stick of kindling.⁴⁰
When will I ever pay back completely the love debt I owe from my last life?
I fail to see any blue bird conveying his love letter.⁴¹
The dog Yellow Ear has brought no news.⁴²
Every day I am sick with depression, too lazy to sit by my dressing mirror.
But if we are ever reunited, we will sacrifice a consecrated lamb.
Our affinities will be fulfilled;
Our hearts be mutually inclined.
We will soon become as inseparable as male and female phoenix mates;⁴³
And thereby avoid derisive butterflies and suspicious honeybees.⁴⁴

CODA:

The scene is assuredly set.
My lover, sooner or later,
will surely return;
And as loving husband and wife⁴⁵ we will live happily ever after.⁴⁶

While the four singing girls were still performing, whom should they see come in but Tai-an.

Yüeh-niang asked him, "Why is it that the group of ladies you went to invite still haven't shown up?"

"When I went to Kinswoman Ch'iao's place for that purpose," said Tai-an, "the wives of Censor Chu and Provincial Graduate Shang had already forgathered there and were only awaiting the arrival of Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, before setting out to come here."

Yüeh-niang instructed him, "Tell the page boy P'ing-an to keep a lookout at the main gate and come in to give us advance notice as soon as the sedan chairs of the ladies arrive."

"Drum music will be struck up to welcome them, both at the front gate and in the main reception hall," said Tai-an, "so you will have ample time to prepare to receive them."

Yüeh-niang further instructed Tai-an, "See to it that brocade carpets are laid down in the parlor of the rear reception hall, that the seats are properly arranged, and that the blinds are rolled up."

Golden curtain hooks are hung in pairs;⁴⁷

The fragrance of orchid and musk swirls.⁴⁸

Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all dressed up for the occasion. The wives of the servants were all:

Studded with gold and decked with silver;

Sporting red and trailing green;

as they prepared to receive their new relatives by marriage.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh's wife, whose sedan chair was the first to arrive, escorted by Ying Pao. Yüeh-niang and the others welcomed her in, and, after the customary amenities had been exchanged, she took a seat in the parlor.

Bowing repeatedly to Yüeh-niang, she said, "My husband is constantly imposing upon you, I fear. We are grateful for your patronage."

"How can you say such a thing?" Yüeh-niang responded. "We are much indebted to the help of Master Ying the Second."

After some time, what should they hear but the approach of an escort shouting to clear the way, and as:

Drums and music began to sound,

in the front reception hall, P'ing-an came in to report that Madame Ch'iao's sedan chair had arrived. In no time at all, the whole area

was rendered black by the number of servitors accompanying the five large sedan chairs as they came to rest at the front gate. The sedan chair of Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, was in the van. It had a silver finial on top, from which pearls were suspended; was invested in an ultramarine, double-fringed, gold lamé, waterproof canopy; and was accompanied by an escort of retainers, armed with rattan canes, who shouted to clear the way. Behind it came the wives of her servants, ensconced in smaller sedan chairs; four commandants, bearing her dressing case and brazier; and two black-clad servants, riding on ponies. The remainder of the procession consisted of the wife of Ch'iao Hung, Censor Chu's wife, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Ts'ui Pen's wife, Big Sister Tuan, and the wife of Ch'iao T'ung, the head servant in Ch'iao Hung's household, who accompanied her mistress in a smaller sedan chair, in order to look after her clothes.

Wu Yüeh-niang was attired in a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated satin, decorated with a motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions⁴⁹ paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*.⁵⁰ Around her waist she wore a girdle of gold inlaid with assorted jewels. On her head:

Her chignon was of an imposing height;
Phoenix pins protruded to either side;
And pearls and trinkets rose in piles.

On her breast:

Gold pendants hung on embroidered cords;
And a profusion of amulets scintillated.

Beside her skirt were suspended:

Decorative pendants of lustrous pearls.

Along with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Sun Hsüeh-o, all of whom were dressed up to look as though they were:

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,
Producing brocade effects that dazzle the eye,

Wu Yüeh-niang came out as far as the gate that led into the second courtyard to greet their guests.

What should they see but the crowd of female guests, gathered around Madame Ch'iao the Fifth as she made her entrance. She was petite in stature, more than seventy years old, wore a head-dress bedecked with kingfisher feathers, jewels, and pearls, and a scarlet robe decorated with palace-style embroidery. When looked at close up, it was apparent that her hair was all white. Truly:

Her eyebrows are two streaks of snow,
Her chignon is tied into a bag of silk;
Her eyes resemble autumn waters, somewhat disturbed,
Her hair is like the hills of Ch'u, veiled in clouds.⁵¹

Once she had been ushered into the rear reception hall, she first exchanged salutations with Sister-in-law Wu and after that proceeded to do the same with Yüeh-niang and the others.

Yüeh-niang reiterated, "Madame, pray accept my salutation," but her guest refused to accede, and it was only after they had dickered politely for a while that she agreed to accept a half kowtow from her.

After that, Yüeh-niang proceeded to exchange the courtesies appropriate between new relatives by marriage with Ch'iao Hung's wife, each of them in turn expressing her satisfaction with their new relationship and thanking the other for the lavish gifts they had received.



As a Result of the Betrothal Yüeh-niang Meets Madame Ch'iao

When these amenities were concluded, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth was ushered to the place of honor, where she was invited to take her seat upon a chair covered with a brocade cushion in front of a standing brocade screen.

Ch'iao Hung's wife was invited to take the seat next to hers, but she repeatedly demurred, saying, "As the wife of Madame's nephew, I could scarcely presume to take such a liberty."

She deferred to the wives of Censor Chu and Provincial Graduate Shang, but the two of them also declined, and it was only after they had dickered politely for some time that Madame Ch'iao the Fifth consented to take her place in the seat of honor, and the rest of the company sat down in two rows, with the guests on the east and the hosts on the west.

In the center of the room was a large square box stove in which a fire was blazing, so that:

The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring.⁵²

The four maidservants, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, all of whom were dressed in jackets of scarlet figured satin, blue gold lamé skirts, and green brocaded vests, waited upon the company and served them with tea.

After some time, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth said to Yüeh-niang, "Why not invite His Honor Hsi-men to come out and meet us, so we can exchange the courtesies appropriate to relatives by marriage."

"My poor husband has had to go to the yamen to conduct public business today," explained Yüeh-niang, "and he hasn't come home yet."

"What office does His Honor hold?" asked Madame Ch'iao the Fifth.

"Though nothing but:
A humble villager,"

said Yüeh-niang, “thanks to our sovereign’s grace, he has been granted a substantive appointment as battalion commander, and currently occupies a post in the legal system. For our humble household to aspire to a marriage alliance with these relatives of yours is truly presumptuous.”

“How can you talk that way?” responded Madame Ch’iao the Fifth. “Such an exalted position as His Honor has achieved is more than sufficient. The other day when I heard that the daughter of my nephew had been betrothed to the scion of your household, my heart was filled with delight. Today I have come in order to get acquainted, so that we will be comfortable addressing each other on social occasions in the future.”

“My only fear is,” said Yüeh-niang, “that such an alliance can only detract from your reputation.”

“What kind of talk is that?” replied Madame Ch’iao the Fifth. “Do you suppose that the sovereign himself never deigns to form marriage alliances with commoners?”

It’s a long story,⁵³

but the honored consort, née Cheng, of the present emperor, who resides in the Eastern Palace, happens to be a niece of mine.⁵⁴ Her father and mother are both dead, so I am the only relative she has left. When my old man was still alive he held the hereditary title of commander, but, unfortunately, he died without issue at the age of forty-nine, so the title passed to a nephew of his from another branch of the family. As for this nephew of mine, although he didn’t have any money to start with, he has now become a well-to-do householder. Although he may have started out as a *corvée* laborer, he now has enough to live on quite comfortably, so he would not detract in any way from the reputation of your family.”

After they had talked for some time, Sister-in-law Wu said to Yüeh-niang, “Why don’t you have the baby brought out so our venerable visitor can have a look at him and he can solicit a share of her longevity?”

Li P’ing-erh hastily went back to her room and told the wet nurse, “Bring Kuan-ko out so he can pay his respects to Madame Ch’iao.”

When Madame Ch’iao saw him, she exclaimed hyperbolically, “What a perfectly formed little fellow!”

Then, calling over one of her attendants, she opened her felt bag and took out a length of purple brocade material, shot with yellow, of the kind purveyed for use in the palace, and a pair of gilded bracelets for the child to wear.

Yüeh-niang hastily got up from her place to thank her, and then invited her to retire to her boudoir in order to change her clothes.

Before long, four tables were set up in the summerhouse in the front garden, where tea was to be served. Upon each table were arrayed forty saucers of every kind of condiment and sweetmeat, mouth-watering appetizers, steamed-shortcake pastries, and the finest deep-fried patisserie, while to either side maidservants and the wives of household retainers stood by to wait upon the company. But no more of this.

After they were finished with tea, Yüeh-niang opened the gate which led into the garden behind them, with its artificial hill, and they all went in for a tour of the premises. By that time Ch’en Ching-chi had come back from the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, where he had stayed only for the noon vegetarian repast, and, along with Shu-t’ung and Tai-an, had made all the necessary preparations for the feast in the front reception hall, where the ladies were now invited to partake of wine and inaugurate the festivities. Truly it was a fine feast. Behold:

Screens display their peacocks’ tails,
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.
Platters are piled with exotic fruits and rare viands,
Vases are studded with gold flowers and emerald leaves.⁵⁵
Braziers burn animal-shaped briquettes,
Incense diffuses the odor of ambergris.⁵⁶
The table service is an array of exotic antiques from Hsiang-chou;⁵⁷
The hanging blinds are adorned with shining pearls from Ho-p’u.⁵⁸
White jade saucers are piled high with preserved *ch’i-lin* meat;⁵⁹
Golden flagons are filled to the brim with carnelian-hued nectar.
There are stewed chimpanzee lips,
And baked leopard embryos;
Truly, one has but to use one’s chopsticks to exhaust ten thousand cash.
There are deep-fried dragon livers,
And roast phoenix marrow;
Indeed, when they are all displayed, seasonal delicacies abound.
The denizens of the Pear Garden,⁶⁰
Crowd around with their phoenix pipes and phoenix flutes.⁶¹
The courtesans from the inner palace,
Urgently tune their silver psalteries and ivory clappers.⁶²
The beauties proffering wine are duplicates of the Goddess of the Lo River;⁶³
The incense-burning serving girls are replicas of Ch’ang-o, the Goddess of the Moon.⁶⁴

Truly:

Two ranks of pearls and trinkets⁶⁵ are arrayed beneath the steps;
The tones of pipes and voices⁶⁶ hover about the banquet hall.⁶⁷

In due course, Wu Yüeh-niang offered Li P’ing-erh a goblet of wine, and after the players beneath the steps had concluded a flourish of the drums, Madame Ch’iao and the rest of the assembled relatives toasted Li P’ing-erh and wished her a long life in honor of her birthday. The four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Han Yü-ch’uan, and Tung Chiao-erh, took their places before the company, struck up their instruments:

Patterned cithara, silver psaltery,
Jade-surfaced *p'i-p'a*, and
Clappers inlaid with red ivory,⁶⁸
and sang the song suite that begins with the words:

May you live as long as the Southern Hills.⁶⁹

After which, from beneath the steps:

Drums and music began to sound,
and the players presented the accordion-bound album listing the names of the dramas they were prepared to perform. Madame Ch'iao the Fifth instructed them to put on the play entitled *Wang Yüeh-ying Leaves her Shoe Behind on the Lantern Festival*.⁷⁰ The chef then came out and presented the minor entrée of roast goose, for which Madame Ch'iao rewarded him with five mace of silver.

By the time:

Five carved entrées had been consumed,
Three courses of soup had been served,
and the four scenes of the drama were concluded, it began to grow late.
Painted candles dispersed their light,
from mountainous banks of sconces; every variety of decorative taper was lit up.
Brocade sashes fluttered,⁷¹
Gaudy ropes hung pendulously.
The wheel of the bright moon,⁷²
Arose out of the east, and
Illuminated the chamber,
Under the flickering lamplight.

Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu and Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang attended upon the company, each of them bearing a square platter of stuffed Lantern Festival dumplings. The tea that was served in cups inlaid with silver, provided with gold teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves, was flavored with rose hips and crystallized sugar and exuded a mouth-watering fragrance. The four senior maidservants, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, divided the task of waiting upon the company between them:

Observing the demands of propriety,
Dignified and stately in demeanor.

Meanwhile, beneath the steps, the music started up again. Playing a *p'i-p'a*, a psaltery, and a mandola, accompanied by pipes and flutes, the musicians performed a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, beginning with the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows," the first line of which is:

Blossoms and moonlight pervade the spring metropolis.⁷³

When the performance was over, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth and Ch'iao Hung's wife called the players before them and rewarded them with two packages, each of which contained a tael of silver. The four singing girls were also awarded two mace of silver apiece.

Yüeh-niang had also set up many saucers full of delicacies in the parlor of the master suite in the rear compound, where the guests were invited to retire after the formal entertainment was over. The four tables were loaded with refreshments.

The singers performed,
The musicians played,
and another round of wine was served.

Madame Ch'iao the Fifth repeatedly remarked that it was getting late, and that she should be on her way. Yüeh-niang and the others were unable to persuade her to stay any longer and accompanied her to the main gate, where she was detained for a parting cup of wine and invited to view the fireworks. The onlookers on either side of the street were as closely arrayed as:

Fish scales or swarming bees.

P'ing-an, together with a contingent of orderlies with sticks in hand, tried to hold back the crowds, but they surged forward repeatedly. After a little while, when a rack of fireworks had been set off, the onlookers to either side scattered. Only then did Madame Ch'iao the Fifth and the other ladies bid farewell to Yüeh-niang, mount their sedan chairs, and make their departure. By that time, it was already the third watch. Subsequently they also had to see Ying Pochüeh's wife on her way.

When Yüeh-niang and her sister wives returned to the rear compound, they instructed Ch'en Ching-chi, Lai-hsing, Shu-t'ung, and Tai-an to put away the tableware from the reception hall, see that the players and their two instructors were provided with food and wine, pay them five taels of silver for their services, and send them on their way.

Yüeh-niang gave instructions that the remaining table's worth of leftovers and half a jug of wine, should be set aside for the delectation of Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi.

"They must be worn out," she said. "Let them all have a drink together. Set up a table for them in the main reception hall. Who knows how late it will be before your father returns home."

Thereupon, there still remaining some lamps that had not burnt out, Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, Ch'en Ching-chi, and Lai-pao took the positions of honor, while Lai-hsing, Shu-t'ung, Tai-an, and P'ing-an ranged themselves to either side, and the wine was poured.

Lai-pao called out, "P'ing-an, you ought to depute someone to cover the main gate, lest Father should return and find no one tending the door."

"I've told Hua-t'ung to take care of it," replied P'ing-an. "That's not a problem."

Thereupon the eight of them fell to playing at guess-fingers while drinking their wine.

“Let's not play at guess-fingers,” said Ch'en Ching-chi. “If we:

Create such a commotion,
we'll only disturb the people in the rear compound. Let's quietly play a game of forfeits instead. Each player must come up with a line of poetry. Those who are able to do so will escape paying a forfeit, but those who fail to do so will have to drink a large cup of wine.

Manager Fu started off with the line:

How comical are the trappings of the Lantern Festival,

Pen the Fourth continued:

The occasions for pleasure in man's life are numbered.

Ch'en Ching-chi said:

Availing ourselves of this moonshine and lantern light,

to which Lai-pao responded:

We must, on no account, allow them to go unappreciated.

Lai-hsing said:

Our trysts with our girls may have failed to come off,

To which Shu-t'ung responded:

But we have complied with the wishes of the First Lady.

Tai-an said:

Though we have only leftover wine and waning lamplight,

and P'ing-an concluded:

It may still constitute “a fling in the spring breeze.”

When the group of them had finished their joint composition, they broke into loud laughter. Truly:

After finishing their drinking, when the wine is exhausted and the party is over;⁷⁴
There is no one to notice that the moonlight is illuminating the plum branches.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 44

WU YÜEH-NIANG DETAINS

LI KUEI-CHIEH OVERNIGHT;

HSI-MEN CH'ING DRUNKENLY

INTERROGATES HSIA-HUA

In straitened circumstances, I continue to be
mired in the muck day by day;
While the resplendence of the imperial park
is perennially renewed.
Brambles do not encroach on the carriageways
and riding paths;
Pipes and strings forever enhance the homes
of the silk-clad.
Patrician youths roam the greensward like
fluttering butterflies;
Budding damsels disport in the breeze like
proliferating blossoms.
But I am reluctant to go out, let the vagrant
youths scoff as they will;
For, once back inside the gate, the old life
will go on just as before.¹

THE STORY GOES that while Ch'en Ching-chi, Manager Fu, and the others were drinking in the front compound, Sister-in-law Wu's sedan chair arrived, and she prepared to return home.

Wu Yüeh-niang did her best to detain her, saying repeatedly, "Stay another night, Sister-in-law, and go home tomorrow."

"Including the time I spent at Kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place," Sister-in-law Wu replied, "I've been away for three or four days already. There's no one to look after the place at home, and your brother is tied up at the yamen, so he's not there either. I'd better go home. Tomorrow all of you ladies are invited, whatever you do, to come to our place for a holiday visit. In the evening, you can walk off the hundred ailments on your way home."

"Tomorrow," said Yüeh-niang, "we won't be able to make it before evening."

"You really ought to come by sedan chair a little earlier," said Sister-in-law Wu. "That will give you time to walk back together later in the evening."

When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang had two gift boxes made up for her, one of Lantern Festival dumplings, and one of steamed dumplings, and ordered Lai-an to escort her sister-in-law on her way home.

The four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh and company, then kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and bade her farewell as they also prepared to return home.

"What's the hurry?" said Yüeh-niang. "Are you that anxious to be off? Wait till your father gets home and dismisses you. On his way out he told me to keep you here. I expect he has something else to say to you. I wouldn't presume to let you go."

"Father has gone out to a drinking party," said Li Kuei-chieh. "Who knows when he'll get home? We've been waiting for some time already. Mother, why don't you let me and Wu Yin-erh leave before the others. The two of them only came today, while we've been here for two days already. Who knows how anxious my mother back at home is to see me?"

"Is your mother really so anxious to see you," said Yüeh-niang, "that she can't bear to wait another night?"

"That's a fine thing to say," protested Li Kuei-chieh. "There's no one to look after the place at home, and moreover my elder sister's services have been engaged elsewhere. Mother, if we get out our instruments and sing another song for you, surely you'll let us go home."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to turn over the unused gratuities to Yüeh-niang.

"The one-candareen gratuities for the chair carriers of the Ch'iao family and the others came to ten packets in all, amounting to three taels," he reported. "There are still ten packets left over."

As Yüeh-niang was putting these away, Li Kuei-chieh took the opportunity to ask, "Son-in-law, when you were outside just now, did you notice whether our sedan chairs had come for us or not?"

"Only the sedan chairs for the other two are here," replied Ch'en Ching-chi. "Those for you and Wu Yin-erh have not arrived. It seems that a while ago someone sent them away."

"Son-in-law," exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh, "did you really send them away? You're fooling me."

"If you don't believe me, go see for yourself," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "As though I would try to fool you."

Before he had finished speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying his master's felt bag and announced, "Father has come home."

"It's a good thing the two of you haven't left," said Yüeh-niang. "It turns out your father has shown up after all."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, still wearing his official hat on his head, and 70 or 80 percent inebriated. Striding into the room, he assumed his place in the seat of honor.

"Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan are still here," Yüeh-niang reported, and the two of them proceeded to step forward and kowtow.

"Everyone has left," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and it is already late at night. Do you still want me to have them sing for us?"

"They've been asking me to let them go home," said Yüeh-niang.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Li Kuei-chieh and said, "You and Yin-erh might as well wait until the festival is over before going home. It's all right to let the other two go."

"You see," said Yüeh-niang. "I told you so, but you wouldn't believe me and acted as though I were fooling you, or something."

Li Kuei-chieh merely lowered her head with a disgruntled expression and had nothing further to say.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Tai-an, "Are the sedan chairs for those two here or not?"

"Only the two sedan chairs for Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan are waiting for them," Tai-an responded.

"I'll not have anything more to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can each get out your instruments and sing the medley called 'Ten Strips of Brocade' for us, after which I'll let those two go home before the others."

Thereupon, with Li Kuei-chieh playing the *p'i-p'a*, Wu Yin-erh playing the psaltery, Han Yü-ch'uan strumming the mandola, and Tung Chiao-erh beating a quick tempo on the drum, the four singing girls, performing in relay, sang the twenty halves of the ten songs that made up "Ten Strips of Brocade." Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ingerh all sat down in the room to listen to the performance.

Li Kuei-chieh started off with the first half of a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

My handsome lover naturally stands out among his kind,²
But my halcyon-hued coverlet is cold and I am desolate and alone.
Since we parted, I think of him by day and yearn for him at night,³
I yearn for him, wondering when we will ever meet again.
When I do meet with my lover, it will be just as before,
Just as before.

It was then Wu Yin-erh's turn to sing the first half of a song to the tune "Sutra in Letters of Gold":

Where has the flower-lover gone?
The red petals have fallen, spring is over.
I have already climbed the lofty tower and leaned over all twelve balustrades,
All twelve balustrades.⁴

Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the first half of a song to the tune "Stopping the Clouds in Flight":

Depressed, I lean over the balustrade,⁵
The swallows and orioles, I am reluctant to watch.
Who has broken the commandment against adultery?
Who has grown accustomed to spectral visitations?⁶

Tung Chiao-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "River Water, with Two Variations":

My flowerlike countenance and moonlike allure⁷ have faded completely away.
The double gates are always closed.
It is just the time when the east wind is chilly,⁸
Fine rain sprinkles continuously,⁹ and
Fallen red petals by the thousands dot the ground.¹⁰

Li Kuei-chieh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows":

Since the last time I met my handsome lover,
My silver psaltery is covered with dust and I am reluctant to touch it.
Although we are only separated by a matter of feet,
It feels as though we are at opposite ends of the sky.
I remember a hundred instances of his kindness,
And cannot recall the slightest case of deceptive conduct on his part.

Wu Yin-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers":

On the surface of the water there was a pair of mandarin ducks,
Beside the bank of the river, following each other in close formation.¹¹
How could they have foreseen that a fishing boat would separate them,
Making them fly off in different directions?

Han Yü-ch'uan continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Playful Children":

Ever since he left, I have become haggard and emaciated.
I have never before been sick for so long.
When my talented lover went away,¹² it had just become spring;
But before I know it, the geese have flown, and it is already midautumn.¹³

Tung Chiao-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Confronting the Dressing Mirror":

At the present time,
The strings on the jasper-inlaid zither are broken,¹⁴ there is no one to listen to them.
When the blossoms are most beautiful,
Who is there with whom to enjoy them?

Li Kuei-chieh continued with the first half of a song to the tune “Shrouding the Southern Branch”:

Outside my gauze window,
The moon is setting.
I am always yearning for that man of mine,
Unable to get him out of my mind.
On my behalf, you utterly exhaust your strength and heart;
On your behalf, I secretly wipe away the pearly tears.

Wu Yin-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune “The Cassia Sprig Is Fragrant”:

His heart is like a willow catkin,¹⁵
Flying wherever the wind takes it.
It turns out that his intentions are false and his reputation undeserved;
But he has induced me to cater to him with sincere devotion.¹⁶

Han Yü-ch'uan then resumed by singing the second half of the song to the tune “Sheep on the Mountain Slope”:

He is solicitous of jade and considerate of fragrance.¹⁷
He and I lay face to face underneath the hibiscus bed curtains,¹⁸
Where we revealed every detail of our innermost feelings to each other.
Speaking of our emotions at separation, how could you have abandoned me?
It makes me so mad I'm half drunk and half crazy.
How could you have had such a change of heart as to pick up with another soul mate?
When will we ever be able to arrange another assignation, another assignation?
If we really meet again, it will be just like a dream.

Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Sutra in Letters of Gold”:

Though I wipe them away,
Tears have stained my silk handkerchief.
On the southern bank of the river,
The setting sun reveals hills beyond the hills.¹⁹

Li Kuei-chieh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Stopping the Clouds in Flight”:

Ch'a!
I have sent him letters two or three times,
But it has been difficult to see him.
I'd better take up my frosty brush,
And write out another dubious indictment;
But the ink is not dry on the page of loving feelings I have already expressed.²⁰

Wu Yin-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “River Water, with Two Variations”:

I am too indolent to burn another coil of incense,
And reluctant to pick up my needle.
My emaciated body is cadaverous,
Beset as it is by spectral visitations.²¹
When I reexamine the old feelings that we had for each other,
Sorrow weighs down the turquoise peaks of my painted eyebrows;
Which only serves to arouse the distaste of my young lover,
So that, for some time, despite the orioles and the flowers, I have not bothered to roll up my curtain.

Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Prelude to Painted Eyebrows”:

When I think of the affectionate words he uttered when we shared the same pillow,
I can't help feeling a shuddering of the flesh and benumbing of the body.

Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Red Embroidered Slippers”:

One of us headed for the east,
The other flew toward the west;
Which left me languishing in the south,
While he set off for the north.

Li Kuei-chieh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Playful Children”:

While you're there within the bed-curtains of gold lamé cuddling the red and hugging the turquoise,²²
I'm here clandestinely letting the tears flow as I keep solitary vigil in my fragrant boudoir.²³
I remember the vows of fidelity that you swore,
But they have faded from your fickle mind as quickly as the lantern gutters out.
The evidence against you is still on record in the Temple of the God of the Sea.²⁴

Wu Yin-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune “Confronting the Dressing Mirror”:

Who is there with whom to pour the vintage wine?
Our feelings have come to naught, like a pitcher that has fallen down a well.

We are as unlikely to see each other as Orion and Antares ²⁵
Since we became separated years and months have gone by.
I have calculated the date of your return so often I have worn away the golden tip of my comb.

Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch":

On either side we have been disturbed at heart.
How could we have known that the wind would sweep the clouds away,
So that tonight the full moon would shine forth once more,
Permitting my lover once again to unfasten my fragrant silk raiment?
In discussing our feelings, the question of who was unfaithful to whom,
Is something I will have to demand a clarification of from you.

Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "The Cassia Sprig Is Fragrant":

How could he ever have forgotten that time in the past when he swore to be as faithful as the hills?
He has buried me alive,
That lover of mine.
Since he has abandoned me here,
When will we be able to make love again?

Li Kuei-chieh then concluded by singing the Coda:

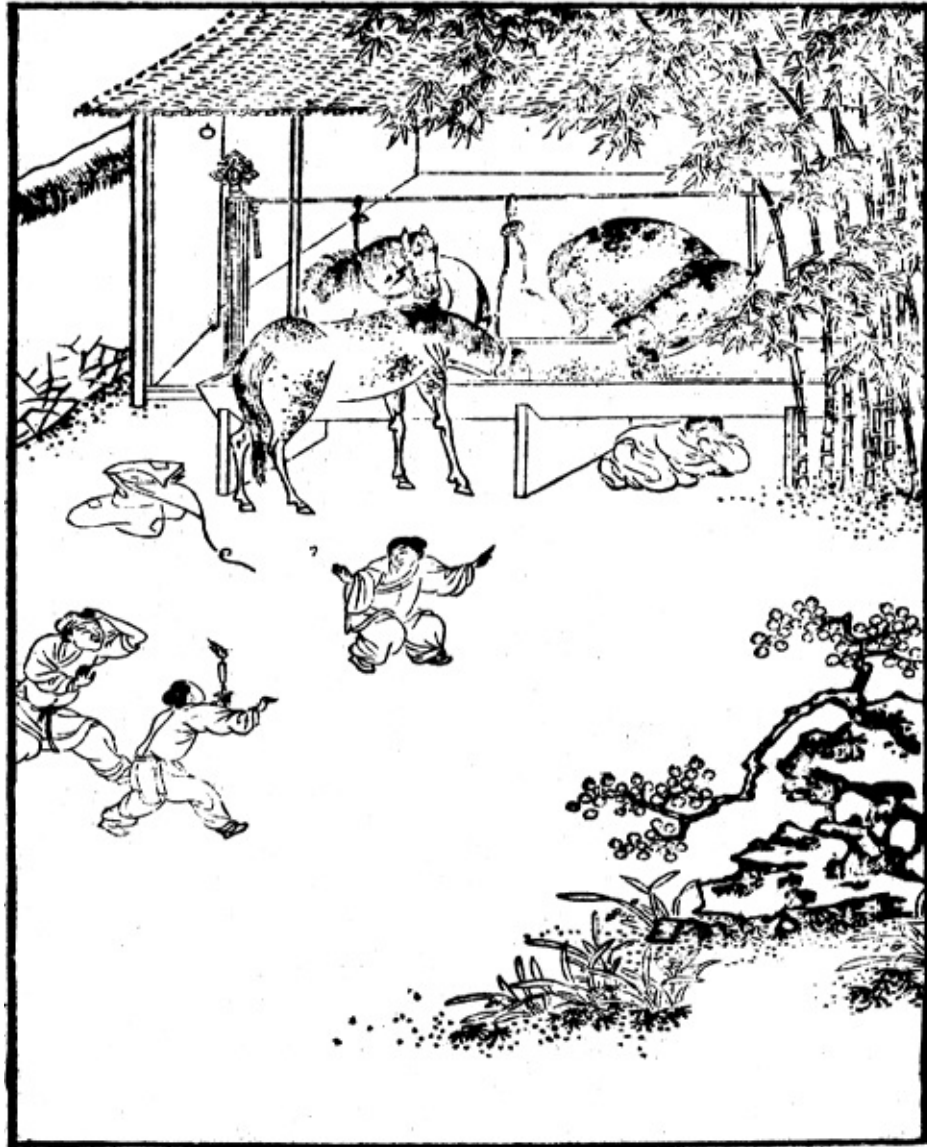
Embroidered silk slippers, but half a span in length;
When his eyes catch sight of them, his amorous feelings are aroused.
My delectable and talented lover, let's forgo any further recriminations.
Hurry up and embrace this shapely body of mine.

When they had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing paid Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh for their services, and the two of them said their farewells and departed, but he instructed Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight.

All of a sudden, a commotion became audible in the front compound and, before they knew it, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung came in, dragging Hsia-hua, the maidservant from Li Chiao-erh's quarters, along with them, and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "After escorting the two singing girls to the gate just now, we took a lantern into the stable to prepare the fodder for the horses, when what should we see but Hsia-hua hiding under the manger, which gave us quite a start. We don't know what she was doing there, and when we asked her, she refused to answer."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Where is that slave? Bring her over here."

Thereupon, he strode into the corridor outside the parlor and sat down in a chair, while the maidservant was hustled into his presence and forced to kneel down in front of him.



Hsia-hua Is Found under the Manger with the Stolen Gold

When Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know why she had gone out to the front compound, she refused to answer.

Li Chiao-erh chimed in from the sidelines, saying, "I didn't send you on any errand. Whatever were you up to, going out to the stable, for no good reason?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw what a state of panic the girl was in, he assumed that she had been trying to run away and ordered the servants to search her person, but she resisted being searched. Thereupon, Ch'in-t'ung dragged her down with a tug, when what should they hear but a tinkling sound as an object that had been concealed in her waist fell to the ground. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked what it was, and when Tai-an handed it to him:

Strange as it may seem,
it turned out to be a gold bracelet.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had examined it by lamplight, he said, "It's that gold bracelet that disappeared a while ago and couldn't be found anywhere. So it turns out that this slave had stolen it."

Hsia-hua protested that she had only picked it up, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know where she had picked it up, she remained silent. This enraged Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he forthwith ordered Ch'in-t'ung to go to the front compound and fetch the finger squeezers. In no time at all, the maidservant's fingers were put in the squeezers and squeezed until she:

Howled like a stuck pig.

After she had been squeezed for a while, he ordered that the squeezers should be struck twenty times. Yüeh-niang saw that her husband was drunk and did not dare to interfere.

Unable to bear the pain any longer, the maidservant finally said, "I picked it up off the floor in the Sixth Lady's quarters."

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing order the squeezers removed, after which he instructed Li Chiao-erh, "Take her back to your room and, tomorrow, call in a go-between to take her away and sell her. What would we want to keep a slave like this around for anyway?"

Li Chiao-erh was initially at a loss for words, after which she finally said, "You lousy slave! Whoever told you to go out to the front compound? As long as I'm maintaining you, you should ask my permission before doing anything, instead of sneaking out there without anyone knowing about it. If you picked up that gold bracelet in her room, you should have told me about it."

When Hsia-hua merely continued to cry, Li Chiao-erh said to her, "Slave that you are, you might just as well have been squeezed to death, for all I care. Still crying are you?"

"That's enough of that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which he turned the gold bracelet over to Yüeh-niang to put away and went out to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound.

When the page boys had all left, Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to close the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds and then turned to Yü-hsiao and asked, "Did that maidservant actually go out to the front compound on that occasion?"

"When the Second Lady and the Third Lady," reported Yü-hsiao, "accompanied Sister-in-law Wu and her daughter-in-law, Third Sister Cheng, to the Sixth Lady's place, she went along with them. Who could have anticipated that she would steal this gold bracelet without anyone's knowing it? A while ago, when she overheard Mother saying that Father had sent a page boy out to buy a wolf's sinew, she was frightened to death. She asked me in the kitchen what a wolf's sinew was, which gave all of us a laugh, and we told her, 'A wolf's sinew, no doubt, is a sinew from the body of a wolf. If anyone has stolen something, and the wolf's sinew is applied to him, it will wrap itself around the guilty person's body and bind his hands and feet together.' I imagine that, when she heard what we said, she panicked, and took advantage of the departure of the singing girls tonight, to sneak out there in the endeavor to run away. When she saw that there were people at the front gate, she must have ducked into the stable and tried to hide under the manger, but ended up being spotted by the page boys and dragged out into the open."

Yüeh-niang said:

"How is one to judge what people are really like?²⁶

Who would have thought that such a young maidservant would turn out to be:

Like a furtive thieving rat,

and not a proper person at all?"

To resume our story, Li Chiao-erh led Hsia-hua back to her quarters, and, that evening, Li Kuei-chieh took her severely to task, saying, "It turns out that you're nothing but an uncouth youngster. For someone who is fourteen or fifteen years old, and knows something about human behavior, how could you be so stupid? Even in the licensed quarter where I work, that sort of thing would never be countenanced. There's no one else here, so I can speak frankly. If you pick up something, you should bring it back to your room and turn it over inconspicuously to your mistress. Then, if the matter should come to light, she would be able to intervene on your behalf. How could you fail to say so much as a word to her about it? What did it feel like to be put in the squeezers and beaten like that just now? A fine maidservant you are! As the saying goes:

If you don the black livery of a servant,

You must cling to even the blackest post.

If you weren't assigned to her quarters, it wouldn't matter, but when you are subjected to the third degree the way you just were, how do you suppose it reflects on your mistress's standing in the household?"

She then went on to take her aunt to task, saying, "You're really hopeless! If it had been me, I would never have let him subject a maidservant of mine to the squeezers in front of everybody that way. If she were at fault, I would drag her back to my own room and give her a caning myself. How is it that none of the maidservants from the front compound were put in the squeezers, and it was only a maidservant from your quarters that was subjected to the third degree? You allow yourself to be taken advantage of, as though:

You haven't any breath in your own nostrils.²⁷

If you wait until tomorrow, are you really going to let him get rid of your maidservant that way, without saying a word about it? If you won't say anything about it, I will. Anything would be better than letting her be taken off that way, and making yourself a laughingstock to the others. Just take a look at the one named Meng and the one named P'an. The two of them are just like a pair of vixens. You're not very likely to get the better of them."

She then called Hsia-hua over and asked her, "Do you want to leave, or not to leave?"

"I don't want to leave," the maidservant replied.

"If you don't leave," said Li Kuei-chieh, "in the future, you'll have to pay closer attention to your mistress's interests. In all matters, you must strive to be:

Of one heart and one mind,

with her. No matter what you might pick up, turn it over to her, so that she will treat you with the same favor that she does Yüan-hsiao."

"Your instructions are duly noted," said Hsia-hua.

Let us put the chiding addressed to Hsia-hua aside for a moment and say no more about it.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound, what should he find but Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yin-erh sitting together on the k'ang.

All he wanted to do was to get undressed and go to bed, but Li P'ing-erh said, "Since Wu Yin-erh is here, there's no place to put you. You'd better go next door."

"What do you mean there's no place to put me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The two of you, mother and daughter, can lie down on either side, and I'll go to sleep between you."

Li P'ing-erh gave him a look, saying, "Now you're getting vulgar."

"Well, where am I to sleep then?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You can go next door to Sister Six's place to sleep tonight," said Li P'ing-erh.

After sitting with them for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, saying, "All right. All right. At least that will prevent me from

disturbing the two of you any further. I might as well go over there to sleep then."

Thereupon, he went straight over to Chin-lien's quarters. When Chin-lien realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come in, she felt:

Just as though he had fallen from Heaven.

She came forward to help him off with his outer garments and girdle, provided a clean set of bedding:

Spread out the mermaid silk covers, and

Deftly positioned the coral pillow.

After a serving of tea, the two of them went to bed for the night. But no more of this.

Meanwhile, at Li P'ing-erh's place, after she had seen Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, she and Wu Yin-erh sat down, face to face, at a k'ang table, set out the black and white pieces on the board, and proceeded to play a game of elephant chess by lamplight.

"Prepare two cups of tea," she instructed Ying-ch'un, "bring a box of assorted delicacies, and decant a flagon of that sweet Chin-hua wine for me to share with Sister Yin-erh."

"Would you like some rice, Sister Yin-erh?" she went on to ask. "I can have her bring some rice for you to eat."

"Mother, I'm not hungry," Wu Yin-erh replied. "Don't have her bring anything for me."

"All right," said Li P'ing-erh. "Since Sister Yin-erh doesn't want any rice, get four of those stuffed pastries out of my cabinet, and bring them here in a box lid for Yin-erh to eat."

In a little while, Ying-ch'un brought in four saucers of side dishes, one of the fermented brawn from a set of pig's trotters, one of salted chicken, one of poached eggs, and one of sautéed bean sprouts and jellyfish, in addition to which there were also a box of assorted fancy nuts, and a box of stuffed pastries, which were all put down beside them.

It did not take long for Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yin-erh to finish three games of elephant chess, after which the wine was poured, and the two of them proceeded to drink together from silver cups.

At this point, Wu Yin-erh said, "Sister Ying-ch'un, if you would hand me my *p'i-p'a*, I'll sing a song for your mistress's entertainment."

"Sister, I'd rather you didn't sing," said Li P'ing-erh. "The little gentleman is asleep, and if his father should happen to hear the singing from next door, he'd scold me for it. We can play at dice instead."

Thereupon, she told Ying-ch'un to fetch the dice box, and the two of them proceeded to enjoy themselves casting dice, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit.

After they had played with the dice for a while, Wu Yin-erh said, "Sister Ying-ch'un, why don't you step into the other room and invite the wet nurse to come over here and have a cup of wine."



Two Beauties Enjoy a Game of Elephant Chess by Lamplight

"She's lying on the k'ang in there with the baby in her arms," said Yingch'un.

"Tell her to stay where she is with the baby in her arms," said Li P'ing-erh, "but take a cup of wine over there for her. That ought to do. You don't know about it, but this little gentleman is rather hypersensitive. If you try to leave him, he's sure to wake up. One day, when he was asleep on my side of the k'ang, and his father presumed to start something with me, he opened his eyes wide and woke up, just as if he was aware of what was going on. I had the wet nurse take him into the other room, but all he would do was cry, and insist on my holding him."

"Now that you've got this baby boy," Wu Yin-erh laughed, "it seems that Father and you can't even spend a satisfactory night together any more. How often does Father pay a visit to your room?"

"There's no telling," said Li P'ing-erh. "He doesn't always stop at one, or even two visits, but drops in to see him all the time. It ought not to matter that he comes to see the child this way, but the fact that he comes here so often has had the effect of filling certain persons to bursting with rage, and induced them to utter the direst imprecations against the child and his father behind their backs. As for me, it goes without saying that I am nothing but an object of obloquy. It's not as though he and I are up to anything in particular. I'd really rather he didn't come here so often. Whenever he does, the next day people indicate by looks and grimaces that they think I'm monopolizing their husband. Why do you suppose, when he came in here just now, I urged him to go somewhere else?"

"Sister Yin-erh, you may not know it, but in this household:

When people are many, tongues are many.²⁸

Take today, for instance. When that gold bracelet disappeared, fortunately you were here to see it yourself, a certain person, out of spite, went to the rear compound and did her best to incite the First Lady against me, raising suspicions about the fact that the gold was

brought into my quarters, and it was in my room that the bracelet disappeared. Later on, it was only after it was disclosed that the maidservant from the Second Lady's quarters had stolen it, that the:

Blue or red, black or white,
of the situation finally became clear. Had that not been the case, even without any other funny business, things looked bad enough for the maidservants in my room and the wet nurse. And Old Mother Feng was so upset she started to cry, threatening to commit suicide, and saying, 'If the gold bracelet is not found, I'm not going to go anywhere.' And, in fact, it was not until the bracelet turned up, later on, that she consented to leave the premises, and, taking a lantern, set off for home."

"Mother," said Wu Yin-erh, "if that's the way it is, out of consideration for Father, all you can do is look after the child as best you can, and let things take their course. Whatever happens, you'll just have to:

Deal with matters as they occur.²⁹

As for the First Lady in the rear compound, so long as she doesn't have anything to say against you, that's that. The problem is that the others, on seeing that you have given birth to a son, can't help being somewhat put out. As long as Father takes charge of the situation, things ought to be all right."

"If it weren't for the consideration shown by Father and the First Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "the child would not have lived to this day."

As they were talking together, what with:

First a cup for you,

Then a cup for me,

without their realizing it, it was the third watch of the night before they went to bed. Truly:

When a favored guest arrives, one's feelings can never be satiated;

When a real confidante shows up, conversation is mutually agreeable.³⁰

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Within the painted boudoir a bright moon traverses the shutters;
As beauties, keeping each other company, spend the night together.
Who could be anything but enamored of their jade bones and icy flesh?
A sprig of plum blossoms projects its shadow through the unending night.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 45

LI KUEI-CHIEH REQUESTS

THE RETENTION OF HSIA-HUA;

WU YÜEH-NIANG IN A FIT OF ANGER

CURSES AT TAI-AN

As a fancy name, it has been designated
the king of all the flowers;¹
The miraculous appearance of its icy flesh
sets it apart from its rivals.
Its seductiveness enhanced by the sunlight,
it displays its pure allure;
Its cool limpidity transported by the wind
diffuses a chaste fragrance.
Its jade countenance need not envy the ladies
who affect teary complexions;²
Its snowy visage cannot help but remind one of
the powder-faced gentleman.³
With sandalwood clappers and golden goblets⁴
its qualities are celebrated;
What need is there to boast of Mr. Wei's Purples
and Mr. Yao's Yellows?⁵

THE STORY GOES that because Hsi-men Ch'ing was on holiday he did not go to the yamen that day. When he got up in the morning, he went to the front reception hall to look on as Tai-an prepared two table settings of food for the Ch'iao family, one of them to be delivered to Madame Ch'iao the Fifth, and the other to the wife of Ch'iao Hung. Both of them were replete with:

High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery, assortments of the giblets of domestic fowl, seasonal fruits, and the like. Madame Ch'iao the Fifth rewarded Tai-an with two handkerchiefs and three candareens of silver, and Ch'iao Hung's wife gave him a bolt of black silk, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh, upon taking leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing the day before, had gone straight to the home of Huang the Fourth. Huang the Fourth, for his part, had already arranged with his associates to seal up the sum of ten taels of silver to thank Ying Po-chüeh for his services.

"His Honor told us to come back after the Lantern Festival is over," said Huang the Fourth. "From what he said, it sounded as though he might be willing to renegotiate the contract for the remaining five hundred taels that we owe him. We can hardly manage without the use of that sum of money."

"How much more do you need right now?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"Brother Li the Third doesn't know any better," said Huang the Fourth, "and wants to try to borrow it from some eunuch or other. But it would still cost us 5 percent interest per month. It seems to me that it would be better if we could borrow it here, and thereby take advantage of the prestige of his yamen. Even if we have to expend something, both high and low, it would still end up costing us less. Right now, if he can be induced to put up another fifty ingots of silver, it would make it a contract for an even thousand taels, and simplify the calculation of the monthly interest payments."

When Ying Po-chüeh had heard him out, he nodded his head and said, "That's no problem. But if I succeed in persuading him to do this on your behalf, how will you and your associates, the six of you, reward me for my efforts?"

"I will take it up with Li the Third," said Huang the Fourth, "and persuade our associates to give you an additional five taels of silver."

"You can forget about any five taels," said Ying Po-chüeh. "With the skills that I possess, those five taels of yours mean nothing to me. But if you rely on my ingenuity to persuade him with a single word, I'll have to be included in the deal. Today, my wife has gone to his place to attend a party, but I won't be going there myself. Tomorrow evening, however, I've been invited to a lantern-viewing party there. The two of you, first thing tomorrow morning, should supply yourselves with four kinds of delicacies, and also a jug of Chin-hua wine. Don't bother to engage the services of any singing girls, because Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh are already there and haven't gone home yet. You can hire six players of wind and percussion instruments from the licensed quarter. If I escort you over there, he's sure to invite you to sit down for a visit. Then, by putting in no more than:

A single word or half a sentence,⁶

from the sidelines, I guarantee that I will persuade him to do as you wish. If he agrees to come up with another five hundred taels of silver and renegotiate the contract for an even thousand taels, at the very most you'll owe him fifty taels of silver per month. What does

that amount to after all? It would cost you that much to keep a mistress for a month. As the saying goes:

An undissembling scholar may well exist, but there is no such thing as unadulterated varnish.⁷

When you turn over the consignment of goods you have contracted to purvey, you can mix some sawdust in with the incense and adulterate the wax with juniper oil. Who will know the difference? After all:

You're not out to catch fish,

But only to muddy the waters.⁸

The best way to proceed is to avail yourself of his reputation."

Thereupon, their plan having been decided upon, the next day, Li the Third and Huang the Fourth actually purchased the wine and gifts and turned them over to Ying Po-chüeh, who escorted their two servants on the way to deliver them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the front reception hall taking care of the dispatch of the complimentary table settings, when Ying Po-chüeh showed up and said, "My wife put you to a lot of trouble yesterday and was late returning home."

"I went to a party at Commandant Chou Hsiu's place yesterday," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "and it was already the first watch of the night before I got home. So I didn't even have a chance to see my new relatives, who, I was told, had departed some time earlier. This morning, being on holiday, I did not have to go to the yamen, but, rather than going to see them, I have sent two table settings to the houses of my Ch'iao relatives."

When he had finished speaking, he sat down.

Ying Po-chüeh then called for Li Chin, the servant from Li the Third's household who had accompanied him, and said, "Bring in the gifts."

The two servants then carried in the gifts and put them down just inside the ceremonial gate leading into the second courtyard.

"Brothers Li the Third and Huang the Fourth," said Ying Po-chüeh, "have repeatedly told me of their sense of obligation for the great favor they have received from you. On this festive occasion, not having anything else to offer, they have purchased some insignificant gifts as a humble offering for you to give away to someone if you like."

What should they see at this juncture, but the two servants, who proceeded to come forward, prostrate themselves on the ground, and kowtow.

"What did you have to bring these gifts for?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It would not be right for me to accept them. Tell them to carry them back where they came from."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "for you to refuse to accept these gifts of theirs, and insist on having them returned to the donors, would be a very ugly gesture. They also wanted to engage the services of some singing girls to come and wait on you, but I put a stop to that. They have, however, hired six players of wind and percussion instruments, who are waiting outside at this moment."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered, "Have them called inside for me."

In no time at all, the six musicians were summoned into their presence and knelt down in front of him.

"Since their services have already been engaged," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ying Po-chüeh, "I can hardly send them back where they came from. The appropriate thing to do would be to invite the two of them over for a visit."

This was just the signal Ying Po-chüeh had been waiting for, and he promptly called Li Chin over and instructed him, "When you get home, tell your master that His Honor has accepted his gifts and is not going to send anyone with a formal invitation, but that he would like your master and Master Huang the Fourth to come over as soon as possible for a visit."

Li Chin assented to these instructions and withdrew. Before long, the gifts were duly put away, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to reward the two servants with a candareen of silver apiece, and they kowtowed and departed. The six players of wind and percussion instruments stood in attendance in the courtyard below.

In a little while, Ch'i-t'ung brought in a serving of tea, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Ying Po-chüeh company as they drank it.

Ch'i-t'ung then said, "The food is ready. Where would you like to eat it?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by ushering Ying Po-chüeh over to the ante-room on the west side of the courtyard, where they took their seats.

He then went on to ask Ying Po-chüeh, "You didn't happen to run into Hsieh Hsi-ta today, did you?"

"I had no sooner gotten up this morning," said Ying Po-chüeh, "than Li the Third showed up at my place and arranged with me to take care of having the gifts delivered here. How could I have had the spare time to meet with him?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Ch'i-t'ung, "Quickly go and invite Master Hsieh to come join us."

In no time at all, Shu-t'ung set up a table and prepared it for their repast, while Hua-t'ung brought in four portions of appetizers in a square box coated with translucent lacquer. These were served in dainty diminutive picnic saucers, decorated with patterns both inside and out. There was one saucer of delectably tasty squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of a sweet-flavored assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of redo-lently fragrant orange conserve, and one saucer of fragrant bamboo shoots preserved in fermented red mash. There were also four large serving bowls containing main dishes. One bowl of stewed singed sheep's head, one bowl of marinated broiled duck, one bowl of blanched celery cabbage, egg, and wonton soup, and one bowl of yams with red-cooked minced-pork meatballs. At either end of the table there were set out ivory chopsticks inlaid with gold. In front of Ying Po-chüeh there was a bowl of fresh polished white rice, and in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing there was a cup of fragrant congee made from nonglutinous rice.

After the two of them had consumed their repast, the utensils were cleared away, and the table was wiped clean, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh continued to sit where they were, playing at backgammon, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit.

Taking advantage of the fact that Hsieh Hsi-ta had not showed up yet, Ying Po-chüeh seized the occasion to ask, "Brother, how much silver do you propose to advance to Li Chih and Huang the Fourth tomorrow?"

"I plan to retrieve the old contract and renegotiate a new one for the five hundred taels of silver they still owe me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That ought to do it."

"That would be all right, I guess," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "but it would really be better if you could see your way to advance them

enough additional capital to make a round thousand taels. It would make it easier to calculate the interest in the future. And I also have another suggestion. Since you really have no use for those gold bracelets they gave you, if you were to throw them in at a valuation of a hundred and fifty taels, you wouldn't have to come up with much in the way of additional cash."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard him out, he said, "What you say makes a lot of sense. I'll advance them another three hundred and fifty taels tomorrow, then, and renegotiate the contract for an even thousand taels. That way I won't be so improvident as to let the gold sit idly at home."

As the two of them were playing backgammon together, Tai-an suddenly came in and announced, "Pen the Fourth has brought in a large marble standing screen, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, together with a bronze gong, and a bronze drum, complete with their stands and knockers. He says that they belong to the household of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Hsiang the Fifth, who wants to pawn them for thirty taels of silver. Is Father willing to agree to that or not?"

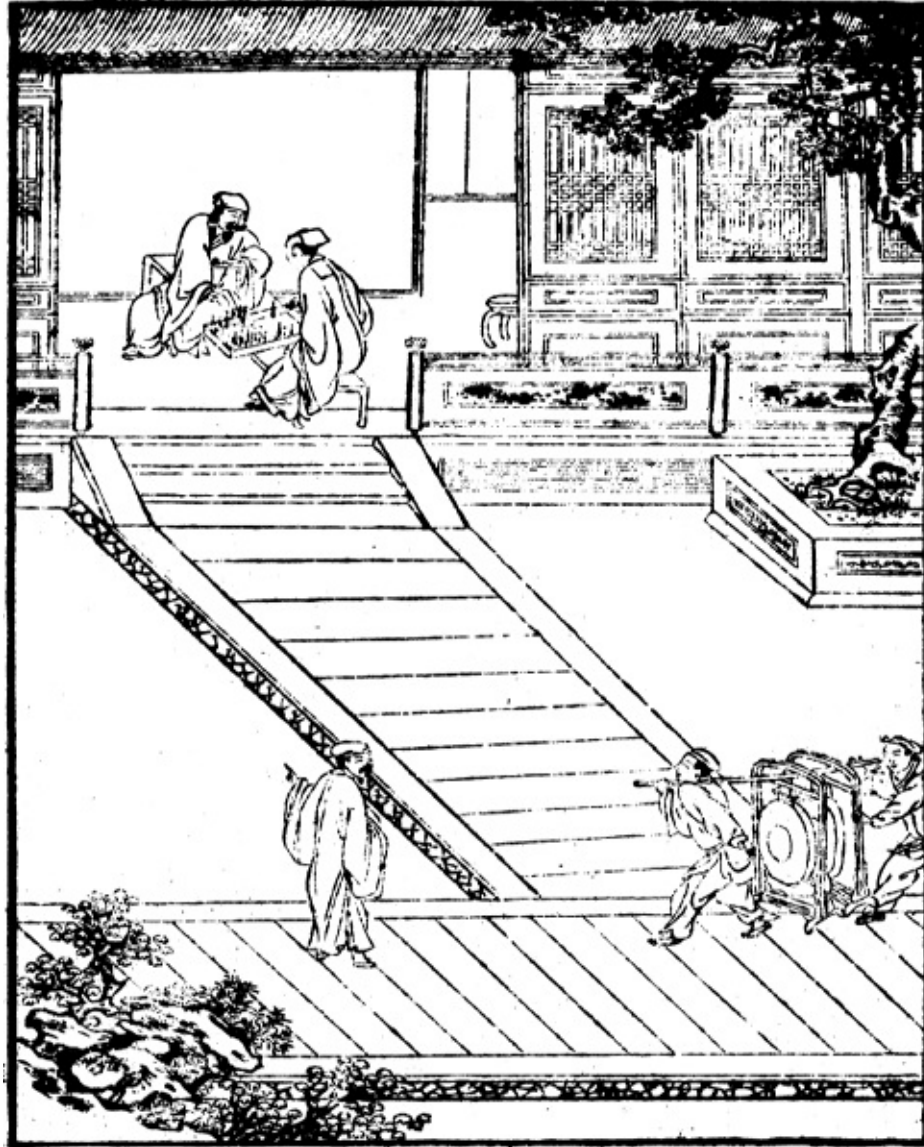
"Tell Pen the Fourth to bring them in for me to see," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long, Pen the Fourth, with the aid of two assistants, carried them in and set them down in the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Pochüeh gave up their game of backgammon and came over to look at them. It so happens that the principal object was a three-foot-wide, five-foot-tall, marble standing screen, suitable for being displayed upon a table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and decorated with gold tracery, the pattern in the marble being such that:

The black and white were distinctly defined.⁹

After Ying Po-chüeh had contemplated the objects for a while, he said deliberately to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, just take a good look at these things. The pattern in the marble resembles a lion couchant, protector of the house, and the two stands for the bronze gong and the bronze drum are sumptuously decorated with varicolored designs and cloud patterns carved in relief, the workmanship of which is truly outstanding."

Doing his best to expedite things from the sidelines, he continued, "Brother, you really ought to accept these objects that he is offering to pawn with you. Even leaving out of account the bronze gong and drum with their two stands, this screen alone is something you could hardly hope to buy for fifty taels of silver."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Accepts the Pawning of a Bronze Gong and Drum

"There is no way of knowing whether or not he is likely to redeem them in the future," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Needless to say," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "he is hardly likely to redeem them. His affairs are like a cart on the downward slope. And if he waits as long as three years, the accumulated interest would probably be equal to the capital."

"All right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have my son-in-law in the shop up front weigh out thirty taels of silver for him."

As soon as he had sent Pen the Fourth on his way, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the standing screen wiped clean, positioned it at the upper end of the large reception hall, and proceeded to examine it from left and right. Indeed, he found, the golds and greens of the varicolored clouds blended their hues harmoniously.

"Have those musicians had something to eat yet?" he then went on to ask.

"They're being fed down below right now," said Ch'in-t'ung.

"Tell them, when they're finished eating," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to come and let us hear them play."

Thereupon, a great drum was carried into the reception hall, the bronze gong and bronze drum were set up in the corridor, and the musicians commenced to play. Truly:

The sound shakes the cloudy empyrean;

The tones startle both fish and birds.¹⁰

As they were playing, who should appear but Ch'i-t'ung, with Hsieh Hsi-ta in his wake, who came in and bowed to the two of them.

"Hsieh Hsi-ta," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come over here and see what you think this standing screen is worth."

Hsieh Hsi-ta stepped up and proceeded to examine it for some time, uttering no end of exaggerated praise as he did so, saying, "Brother, even if you were able to strike a bargain, you must have paid at least a hundred taels of silver for this standing screen. If you

had offered any less, they would have refused to sell it."

"Would you believe it?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Even with that bronze gong and bronze drum out there thrown in, complete with their two stands and knockers, he paid only thirty taels of silver for them altogether."

Clapping his hands together, Hsieh Hsi-ta exclaimed, "Amitü-bha be praised! Where could one ever find such a bargain? Including capital and interest, even if you leave the standing screen out of account, thirty taels of silver would hardly suffice to purchase this bronze gong and bronze drum, together with their stands. Just look at the workmanship of these stands. The cinnabar-red painted lacquer is all done in accord with official specifications, and the instruments themselves must contain, at the very least, some forty catties of resounding bronze, which must be worth a pretty penny. No wonder they say:

Every object has its rightful owner.¹¹

Who else could hope to have such great good fortune as yours, that a bargain like this should just happen to come your way?"

After they had chatted for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to have a seat in his studio, and, before long, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth also showed up.

"Why did the two of you go to the trouble of sending me gifts?" said Hsimen Ch'ing. "It would hardly be right for me to accept them."

This threw Li Chih and Huang the Fourth into such a state of consternation that they kowtowed, saying, "Pray don't embarrass us. These insignificant things are only indiscriminate tokens for you to give away to someone if you like. We could hardly presume not to respond to Your Honor's summons."

Thereupon, seats were provided for them, and they sat down to one side. Shortly thereafter, the page boy Hua-t'ung brought in five cups of tea, and, after they had drunk them, he took the cups and their raised saucers away.

A little later, Tai-an came up and asked, "Father, where would you like me to set up the table?"

"Bring the table in here," directed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well remain where we are."

Thereupon, Tai-an and Hua-t'ung between them managed to carry in an Eight Immortals table finished with agateware lacquer and set it down on the floor over a charcoal brazier. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta took the seats of honor at the head of the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the host's position opposite them, and Li Chih and Huang the Fourth sat down at either side. Shortly thereafter, a plate of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres suitable to accompany a drinking party was brought in, along with soup, rice, and other delicacies, served in:

Large platters and large bowls,
consisting of goose, duck, chicken feet, and every other kind of side dish.

The finest of Yang-kao vintages is decanted;

The soup appears afloat with peach blossoms.

The musicians continued to play outside the windows, and Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Wu Yin-erh to serve the wine. But we will say no more, for the time being, about this drinking party in the front compound.

To continue our story, the male servant from Li Kuei-chieh's establishment and the maidservant, La-mei, from Wu Yin-erh's place, having engaged sedan chairs for the purpose, came to take their mistresses back home. When Li Kuei-chieh heard that the servant had arrived, she hurried out to the front gate and engaged him in a surreptitious conversation for some time, after which she returned to the master suite to say goodbye and explain that she needed to go home.

Wu Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged her to stay, saying, "We're all about to go to the home of my sister-in-law and are prepared to take both of you with us. If it gets too late, you can set off from their place, without any need for sedan chairs, and make your way home by joining the rest of us in 'walking off the hundred ailments.'"

"Mother, you don't understand," said Li Kuei-chieh. "There's no one to be relied upon at home. My elder sister is not there, and moreover, my fifth maternal aunt has invited a lot of people for a 'hamper party.'¹² My mother is really anxious to have me there and was expecting me all day yesterday. If she weren't so concerned, she wouldn't have sent the servant to fetch me. Under ordinary circumstances, if you invited me to stay several days, I'd be happy to do so."

When Yüeh-niang realized that she would not stay, she told Yü-hsiao to take the two trays from the gift box she had originally brought with her, fill one of them with Lantern Festival dumplings, and the other with sugar crisps, and then give it to the servant from her establishment to carry. She also gave Li Kuei-chieh a tael of silver and allowed her to make an early departure. After Kuei-chieh had said goodbye to Yüeh-niang and the others, her aunt accompanied her to the front compound and told Hua-t'ung to carry her felt bag for her. When she came by the door to the studio in the front courtyard, she told Tai-an to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come out and speak to her.

Cautiously lifting aside the portiere, Tai-an went inside the studio and extended the invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Kuei-chieh is about to go home and would like to have a word with you."

"Do you mean to say that little whore Li Kuei-chieh hasn't left yet?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"She's not going home until today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then stepped outside, where he saw that Li Kuei-chieh was wearing a jacket that opened down the middle, made of lilac-colored Lu-chou silk with purpled edging, over a skirt of white glazed damask with a wide varicolored drawnwork border, and had a white satin kerchief shot with turquoise wrapped around her head.

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,

she knelt down in front of him and kowtowed four times, saying, "I've put Father and Mother to a lot of trouble."

"Why don't you go home tomorrow?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"There's no one to look after things at home," said Kuei-chieh. "My mother has sent the servant with a sedan chair to fetch me."

"There is also another matter that I'd like to take up with you," she went on to say. "With regard to that child in my aunt's quarters, you really oughtn't to have her taken away. My aunt has already punished her last night with a few strokes of the cane. If you consider the situation, she's still young and doesn't really understand how to behave. I gave her a real talking to, and from now on her conduct

will be reformed. She won't dare do anything like that again. It's not so much that I object to your getting rid of her, but if my aunt is left with no one to wait on her during a major festival like this, wouldn't you be troubled by it? It's always been the case that:

Though the wooden ladle or the fire tongs may be short,

They're still better than having to use your hands.¹³

Father, whatever you do, for my sake, allow this maidservant to remain in your household."

"Since you have spoken up for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll keep the slave after all."

Turning to Tai-an, he said, "Go to the rear compound and tell the First Lady not to send for a go-between."

Noticing that Hua-t'ung was standing by with Kuei-chieh's felt bag, Tai-an said, "Have him give me Kuei-chieh's felt bag to hold, and send him back to the rear compound to deliver the message."

Hua-t'ung assented and headed straight back to the rear compound.

When Kuei-chieh had finished speaking to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she raised her voice outside the east window and called out, "Beggar Ying, I won't bother to pay my respects to you. Your mother is on her way home."

"Drag that lousy little whore back in here," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "Don't let her go. Have her sing a song suite for my delectation."

"You'll have to wait until your mother has the leisure to sing for you," said Kuei-chieh.

"What kind of chaste schemes are the two of you hatching," asked Ying Pochüeh, "that you insist on carrying on a private conversation without letting me in on it? If you let her go home in broad daylight like this, you'll only be benefiting the lousy little whore. She'll have time to take on any number of customers before it gets dark."

"You're delirious, you beggar!" said Kuei-chieh, as she made her exit with a laugh.

Tai-an accompanied her on the way out and saw her into her sedan chair. When he had finished speaking with Kuei-chieh, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound to adjust his toilet.

During his absence, Ying Po-chüeh said to Hsieh Hsi-ta, "This little whore, Li Kuei-chieh, is carrying on just like an escaped convict. Her meretriciousness is more beguiling than ever. As though on a major festival like this she would ever consent to remain at one place if she could help it. She has arranged for the procuress of her establishment to send for her. I wonder who it might be that is waiting for her there."

"Take a guess," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, as he surreptitiously whispered no more than a few sentences:

Thus and thus, and

So and so,

into Ying Po-chüeh's ear.

"Keep your voice down," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Our brother doesn't know anything about it."

In no time at all, they heard the sound of Hsi-men Ch'ing's footsteps, and the two of them ceased speaking.

Taking Wu Yin-erh onto his lap, Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to pass the same cup of wine back and forth between them, saying as he did so, "This adopted daughter of mine is both gentle and soft, a hundred times better than that little whore from the Li Family Establishment, that not even a dog would want to mess around with."

"What a thing to say, Master Two!" laughed Wu Yin-erh.

Every single person is a unique individual,

A hundred persons are a hundred individuals.

In the space of any particular quarter,

There are both the wise and the foolish.¹⁴

Why insist on comparing one with another? What has Kuei-chieh ever done to annoy you?"

"There's no point in interrogating that lousy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All he utters is the same old:

Ridiculous blatherskite."

"Don't you worry yourself about anyone else," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Just let me live out my days with this adopted daughter of mine. Daughter, come over here, take up your *p'i-p'a*, and sing me a song."

Thereupon, Wu Yin-erh:

Neither hastily nor hurriedly,

Deftly extended her jade fingers,

Gently strummed the silken strings,

placed the *p'i-p'a* on her knees, and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "The Willows Dangle Their Gold":

In my heart I am preoccupied,

Unable to eat food or drink tea.¹⁵

It is not easy to relinquish my handsome lover.

I am desolate because I can't get him out of my mind.

I don't even know whose establishment you are visiting now.

If you want to part company with me, at least you could give me a clear statement.

You have utterly abandoned me;

You have utterly deceived me;

But you'd better not think you've heard the last of me.

After Ying Po-chüeh had downed a cup of wine, Wu Yin-erh proffered another to Hsieh Hsi-ta and then proceeded to sing, to the same tune as before:

I am constantly depressed. When will I ever achieve my heart's desire?

I am preoccupied with the thought of my tender-hearted lover.

My sisters do their best to keep me under tight control;

My old mother will not let up on me;

Which makes it look as if I am unable to keep my word.

I don't love you for your jewels or your gold.

The thing that I love, the thing that I love, is just your handsome face.
If we could only be man and wife,
I could die happy,
Because then you and I could satisfy each other's desires.

But we will say no more, for the moment, about how Wu Yin-erh served wine, played her instrument, and sang in the front compound.

To resume our story, Hua-t'ung went back to the rear compound on his errand, where he found that Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in the master suite together with Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery.

On seeing Hua-t'ung come in, Yüeh-niang was just about to send him after Old Mother Feng in order to take Hsia-hua away, when Hua-t'ung said, "Father has sent me to tell you that he doesn't want you to have her taken away."

"Your father told me to sell her off," said Yüeh-niang. "Why should he not want to sell her now? Tell me the truth. Who was it who suggested to your father that she not be taken away?"

"Just now," said Hua-t'ung, "I was standing by, holding Kuei-chieh's felt bag for her. But when she was just about to leave, she spoke to Father, begging him to let Hsia-hua stay, to deal with her leniently, and not to allow her to be taken away. Father told Tai-an to come back and tell you about it, but Tai-an refused to come inside and, right in front of Father, sent me to come in his stead, took her felt bag away from me, and then proceeded to see Kuei-chieh on her way himself."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she was more than a little annoyed and cursed Tai-an, saying, "Why that double-dealing, ingratiating, treacherous slave! No wonder, when I was originally told to send for a go-between, he said it was Father who had ordered that she be taken away, when all along he was just up to his tricks. And now he's contrived to be the one who sees Kuei-chieh on her way. When he comes back here, I'll have something to say to him."

As she was speaking, whom should she see but Wu Yin-erh, who came in after she had finished singing in the front compound.

"La-mei, the maidservant from your place, has come to fetch you," Yüeh-niang said to her. "Li Kuei-chieh has already gone home. No doubt, you're planning to go home yourself."

"Since you have urged me to stay," said Wu Yin-erh, "if I were to go home, it would only show that:

I wouldn't know a favor if I saw one."

Then, turning to La-mei, she went on to ask, "What did you come for?"

"Mother sent me to see how you were doing," said La-mei.

"There isn't anything going on at home, is there?" Wu Yin-erh asked.

"Nothing at all," La-mei replied.

"Since there's nothing going on," said Wu Yin-erh, "what did you come to fetch me for? You might as well return home. Mother here has urged me to stay, and to join her and the other ladies this evening in visiting her sister-inlaw's place and then 'walking off the hundred ailments' together. I won't come home until getting back from that excursion."

When she had finished speaking, La-mei was about to depart, but Yüeh-niang said, "Call her back so I can see that she has something to eat."

"The First Lady is offering you something to eat," said Wu Yin-erh. If you wait a little, you can take my clothes bag home with you. Tell Mother not to send a sedan chair for me. This evening I'll make my way home on foot."

"Why didn't Wu Hui come?" she went on to ask.

"He's at home suffering from an eye ailment," La-mei said.

"Take La-mei back to the rear compound," Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "and see that she gets provided with two dishes of pork, a plate of steamed dumplings, and a cup of wine. And also take the gift box that she brought with her and replenish it with a tray of Lantern Festival dumplings, and a tray of tea cakes, to take back with her."

It so happens that Wu Yin-erh had left her clothes bag in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and Li P'ing-erh had already sought out a set of first-class silk brocade clothing, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a tael of silver and put them in her felt bag as a gift.

But Wu Yin-erh blithely declined them, saying, "Mother, I don't want these clothes."

"The truth of the matter is, Mother," she continued with an ingratiating smile, "that I don't have a white jacket to wear. If you would take back these silk clothes, could you possibly seek out any kind of old white satin jacket and give it to me instead?"

"My white jackets are all too big for you," said Li P'ing-erh. "You could scarcely wear any of them."

Thereupon, she said to Ying-ch'un, "Take the keys and get a whole bolt of white satin out of my large trunk to give to Yin-erh."

"Tell your mother," she said, "to have a tailor make up two dress jackets for you."

"By the way," she went on to ask, "did you want figured satin or plain?"

"Mother, I'd prefer the plain," replied Wu Yin-erh. "I want something that will go well with a vest."

Then, turning to Ying-ch'un, she said with an ingratiating smile, "I'm putting you to the trouble of going upstairs again on my behalf. In the future, though I have nothing else to offer, I can always entertain you with a song."

In a little while, Ying-ch'un brought down from upstairs a bolt of fine plain white satin, manufactured on a wide loom in Sung-chiang, the label attached to the end of which indicated that it weighed thirty-eight ounces, and handed it to Wu Yin-erh. Yin-erh hastily:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;

kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh four times. After which, she got to her feet and also bowed deeply to Ying-ch'un eight times.

"Yin-erh," said Li P'ing-erh, "Wrap up this silk clothing and take it along with you too. Sooner or later you may have occasion to wear it to a party."

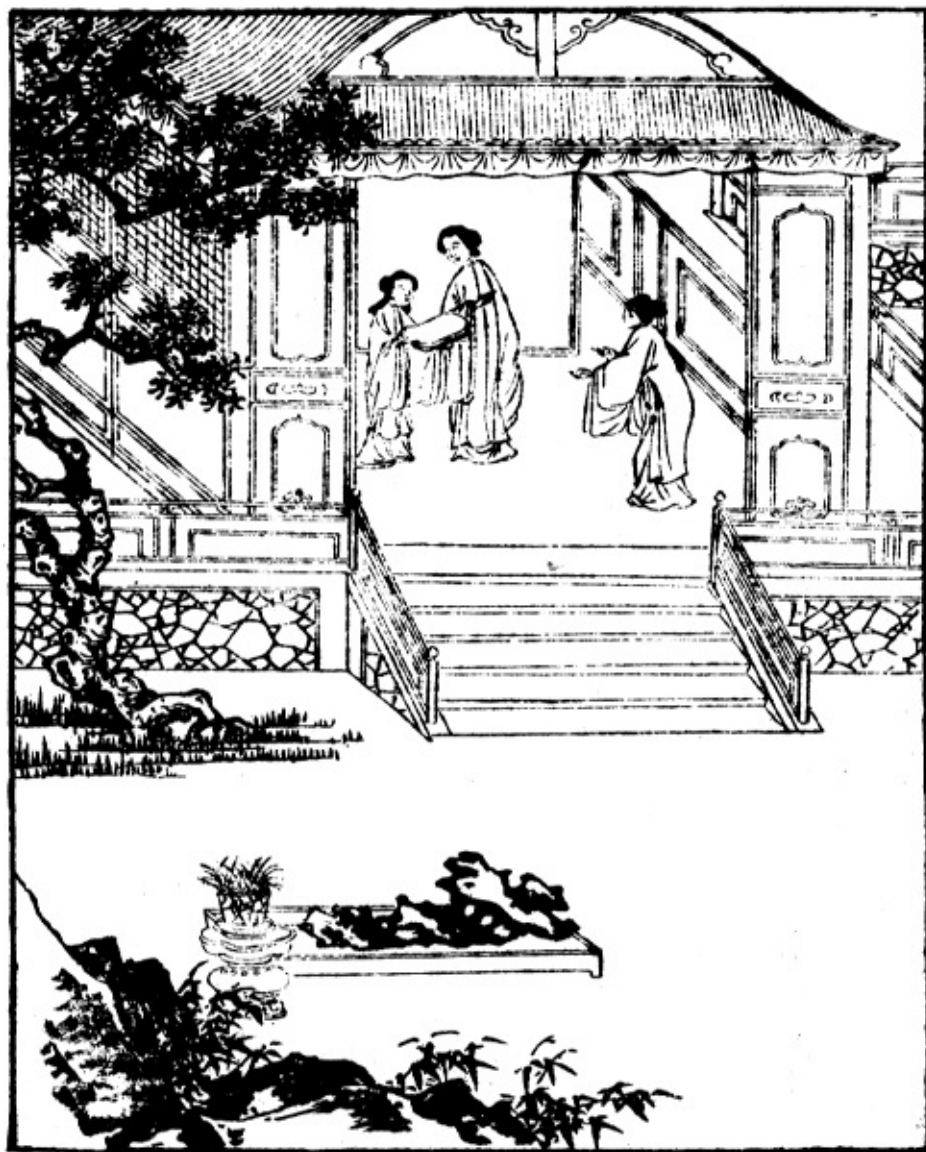
Wu Yin-erh said, "Mother has not only bestowed this white satin on me to make a jacket out of, but also persuaded me to take this other clothing as well."

Thereupon, she kowtowed to her again to express her gratitude. In no time at all, when La-mei had finished her meal, the gift box and felt bag were entrusted to her, and she set off for home.

Yüeh-niang took the occasion to say, "Yin-erh, this conduct of yours is just the kind I like. See that you don't imitate those meretricious tricks of Li Kueichieh. Yesterday, and again this morning, she carried on just like:

A recalcitrant tiger that refuses to lie down, declining our invitation to stay, and insisting on going home. What's happening at her place that requires her to be there so urgently? She didn't even want to put herself out to sing. When she saw that the servant from her place had come for her, she didn't even have anything to eat before running off, without even waiting to say goodbye to you. See that you don't imitate that conduct of hers."

"Dear Mother!" exclaimed Wu Yin-erh. "What sort of a place is this after all, the residence of Father and Mother? If she had any excess wind in her colon, she should have saved it for somewhere else, rather than presuming to let it off here. But Kuei-chieh is still young, and doesn't know what's what. Mother shouldn't allow herself to be bothered by her."



Li P'ing-erh Contributes a Gift of White Satin to Wu Yin-erh

As they were talking, who should appear but the page boy Lai-ting, who had been sent by Sister-in-law Wu to urge them on their way, saying, "My mistress respectfully requests that Sister-in-law Three, and the other ladies, including Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, should come over as soon as possible, and that Sun Hsüeh-o should also come along for a visit."

"When you get home," said Yüeh-niang, "say to your mistress, 'We're in the process of getting ready right now. The Second Lady is suffering from pain in her legs, and will not be coming, but stay behind to look after the house. Your brother-in-law is entertaining some guests in the front compound today, leaving hardly anyone in the residential part of the house. The lady from the rear compound

will not be coming, and Li Kuei-chieh has already gone home, so that, including Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, there will be six of us in all. You oughtn't to go to any trouble on our behalf. After visiting together a while longer, we'll come over at nightfall.”

“Who have your master and mistress engaged to sing for us?” she went on to ask Lai-ting.

“Big Sister Yü,” Lai-ting replied and, when he had finished speaking, set off ahead of them.

Wu Yüeh-niang then, along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ingerh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh, having spoken to Hsi-men Ch'ing about their arrangements, and instructed the wet nurse to stay at home and look after Kuan-ko, all dressed themselves up to befit the occasion and set off in six sedan chairs. Escorted by Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung,¹⁶ and Lai-an, along with four orderlies, they proceeded on their way to the home of Sister-in-law Wu. Truly:

In myriads of courtyards the spring prospects are conspicuous;

In thousands of households the lantern lights¹⁷ blaze all night.

In this life nights such as this are seldom to be seen;

Next year where will we see the bright moon on this night?¹⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 46

RAIN AND SNOW INTERRUPT A WALK

DURING THE LANTERN FESTIVAL;

WIFE AND CONCUBINES LAUGHINGLY

CONSULT THE TORTOISE ORACLE

In the imperial precincts the prospects are fine
during the Lantern Festival,
Surpassing those in the immortal Isles of the Blest.
Jade dust is stirred into flight,
Escorts clamor around decorated chariot hubs,
Moonlight illuminates the towers and terraces.

In the three palaces¹ this night is a time for rejoicing.
A myriad golden lotus lanterns,
Are scattered about the streets of the capital.
Hoofers parade to the drum all night.
Citizens compete to put up decorated lanterns,
Which are displayed for five consecutive nights.²

THIS LYRIC was composed by a poet of former times in order to celebrate the sights of the Lantern Festival and the prosperity of the people.³

To resume our story, on that day Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Wu Yüeh-niang and the others off on their way to the party at Sister-in-law Wu's place, while asking Li Chih and Huang the Fourth to keep their seats.

Ying Po-chüeh took advantage of his host's absence while he was seeing off the ladies to address them, thus and so, saying, "I have already spoken to him on behalf of you two gentlemen, and he has positively agreed to advance you another five hundred taels of silver tomorrow."

Li Chih and Huang the Fourth bowed in gratitude to Ying Po-chüeh again and again, and, when it became dusk, said goodbye and departed. Ying Pochüeh, for his part, along with Hsieh Hsi-ta, continued to drink with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the antechamber where his studio was located. Whom should they see at this juncture but Li Ming, who lifted aside the portiere and came in.

When Ying Po-chüeh saw him, he said, "So Li Ming has come."

Li Ming knelt down on the floor and kowtowed to the company, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him, "Why has Wu Hui not come with you?"

"Today," said Li Ming, "Wu Hui was not even able to report for duty at the installation ceremony for the new prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture. He's at home suffering from an eye ailment. I've engaged Wang Chu to come in his stead."

He then called out to Wang Chu, "Come in and kowtow to His Honor."

Wang Chu then proceeded to lift aside the portiere and come into the room, where he kowtowed to the company and then stood to one side with Li Ming.

Addressing himself to the latter, Ying Po-chüeh then said, "Li Kuei-chieh from your establishment has just left to return home. Did you not know about it?"

"When I got home from my duty assignment in Tung-p'ing," said Li Ming, "I only had time to wash my face before coming over here. I don't know anything about it."

Turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I fear the two of them have probably not had a chance to eat yet. Brother, why don't you direct that the two of them be given something to eat?"

"Master Two," said Shu-t'ung, who was standing in attendance, "let them wait a little, and they can eat together with the other musicians. That will obviate the need to fetch food for them a second time."

Ying Po-chüeh told Shu-t'ung to provide him with a tray, to which he transferred two saucers of hors d'oeuvres and a plate of roast lamb from the table top and gave it to Li Ming, saying, "If you wait until they come with the rice, the two of you can take a couple of bowls worth and eat in the parlor here."

Then, turning his attention to Shu-t'ung, he said, "My good nephew! As the saying goes:

Affairs come together according to their tendencies;

Things are differentiated according to their classes.⁴

You don't understand the fact that this category of people, even though they may only be boy actors from the licensed quarter, are not the same as musicians. Although one may treat them alike, it will only serve to show that you and I do not know the score."

This disquisition caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to give Ying Po-chüeh a rap on the head as he admonished him with a laugh, saying, "Dog that you are, since:

People in that line of trade,
Always stand up for each other,
it's no wonder that you know all about the pains and pleasures of those who are subject to performance on demand.”

“My good child!” said Ying Po-chüeh. “What do you know about it? You've been a devotee of the licensed quarters for nothing if you don't even understand the four characters that mean:

Sollicitous of jade and considerate of fragrance.
How should they be explicated? Girls with painted faces and boy actors are just like fresh flowers. If you are solicitous and considerate of them, they will respond by being more vivacious. But if you mistreat them, it will be a case of ‘Eight Beats of a Kan-chou Song’:

Listlessly, listlessly withering away,⁵

and they will be hard to keep alive.”

“I yield to my son,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, “in his understanding of principle.”

In a short time, Li Ming and Wang Chu finished eating, and Ying Po-chüeh called them over to ask, “Do the two of you know the song suite that begins with the line:

Together we used to descant upon the snow and moon, the breeze and flowers,

or not?”

“That's a suite in the Huang-chung mode,”⁶ said Li Ming. “We do know it.”

Thereupon, he picked up his psaltery, after which, with Wang Chu playing the *p'i-p'a* and Li Ming playing the psaltery:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
they sang the song suite that begins with the tune “Drunk in the Flowers’ Shade” in the Huang-chung mode:

Together we used to descant upon the snow and moon, the breeze and flowers;⁷
In our dreams of clouds and rain, the fragrance was alluring, the jade soft.⁸
Though the blossoms are now splendid, the moon just full;
They are weighed down with snow and tossed by the wind;
While my lover is as out of reach as the horizon.
For some time I have wanted to send him a broken-hearted message,
But I find that this boundless longing of mine,
Is nearly impossible to communicate.

To the tune “Rejoicing at the Oriole's Ascent”:

Choosing the blue sea as an inkwell,
And a rabbit-haired brush,⁹ sturdy as a beam;
For pine soot ink,
I will grind down Mount T'ai itself;
And use the infinite expanse of azure Heaven¹⁰ as brocade notepaper,
In order to display the art of the sage of cursive calligraphy.¹¹
Though I write for a while,
I cannot write out the feelings in my heart;
Though I explain for a while,
I cannot explain the extent of my suffering.

To the tune “Dancers’ Ensemble”:

I remember the first time we met,
When I first caught sight of my romantic young karmic encumbrance.
In our two hearts we mutually acknowledged a life and death affinity;
For a whole year our relationship was as close as glue and lacquer.
Who could have anticipated that you would have a change of heart along the way,
Turning our case into a Heaven of Frustrated Separation?¹²

To the same tune:

When I haven't seen him for two or three days,
It feels just as though we have been separated for more than ten years.
Not a meal goes by without my feeling preoccupied with him;
Not a quarter of an hour passes without my calling him to mind;
Not a watch of the night transpires without my dreaming of him.

To the tune “Four Gates Students”:¹³

There is not a traveler from whom I do not ask for news of him.
This lovesickness is really driving me crazy.
My acquaintances on seeing the state I am in urge me to desist;
But I can't help being preoccupied with him in my heart.
I long for him until he appears vividly before my eyes;¹⁴
I yearn for him so hard the saliva in my mouth dries up.
The fronts of my lapels,
The sides of my sleeves,
Are completely covered with tearstains.
I think of that time in the past when he and I exchanged vows.
In those days he was attractively young while I was in my prime;
As for his intelligence, who had ever seen the like?
And he seemed to exhibit an abundance of genuine sincerity.

To the tune “Ground Scouring Wind”:

For my part, my feelings for him have never diminished.
My tears flow in rivers, I love him so much.
We used to sit knee to knee,
And chat shoulder to shoulder.
Amid the fragrance of the callrops and lotuses we used to entwine our necks like mandarin ducks.
We used to walk hand in hand,
And sleep on the same pillow.
Heavens! It seems that my destiny is meager, and my allotment shallow.¹⁵

To the tune “The Water Nymphs”:

It's not a case of my being capricious,
And merely seeking “phoenix glue with which to mend the broken string.”¹⁶
I recall the oaths we swore upon our pillow;¹⁷
I think of the vows we made before the gods.
One whose heart is firm can wear through stone.¹⁸
Surreptitiously, I importune azure Heaven.¹⁹
If I am guilty of failing his expectations in a former incarnation,
So that my handsome lover cannot fulfill his desires in this life,
May we be able to be reunited in the life to come.

CODA

I enjoin you not to let your innermost feelings change.
If we are to meet again, it will not be until ages have passed and years gone by.
Though you may be distant in the flesh,
Do not allow your heart to be distant.²⁰

The story goes that, when they had finished singing it was gradually growing dark. Truly:

The gold raven slowly sinks behind the western hills;
The jade rabbit gradually climbs above the painted balustrade.²¹
A beautiful lady comes gently in to report the fact that:
“The moon has moved the flower shadows²² onto the gauze window.”²³

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that the utensils be cleared away and then sent someone to invite Manager Fu Ming, Han Tao-kuo, Manager Yün Li-shou, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join them at the front gate, where a standing screen had been erected, two tables had been set up, a pair of rams-horn lanterns were suspended, and a party spread had been laid out, replete with a plate of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres and boxes containing every kind of delicacy. Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, occupied the positions of honor at the head of the seating arrangement, while the employees and managers sat down to either side. Outside the front gate there were twelve golden lotus lanterns arrayed on either side, in addition to which there was a small stand of fireworks, which Hsi-men Ch'ing had ordered should not be set off until the womenfolk arrived home.

Before this, the six musicians had carried the bronze gong and bronze drum to the front gate, where they now started to play. After performing for a while on the bronze gong and bronze drum, they followed up with an interlude of more refined music on their wind instruments. The boy actors, Li Ming and Wang Chu, then came forward with their psaltery and *p'i-p'a* and sang a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, beginning with the tune “Prelude to Painted Eyebrows,” the first line of which is:

Blossoms and moonlight pervade the spring metropolis,²⁴

etc. etc.

The passersby in the street, who crowded around to see the show:

Scarcely dared to gaze upon them.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a “loyal and tranquil hat,”²⁵ a velvet robe decorated with a crane motif, and a white satin jacket. Tai-an and P'ing-an took turns setting off sparklers one at a time. A pair of orderlies, holding staves in their hands, used them to fend off the crowd and prevent any idlers from getting too close for comfort.

In no time at all, when it was observed that:

The clouds were tranquil in the azure heavens,

As the wheel of a bright moon²⁶ rose in the east,

crowds of sightseers congregated in the street, and:

The merrymaking was at its height.

Behold:

At every doorway, the beating of gongs and drums;²⁷

In every house, the airs of woodwinds and strings.

Troupe after troupe, the sightseers tread to the sound of singing;

All of a flutter, the wellborn young ladies trail undulating sleeves.

Hills of lanterns decorated with bunting,²⁸

Soar majestically to a hundred feet, piercing the clear sky;

Aromatic incense from phoenix censers,

Drifts hazily in a thousand layers, investing the silken throngs.

Empty courtyards, both inside and out,
Are awash in the brilliance of the precious moon;
Painted bowers, both above and below,
Are iridescent in the glow of decorated lanterns.²⁹
In the three markets and six streets³⁰ the people are making merry;
On this festive day in the metropolis we enjoy the Lantern Festival.³¹

To resume our story, in the rear compound Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, Hsiao-yü, and company, on observing that Yüeh-niang was not at home, and hearing the sound of the bronze drum and other forms of musical performance at the front gate, as well as the fact that there were to be fireworks, all got dressed up and concealed themselves behind the standing screen to see what was going on. Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung were also behind the standing screen, heating wine over the brazier.

It so happens that Yü-hsiao and Shu-t'ung had been carrying on an affair for some time and were constantly flirting with each other. The two of them, on finding themselves together on this occasion, helped themselves to some melon seeds to crack, and in the process of doing so managed to knock over a pewter flagon of wine that was resting on the brazier. The fire in the brazier flared up conspicuously, scattering ashes all over the area, but Yü-hsiao merely continued to laugh about it.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he sent Tai-an to ask who was laughing, and why the ashes had been scattered in such a way.

That day Ch'un-mei was wearing a new white satin jacket with a brocaded scarlet vest and was sitting sedately in a chair. When she saw the two of them knock over the wine, she immediately raised her voice and berated Yü-hsiao, saying, "What a wondrously wanton whore you are! No sooner do you catch sight of a man than you start carrying on with him in an unheard of way. It's enough that the two of you knocked over the wine, but how can you continue to guffaw over it? What are you laughing at? You've not only managed to put out the fire, but covered us all with ashes to boot."

When Yü-hsiao realized that she was being taken to task, she was too frightened to say anything and headed back toward the rear compound.

Shu-t'ung was thrown into consternation and came forward to explain, saying, "I was heating some wine on the brazier and happened to knock over the pewter flagon of wine."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this explanation, he didn't pursue the matter any further and let it drop.

Before this happened, on that particular day, Pen the Fourth's wife, on learning that Yüeh-niang would not be at home, and having been aware for some time that Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang were favorite body servants of Hsi-men Ch'ing, had laid in all kinds of holiday dishes and delicacies and sent her daughter Chang-chieh to invite the four of them to her house to relax and visit together.

They took her to see Li Chiao-erh, but she said, "I'm only:

A walking stick made of rush:

Not to be relied upon.³²

You'd better ask Father's permission."

They also went to ask Sun Hsüeh-o, but she was even less willing to take responsibility for the decision. They procrastinated until after lamplighting time, when Pen the Fourth's wife again sent Chang-chieh to invite the four of them. Lan-hsiang pressed Yü-hsiao, Yü-hsiao pressed Ying-ch'un, and Yingch'un pressed Ch'un-mei to go back to Li Chiao-erh as a group and ask her, in her turn, to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing and request permission for them to go.

But Ch'un-mei just sat there:

Without turning a hair,

and upbraided Yü-hsiao and the others, saying, "The lot of you are like a bunch of good-for-nothings who:

Have never even attended a banquet.

Though you've never been to a feast,

You can't wait to get a sniff of one.

Even if it means I don't get to go, I won't go begging someone else for the privilege. Each and every one of you is carrying on as though you were ghost-driven. What's the big hurry, anyway? I can't bring myself to countenance such things with even half an eye."

Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang had all dressed themselves up to befit the occasion, and come out to the front compound, but did not dare to depart, while Ch'un-mei refused to budge from her seat.

Shu-t'ung, on seeing that Pen the Fourth's wife had again sent Chang-chieh to invite them, said, "Even if Father takes me to task, so be it. Let me go out and petition him on your behalf."

Going straight out to Hsi-men Ch'ing's side, he covered his mouth and whispered into his ear, "Pen the Fourth's wife, on this festival occasion, has invited my sister maidservants over for a visit, and they have asked me to inquire whether they may go or not."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he instructed him, "Tell your sister maid-servants to get themselves ready and go, but to come home early. There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."

Shu-t'ung promptly went inside and said, "Thanks to my initiative in approaching him, he has consented to your request. He says that you should get yourselves ready and go, but to come home early."

Only then did Ch'un-mei nonchalantly betake herself to her room, make herself up, and prepare to depart.

Before long, the four of them passed through the gate together, after Shu-t'ung had adjusted the placement of the standing screen so as to partially conceal their exit, and proceeded on their way to the house of Pen the Fourth.

When Pen the Fourth's wife caught sight of them, she felt:

Just as though they had fallen from Heaven,

and invited them into an inner room, from the ceiling of which hung lighted hydrangea-shaped gauze lanterns, and which featured a table replete with a meticulously laid out and sumptuous display of comestibles, as well as platters of cold hors d'oeuvres.

Pen the Fourth's wife addressed Ch'un-mei as Elder Sister, Ying-ch'un as Second Sister, Yü-hsiao as Third Sister, and Lan-hsiang as Fourth Sister. When they had all exchanged salutations, she also invited Auntie Han, the wife of Mohammedan Han, to come over and

help keep her guests company, having directed that she be provided with a separate selection of foodstuffs that would not violate her dietary restrictions.

Ch'un-mei and Ying-ch'un were seated in the positions of honor, with Yühsiao and Lan-hsiang facing them, while Pen the Fourth's wife and Auntie Han sat to either side, and Chang-chieh went back and forth to heat the wine and wait upon them. But let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing meanwhile proceeded to call over the musicians and instructed them, saying, "Sing that song suite for us, the first words to the prelude of which are:

The east wind is chilly,³³

beginning with the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent."

Just at this juncture, individual servings of rose-flavored Lantern Festival dumplings, provided with silver spoons in the shape of apricot leaves, were brought out from the rear compound, and the company proceeded to pick them up and enjoy them together. Truly, they were:

Fragrant, sweet, and delectable,
And melted on entering the mouth;
Most appropriate for the occasion.

In front of the gathering, Li Ming and Wang Chu took up their instruments and accompanied themselves as they sang the words of this song suite. Truly:

The rhythm was slow and lingering,
The beat melodious and harmonious.

They sang to the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent":

In the eastern fields the blue mist has dissipated.
We delight in this clear morning of a fragrant day.
Our disposition to love flowers,³⁴
Has caused us to get up, this spring, earlier than usual.
Our curiosity aroused,
We inquire of the Lord of the East, "How much spring are you going to allow us?"
To which our maidservant responds with a smile,
"Last night the flowering crab apples have bloomed."

To the tune "May You Live a Thousand Years":

Amid sprigs of apricot blossoms,
Interspersed with snowy pear blossoms,
Tiny green plums may be seen sparsely scattered.
Beside the bridge over flowing water,³⁵
Beside the bridge over flowing water,
All one can hear is the reiterated calls of the flower sellers.
Beyond the swing, along the road,
All we can hear from within the walls,
Is the happy laughter of beautiful maidens,
Joyously exclaiming, "What a wonderful spring."
Eagerly we strive to fill up our flower baskets,
While bearing our picnic hampers on high.

To the tune "Better than Ever":

Where the flowers are at their thickest,³⁶
A wine flag flutters to attract our attention.
Beside the Peony Pavilion,
We seek female companions to compare botanical specimens.
From amid the lofty green willow branches,
With a flicker of wings³⁷ the morning oriole flies over the treetops.
The cascading red blossoms, and fluttering butterflies,
Fly over the painted bridge.
Out of the whole year,
With its four seasons,
Spring alone is the most wonderful.
Amid the flowers we drink lustily;
Beneath the moon we laugh joyously.³⁸

To the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers":

Listening to the strains of phoenix pipes and phoenix flutes;
We ogle the sight of kingfisher ornaments and clustering pearls.
Raising our jade goblets,
We stumble in drunkenness,
Singing "Golden Threads,"³⁹
We do the "Liu-yao" dance.⁴⁰
Let the bright moon climb the flowering branches;⁴¹
The moon climb the flowering branches.⁴²

CODA:

Completely inebriated, let us recline amid the fragrant verdure,
Suspending our silver lanterns on high underneath the flowers.
The fullness of youth turns all too easily to age.⁴³
Let us not permit the wonders of spring to escape us unappreciated.⁴⁴

But let us say no more for the moment about the playing and singing as the party continued.

To resume our story, Tai-an and Ch'en Ching-chi, with lots of firecrackers in their sleeves, called for a pair of orderlies to carry lanterns for them and set out for Sister-in-law Wu's house to escort Wu Yüeh-niang and the others on their way home. They found them in the parlor, together with Yüeh-niang's elder sister, the wife of Mr. Shen, the wife of Yüeh-niang's second brother, Wu the Second, and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, where they were drinking wine and being entertained by the playing and singing of Big Sister Yü.

When their hostess saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had arrived, she arranged for him to be seated together with Wu the Second and her son, Wu Shun-ch'en, and said, "My husband is not at home today. He's at battalion headquarters supervising the compilation of the guard registers."

She also had a table set up for them and provided with a platter of cold hors d'oeuvres, an assortment of other dishes, and wine, so they could keep Ching-chi company.

Tai-an then came forward and said to Yüeh-niang, "Father sent me to escort you ladies on your way, and to ask you to come home early. He is worried that the crowds may get rowdy later in the evening. I came together with your son-in-law."

Because she had been annoyed with him earlier, Yüeh-niang had not a word to say to him in response.

Sister-in-law Wu then said to her page boy Lai-ting, "Get something for Tai-an to eat."

"Wine and meat, soup and rice, are all laid out up front," said Lai-ting. "He can eat with us there."

"What's the need," said Yüeh-niang, "for someone who's:

Newly come and just arrived,

to be fed right away? Tell him to go stand out front. We're about to get started."

"What's the hurry, kinswoman?" said Sister-in-law Wu. "How can you bring yourself to start:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door,

as it were? At present, with all you ladies here, and on this festival occasion, we sisters ought to be able to have a relaxed visit together. In any case, you left the Second Lady and the other lady at home; so what is there to worry about, that you should want to set off so early? If it were someone else's place, that would be another story."

She then turned to Big Sister Yü and said, "Sing a good song to entertain us. The ladies here have been critical of you."

"The Sixth Lady has really been upset with her," said Meng Yü-lou, "for not showing up to celebrate her birthday."

Big Sister Yü promptly got up from her place and kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh four times, saying, "Ever since I got home after celebrating the Fifth Lady's birthday, I haven't been feeling well. It was only yesterday, when your sister-in-law sent someone to summon me, that I've been able to pull myself together sufficiently to come out. If I'd been feeling better, how could I have failed to come pay my respects to you?"

"Big Sister Yü," said Chin-lien, "The Sixth Lady has been out of sorts. Sing a good song for her, and she won't be upset with you anymore."

Li P'ing-erh merely sat where she was and smiled, without making a sound.

"That's no problem," said Big Sister Yü. "Bring my *p'i-p'a* over here, and I'll sing something for you."

Sister-in-law Wu turned to Third Sister Cheng, the wife of Wu Shun-ch'en, saying, "Pour out some more wine for your two aunts and the other ladies. It's been a long time since their cups have been refilled."

Big Sister Yü then took her *p'i-p'a* in hand and proceeded to sing a set of songs to the tune "The Windswept River":

Midnight has come.
How is this feeling of desolation to be borne?
Within silk screens and brocaded curtains⁴⁵ I lie down in my clothes.
My naughty lover,
You promised me that you'd show up between twelve and two,
But it's already past four.
I can only await him with a painful heart, but what can I do?
He has abandoned me.
I hope the gods will see fit to visit him with an appropriate disaster.

It is already six.
I idly do up my raven locks in a chignon.
Ashamed to gaze into the caltrop-patterned mirror,⁴⁶
I think of him.
I am unable to put on my brocade clothes;
Reluctant to don my kingfisher ornaments and pearls;
Unable to dispel my melancholy. eight o'clock has already past;
There is no sign of him at ten.
All on your account, my sorrow is making me sick.

It is noon.
I am really afflicted with lovesickness,
So afflicted that my soul has taken leave of me.
I think of my talented lover.
Do you remember how, under the moon, beneath the stars,
We swore oaths of fidelity by the hills and seas?
Who has ever taken you for granted?
If he should show up by two,
It would relieve my sorrowing breast.
If he makes it by four, I'll purchase a pig's head to sacrifice.

It's already six o'clock.
I can't help being disturbed at heart.

Who is there to share a few understanding words?
My equivocating lover,
You're probably in the houses of pleasure,⁴⁷
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red;
Your lust as big as the sky.
At eight o'clock I light my candles,
But there is no sign of him, early or late.
At ten o'clock I must resign myself to consulting the tortoise oracle.⁴⁸

As she was singing, Yüeh-niang remarked, "How is it that just now it's begun to get so chilly in here?"

Lai-an, who was standing in attendance at one side, reported, "The weather has turned cold outside, and it's started to snow."

"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "the clothes you're wearing are too thin. I've brought a padded cloak with me. After all, by this time of night, it's bound to be cold."

"Since it's snowing," said Yüeh-niang, "we'd better call for a page boy to go home and bring us our fur coats to wear."

Lai-an promptly left the room and said to Tai-an, "Mother has directed that someone go home and fetch the fur coats of the ladies."

Tai-an, in turn, called for Ch'in-t'ung and said, "You go get them, and let me stay here to attend upon them."

Ch'in-t'ung, without inquiring any further, headed straight off for home.

In a little while, Yüeh-niang remembered the problem about a fur coat for Chin-lien and asked Lai-an, "Who went to fetch the fur coats?"

"Ch'in-t'ung went to get them," replied Lai-an.

"He just went off without inquiring any further, did he?" said Yüeh-niang.

"Something was forgotten in his instructions, just now," said Meng Yü-lou, "when he was told to fetch our fur coats. The Fifth Lady doesn't have a fur coat. It would have sufficed if he had been told just to fetch yours, Sister."

"It isn't really the case that there aren't any at home," said Yüeh-niang. "There's a fur coat that somebody pawned, which could have been brought for Sister Six to wear."

Yüeh-niang then asked, "Why didn't that slave Tai-an go on this errand himself, rather than sending that other slave in his stead? Tell him to come here."

Tai-an was duly called into her presence, where Yüeh-niang took him severely to task, saying, "A fine slave you are! When you're told to do something, you refuse to bestir yourself, but depute another officer to act in your stead. You sent that slave off without so much as mentioning it to me, so that he was gone before anyone knew it. All you do is presume to:

Sit at the altar dispatching your generals,⁴⁹
like a Taoist priest. No wonder that:

Having assumed the position of a high official,

You were reluctant to set the fins on your silk hat aflutter,⁵⁰
but dispatched him on the errand instead."

"Mother is mistaken in her criticism of me," protested Tai-an. "If you had originally directed me to go, would I have dared not to go? But when you sent Lai-an out with the message, all he said was that someone should be dispatched to go home on this errand."

"How would that lowly slave Lai-an dare to order the likes of you around?" said Yüeh-niang sarcastically. "Even legitimate wives such as myself hardly dare tell you what to do. Right now all you slaves have been indulged to the point that you seem to have lost all sense of decorum. I suppose, where your masters are concerned:

If a smoke-stained Buddhist effigy,

Is displayed on your wall:

When you have such a benefactor,

You'll get a monk to match.⁵¹

Do you suppose that I'm unaware of the tricks you've been up to, what with your double-dealing, ingratiating, officious, two-faced, meretricious, lazy, gluttonous, and mercenary conduct:

Duping your superiors while engaging in malfeasance,⁵²
behind their backs? Just a while ago, your master did not send you to escort Li Kuei-chieh on her way home, so how did you come to escort her? Someone was already there, holding her felt bag, when you unceremoniously grabbed it out of his hands. Whether to retain the maidservant, or not to retain the maidservant, was not up to you. When you were told to come in and tell me about it, why did you refuse to come in, but set off that way to escort Kueichieh to the licensed quarter, no doubt in hopes of getting something to eat for your pains, and send someone else to come inside in your stead? You must have anticipated that if I were upset about it, I would take it out on the other person instead of you. And you still deny that:

You're a practiced old hand."

"It couldn't have been anyone else," protested Tai-an. "That must have been Hua-t'ung's story. Father saw him holding her felt bag and ordered me, 'You escort your sister Kuei-chieh on her way home.' It was he who sent him inside. As Mother said, whether to retain the maidservant, or not to retain the maidservant, was not up to me; so what have I got to do with it?"

Yüeh-niang became very angry and cursed him, saying, "You lousy slave! Still shooting off your mouth, are you? I don't have the leisure to bandy words with you here. Slave that you are, you've gone altogether too far with your stiff-necked, recalcitrant ways. When I tell you to do something, you refuse to move and have the nerve to talk back to me. Believe you me, if I don't tell him about it tomorrow, so that he takes you, deceitful slave that you are, and:

Pounds you into a bloody sheep's head,
I might as well quit."

"Tai-an," interposed Sister-in-law Wu, "Why don't you get a move on, and fetch the ladies' fur coats for them. Can't you see she's upset?"

"Sister," she went on to say, "tell him where to find that other fur coat for the Fifth Lady to wear."

P'an Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "Sister, don't bother to have him fetch it for me. I don't have to wear a fur coat. Just tell him to bring that cloak of mine from home for me to wear. If it's something that's been pawned, who knows what kind of shape it's in? If it looks like a yellow dog's pelt⁵³ and I put it on, it will only make me a laughingstock. Besides it's not propitious, since sooner or later it will be redeemed."

"The fur coat I have in mind was not really pawned," said Yüeh-niang. "It was actually given to us in lieu of payment for a debt of sixteen taels of silver by that man Li Chih. The fur coat that was pawned with us by the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang has already been given to Li Chiao-erh to wear."

She then went on to instruct Tai-an, "The fur coat in question is in the large cabinet. Have Yü-hsiao find it for you. And bring Mistress Ch'en's cloak while you're at it."

Pouting with his lips, Tai-an went outside, where Ch'en Ching-chi asked him, "Where are you off to?"

"What a purely provoking business!" complained Tai-an.

"A single errand has to be performed twice.

At this hour of the night I've got to turn home again."

He went straight home, where he found Hsi-men Ch'ing still partying at the front gate. Manager Fu Ming and Manager Yün Li-shou had already left, but Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Han Tao-kuo, and Pen the Fourth were still drinking and had not yet gone home.

They asked Tai-an, "Are the ladies coming?" and he replied, "No, they haven't started out yet. They've sent me to fetch their fur coats."

He then headed for the rear compound.

Before this, when Ch'in-t'ung had arrived home, he looked for Yü-hsiao in the master suite, to find the fur coats for him.

There he found Hsiao-yü sitting on the k'ang, not in the best of moods, who said, "Today those four whores have all gone off to Pen the Fourth's wife's place to have a party. I don't know where the fur coats are kept. You'll have to go to her place and ask them to find them for you."

Ch'in-t'ung went straight to Pen the Fourth's house, where, rather than announcing himself, he surreptitiously eavesdropped outside the windows.

What should he hear but Pen the Fourth's wife, saying, "Elder Sister and Second Sister, how is it that it's been such a long time since you've had a drink? And you haven't even been using your chopsticks to help yourselves to the dishes. Is it that you turn up your noses at the fare provided by such mean folk as ourselves, or what?"

"Sister-in-law Four," said Ch'un-mei, "we've had enough to drink."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pen the Fourth's wife. "It scarcely needs saying, but how can you start:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door, that way?"

Then, turning to the wife of Mohammedan Han, she said, "As my next-door neighbor, you're just like an assistant host. Urge Third Sister and Fourth Sister to avail themselves of the wine in front of them on my behalf. How can you be so wooden?"

Instructing her daughter Chang-chieh to serve the wine, she went on to say, "Pour some more for Third Sister, but go a little easy in refilling Fourth Sister's cup."

"I've never been able to drink much," said Lan-hsiang.

"I fear you sisters will end up being famished today, since we've failed to provide any tasty dishes for your entertainment. Please don't make fun of us. We were going to engage a minstrel to come and sing for you ladies as you drank your wine, but we were afraid that the noise might be overheard at Father's place. Our lodgings are so inadequate. The inconveniences such mean folk as ourselves have to put up with can scarcely be described."

As she was speaking, Ch'in-t'ung gave a knock on the door, and everyone fell silent.

After a considerable pause, Chang-chieh was heard asking, "Who is it?"

"It's me," said Ch'in-t'ung. "I need to have a word with my sisters."

The door was duly opened, and Ch'in-t'ung came in, at which Yü-hsiao asked, "Have the ladies come home?"

Ch'in-t'ung looked at them and nearly burst out laughing but refrained from speaking for some time.

"What are you showing your teeth in such a crazy grin for?" demanded Yü-hsiao.

"When I ask you a question," she went on to say, "what are you grinning like that for, without deigning to reply?"

"The ladies are still at Sister-in-law Wu's place drinking wine," responded Ch'in-t'ung. "When they saw that the sky had become overcast and it had started to snow, they sent me home to fetch their fur coats. I was instructed to wrap them all up and take them back with me."

"Mother's fur coat," said Yü-hsiao, "is in that cabinet with the gold tracery in the outer room, isn't it. You can get Hsiao-yü to give it to you."

"Hsiao-yü told me I should come ask you for it," said Ch'in-t'ung.

"How could you believe that little whore?" said Yü-hsiao. "As though she didn't know where it was."

"Those of you whose mistresses have fur coats can get them for him," said Ch'un-mei. "Since my mistress doesn't have a fur coat, I'm the only one who doesn't have to bestir herself."

Lan-hsiang said to Ch'in-t'ung, "You can ask Hsiao-luan for the Third Lady's fur coat."

Ying-ch'un then reached for the keys she carried at her waist and gave them to Ch'in-t'ung, saying, "Get Hsiao-ch'un to open the door to the inner room and get her coat for you."

Ch'in-t'ung went back to the rear compound, where Hsiao-yü in the master suite, and Hsiao-luan in Meng Yü-lou's quarters, wrapped up the fur coats in question and turned them over to him.

Just as he was carrying them out to the front compound, he ran into Tai-an and asked him, "What have you come back home for?"

"You might well ask!" said Tai-an. "All on account of the fact that I sent you on this errand, I've been subjected to a real dressing down by the First Lady. On top of which, she's sent me back to fetch a fur coat for the Fifth Lady."

"Right now, I'm on my way to fetch the Sixth Lady's fur coat," said Ch'in-t'ung.

"When you've fetched it, wait for me here," said Tai-an, "so we can go back together. It shouldn't really matter if you get there ahead of me, but I don't want to give the First Lady any excuse for cursing me out again."

When he had finished speaking, he proceeded to the master suite, where he found Hsiao-yü sitting on the k'ang, warming herself over the frame of the brazier, and cracking melon seeds with her teeth.

When she caught sight of Tai-an, she asked, "So you've come too, have you?"

"You might well ask!" said Tai-an. "I'm suffering from:

A bellyful of anger."

Thereupon, he related the whole episode of how Yüeh-niang had cursed him out, from first to last, saying, "I told Ch'in-t'ung to come fetch the fur coats, and she got angry with me for not coming myself, claiming that I was deputing officers to act in my stead. Then, because the Fifth Lady doesn't have a fur coat of her own, she sent me to come after one. She said that in the large cabinet there was a fur coat that had been left in lieu of a debt by Li the Third, and that I should ask you for it to take back with me."

"Yü-hsiao has the key to the inner room with her," said Hsiao-yü, "and they're all having a party at Pen the Fourth's place. You'll have to have her come and get it for you."

"Ch'in-t'ung has gone to the Sixth Lady's quarters to fetch her fur coat but will be back directly," said Tai-an. "We can get him to go after her. That will give me a chance to give my legs a rest and warm myself at the brazier."

Hsiao-yü then made a place for him at the head of the k'ang, and they sat down next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, and warmed themselves at the brazier.

"There's some wine in the flagon," said Hsiao-yü. "Let me pour a cup for you."

"That's the spirit," said Tai-an. "I accept your largess."

Hsiao-yü got down off the k'ang, put the flagon to heat on the brazier, pulled open a drawer from which she extracted a bowl of preserved goose meat, and poured out some wine for him. There being no one else present, the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues.

As they were drinking, Ch'in-t'ung came in, and Tai-an offered him a drink, after which, he told him, "Go fetch Sister Yü-hsiao, so she can locate the fur coat for the Fifth Lady to wear."

Ch'in-t'ung put down the felt bag and went to Pen the Fourth's place to get Yü-hsiao.

Yü-hsiao cursed him, saying, "You lousy jailbird! What have you come back for?"

She refused to come herself but gave him a key and told him to get Hsiao-yü to open the door. Hsiao-yü opened the door to the inner room with it and tried the key in the lock of the cabinet, but, though she tried for some time, she was unable to get the lock to open, and Ch'in-t'ung had to go back to Pen the Fourth's place again.

"That's not the key," said Yü-hsiao. "The key to Mother's cabinet is kept under the mattress on her bed."

When Hsiao-yü heard this, she cursed Yü-hsiao, saying, "That whore! It's just as though her bottom were nailed in place over there. She refuses to budge herself and, after two trips back and forth, still continues to order me around instead."

When she finally succeeded in getting the cabinet open, it turned out not to contain any fur coats, so Ch'in-t'ung had to make yet another trip to Pen the Fourth's place to ask about it.

This constant running back and forth had aroused Ch'in-t'ung's resentment, and he muttered, "Even if I were to die, I ought to have three days and three nights without this kind of provocation. It's just my luck to run into these pestilential ghosts of small-time ladies, on the lookout for someone to plague."

Turning to Tai-an, he said, "What do you say? When we go back this time, we'll only provoke another tongue-lashing from Mother, who won't take into consideration the fact that the room was locked, but just blame us for the delay."

Returning to Pen the Fourth's place, he said to Yü-hsiao, "We looked in the cabinet in Mother's room, but it didn't contain any fur coats."

Yü-hsiao thought to herself for a while and then laughed, saying, "I forgot. It must be in the large cabinet in the outer room."

When he made his way back to the rear compound, Hsiao-yü started cursing again, saying, "That whore must have been fucked silly by her lover! So the fur coat was here all the time, while we've been looking everywhere for it."

She then proceeded to get it out and wrap it up in a package, together with Hsi-men Ta-chieh's cloak, and handed it over to Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to take back to Sister-in-law Wu's house.

When they got there, Yüeh-niang started cursing again, saying, "You lousy slaves! You've been in cahoots so that neither of you came back without the other. That's all there is to it."

Tai-an was too perturbed to answer, but Ch'in-t'ung spoke up, saying, "The fur coats for the other ladies were all there, but we had to wait while sister looked for this fur coat with the black fabric facing."

Thereupon, they opened up the package and took it out.

Sister-in-law Wu examined it under the lamp light and said, "This is also a good fur coat. Fifth Lady, why did you run it down that way, describing it as a yellow dog's pelt? Where would you find a yellow dog's pelt like that? I'd be happy to wear a coat like this myself."

"It's practically a new fur coat," said Yüeh-niang. "The only thing is that the lapels in front are a little worn. In the future if you replace them with two new brocaded panels, it will look just fine."

Meng Yü-lou picked it up and joked with Chin-lien, saying, "My child, come over here and try on this yellow dog's pelt so your mother can see how well it looks on you."

"If I'm up to snuff," said Chin-lien, "make no mistake about it, I ought to be able to ask my husband to give me one of my own in the future. Who wants to pick up someone else's used fur coat to wear, for no good reason?"

Meng Yü-lou continued to joke with her, saying, "How can you hope to repudiate your karma that way? Since this fur coat of somebody's is available, you ought to be grateful enough to put it on and recite the Buddha's name."

Thereupon, she proceeded to help her on with the coat, and when Chin-lien realized that it had an ample and substantial look to it,

she had nothing more to say.

At this point, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh all donned their sable fur coats and prepared to bid farewell to Sister-in-law Wu and the wife of Wu the Second and set out for home. Yüeh-niang gave Big Sister Yü a package containing two candareens of silver.

"I, too, will bid farewell to the sisters-in-law and you other ladies," said Wu Yin-erh, and she proceeded to kowtow to them in turn.

At this point, Sister-in-law Wu presented her with a pair of silver flower ornaments, and Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh each pulled a tael of silver out of their sleeves and gave them to her, for which she kowtowed to them in thanks.

Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and Third Sister Cheng all expressed a desire to see Yüeh-niang and company on their way, but when they saw that it was snowing, Yüeh-niang insisted that they go back inside.

"It was still snow that was falling a little while ago," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "but now it's turned to drops of water that moisten the body. I'm afraid the clothing of you ladies may get wet. You'd better see if you can borrow an umbrella from Sister-in-law Wu's place, to give you some protection on the way home."

Wu the Second promptly fetched an umbrella, and Ch'in-t'ung put it up. The two orderlies that had accompanied them on their way there held lanterns, and the cluster of men and women set out in their wake. After traversing several narrow lanes, they came out on Main Street.

At this point, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been setting off numerous fire-crackers along the way, said, "Sister Yin-erh, your place is not far from here. We might as well escort you to your home."

"Just where is her place located?" Yüeh-niang then asked.

"If you go straight down this alley here," said Ching-chi, "that establishment with the imposing gateway halfway down is her place."



"I'll say goodbye to you ladies here," said Wu Yin-erh, "and go on home."

"The ground is wet," said Yüeh-niang. "Go on home. You have already performed your kowtows. I'll send a page boy to escort you the rest of the way."

She then called for Tai-an and said, "You escort Sister Yin-erh on her way home."

"Mother," said Ching-chi, "let me and Tai-an, the two of us, go with her."

"All right," said Yüeh-niang, "Sister, you can go on home with the two of them to escort you."

This was just the signal Ch'en Ching-chi had been waiting for, and he set off with Tai-an to see her to her place, while Wu Yüeh-niang and the others continued on their way home.

Along the way, P'an Chin-lien said, "Elder Sister, originally you said something about our seeing her home. How is it that we didn't end up doing it?"

"You're just like a child," Yüeh-niang laughed. "When someone jokes with you, you take it seriously. What sort of a place is the Verdant Spring Bordello,⁵⁴ that the likes of you and me should accompany her there?"

"It seems to me unlikely," said Pan Chin-lien, "if someone's husband were out whoring in the licensed quarter, that his wife would never come looking for him, or never endeavor to:

Beat him into a pot of porridge."

"There you go again!" said Yüeh-niang. "If our husband goes into the quarter some time in the future, just you go looking for him and give it a try. You might well end up being mistaken for a painted face yourself, and dragged off by someone else's husband, if he deigned to give you so much as a second look."

As they were speaking, they gradually approached the entrance to East Street, not far from the gateway of Ch'iao Hung's house, where they saw that Ch'iao Hung's wife and Big Sister Tuan, the wife of her nephew Ts'ui Pen, were standing in the doorway. When the latter two persons observed from a distance that Yüeh-niang and the cluster of men and women accompanying her were approaching, they insisted upon inviting them to come in.

Yüeh-niang declined repeatedly, saying, "Although we very much appreciate our kinswoman's lavish hospitality, it is already late, and we'd better not come in."

But Ch'iao Hung's wife refused to let them go, saying, "My good kins-woman, how can you start:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door?"

She insisted on dragging them inside, where, in the parlor, they found lanterns suspended, an array of wine and delicacies set out, and two female entertainers to play and sing for them as they enjoyed the wine. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing was still drinking with Ying Po-chüeh and company at his front gate, but the party was about to break up. Before this, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, who had been stuffing themselves all day, had long since reached the point where they couldn't have swallowed another bite. But when they noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had fallen asleep in his chair, they took advantage of the fact that he wasn't looking to dump whatever remained on the saucers and serving dishes into their sleeves, clearing them off completely, and then decamped, along with Han Tao-kuo, leaving only Pen the Fourth behind, who was afraid to return home on his own initiative. He remained to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company until he finally arranged for the musicians to have something to drink, paid them for their services, and sent them on their way, saw that the things were put away, and the lanterns and candles extinguished, and made his way back to the rear compound.

Meanwhile, at Pen the Fourth's house, P'ing-an came in and said, "Sisters, haven't you gotten a move on yet? Father's already gone inside."

When Ch'un-mei heard this, along with Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and company, they were in such a hurry to return that they didn't even pay their proper respects to Pen the Fourth's wife, but took their leave and ran off in a cloud of dust.

Lan-hsiang, who had gotten one of her feet twisted in her shoe, was unable to keep up with them and cursed, saying, "The way the lot of you have taken off, as though you were:

Picking up your coffins and fleeing for your lives, has made me twist my foot in its shoe, so I can't seem to get it on right."

When they arrived in the rear compound, they heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to Li Chiao-erh's quarters, and all trooped in to kowtow to him. The abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, on seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come to retire in Li Chiao-erh's quarters, had retreated to the master suite and the company of Hsiao-yü.

When Yü-hsiao came in and saluted her, Hsiao-yü took her to task, saying, "Yü-hsiao, when Mother sent the page boy back from over there to fetch that fur coat, you refused to come take care of it yourself but directed that I should do it. But I didn't know which key it was that opened the door of the cabinet. And then, when we finally got it open, the coat wasn't there. Later on, it turned out to be in the large cabinet in the outer room. You were the one who put it there in the first place, but it seems you were so confused you didn't know what was going on. The lot of you must have had more than enough to eat and drink over there. Each and every one of you looks as though she's put on an additional bulge or two."

Yü-hsiao was so affected by this tirade that the blood flew to her cheeks, and she responded, "Why you crazy little whore! Has the dog scratched your face, or what? Just because you weren't invited, are you going to take it out on those of us who were?"

"As though I cared anything about an invitation from that whore!" exclaimed Hsiao-yü.

The abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, from her position on the sidelines, remarked, "You two sisters ought to be more accommodating in the way you talk to each other, or your master in the other room will overhear you. The ladies are likely to return any minute now. You would do better to prepare some tea for them."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying a felt bag.

"Has Mother come home?" Yü-hsiao asked.

"The ladies were almost here," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "but the wife of Kinsman Ch'iao was standing in her doorway and invited them

in for a drink. They should be getting up to go by now.”

Only then did the two maidservants stop bandying words.

Before long, Yüeh-niang and the others took their leave of Ch'iao Hung's wife and arrived at the front gate, where Pen the Fourth's wife came out to greet them. Ch'en Ching-chi and Pen the Fourth then got out a rack of miniature fireworks, and they all stopped to watch them being set off before coming inside. When they had bowed in salutation to Li Chiao-erh and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, Sun Hsüeh-o came out to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and exchange greetings with Meng Yü-lou and her two companions.

“Where is Father?” Yüeh-niang went on to ask.

“He came into my room just now,” said Li Chiao-erh, “where I've already tucked him in for the night.”

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she hadn't a word to say.

Whom should they see at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yühsiao, and Lan-hsiang, who came in to kowtow.

Li Chiao-erh then explained, “Today Pen the Fourth's wife from up front invited the four of them to come visit for a while, and they've just gotten back.”

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she remained silent for some time and then took them to task, saying, “The preternatural bitches! What did they go out there for, for no good reason? Who said they could go?”

“They got permission from Father before they went,” replied Li Chiao-erh.

“So they asked him, did they?” said Yüeh-niang. “A fine good-for-nothing to take charge of anything he is! Your household is getting to be like:

The temple that opens its gates early on the first and fifteenth;

Only to let a bunch of insignificant ghosts expose themselves.”

“Dear Lady!” exclaimed the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery. “Each of these four sisters is as pretty as a picture. How can you refer to them as insignificant ghosts?”

“If they're as pretty as pictures,” said Yüeh-niang, “they must be only half-length portraits. What need is there to let them out for no good reason, only to allow outsiders to feast their eyes on them?”

Meng Yü-lou, realizing that Yüeh-niang was not in a good mood, was the first to make her departure. After that, Chin-lien, on seeing her get up to go, also went off, together with Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, leaving only the abbess to spend the night with Yüeh-niang. The snow and sleet continued to fall until the fourth watch of the night before stopping. Truly:

It is night in the storied bowers, the incense has dissipated, the candles are cold;

It is a time for cutting vegetables by lantern light, and sweeping away the snow.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen. Around lunch time, Yüeh-niang, along with Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh, saw the abbess off on her way to the nunnery.

As they were standing inside the front gate, they caught sight of an old country woman who made her living telling fortunes by means of the tortoise oracle. She was wearing a patchwork jacket and a blue cotton skirt, her forehead was enclosed in a black headband, and she was carrying a pouch on her back as she came along the street.

Yüeh-niang sent a page boy to invite her to come inside the second gate, where, after she had laid out her fortune-telling diagrams and put her consecrated tortoise in place, she said to her, “How about telling our fortunes?”

The old woman knelt down on the ground and kowtowed to her four times, after which she said, “May I ask how old you are, madame?”

“Tell the fortune of a woman who was born in the year of the dragon,” said Yüeh-niang.

“If it's the greater dragon, you'd be forty-one,” said the woman. “If it's the lesser dragon, you'd be twenty-nine.”

“I'm twenty-nine,” said Yüeh-niang. “I was born at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eighth month.”

The old woman gave the consecrated tortoise a nudge, and after it had made a circuit of the diagrams, it came to rest on one, which, when it was picked up, turned out to depict an official and a lady formally seated and surrounded by servitors, some of them seated and some of them standing, guarding a hoard of gold and silver and other valuables.⁵⁵

“This lady,” said the old woman, “is the mistress of the household and was born in the year *wu-ch'en*.

Those born in *wu-ch'en* or *chi-ssu* are like trees from a great forest;

Throughout her life she will be characterized by humanity and righteousness.



Wife and Concubines Laughingly Consult the Tortoise Oracle

She is magnanimous by nature;
 Benevolent and given to good works;⁵⁶
 Recites scripture and bestows alms;
 And distributes her favors widely.
 Throughout her life she will labor to maintain the household;
 Even at the cost of taking the blame for the faults of others.⁵⁷
 But it may not be said that,
 Her joy and anger are constant, and She is inept in managing her servants.

Truly:

When she is happy, she is all ingratiating smiles;
 When she is angry, she is all reverberating wrath.
 Others may sleep till the sun is high in the sky before getting out of bed;
 But you are up betimes, superintending the maids as they do the pots and pans.
 Though your temper may occasionally flare up like windblown fire;⁵⁸
 In the twinkling of an eye, you'll be talking and laughing once more.
 The only problem is the presence of adverse signs in your 'palace of illness and adversity,'⁵⁹
 Indicating that you are ever beset with bickering,

Though your goodness of heart will enable you to overcome it.

In the end, you will live to the ripe old age of sixty-nine."

"Can you tell whether this lady is fated to have any sons?" asked Meng Yü-lou.

"Pray don't take it amiss," said the old woman, "but there's something indistinct about her 'palace of sons and daughters.'⁶⁰ In the end she will have to depend on a son who has taken the tonsure to support her in her old age. This is not something she can do anything about, but chances are she will not be able to keep him."

Meng Yü-lou smiled at Li P'ing-erh, saying, "That must refer to your son Wu Ying-yüan who has had a religious name bestowed upon him as a Taoist priest."

Yüeh-niang then pointed to Meng Yü-lou and said, "You, too, ought to get her to tell your fortune."

"Tell the fortune," said Yü-lou, "of a thirty-three-year-old woman who was born at 4:00 AM on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month."

The old woman once again laid out her fortune-telling diagrams and put the consecrated tortoise in place, where, after making a circuit, it came to rest on a diagram designated "palace of fate."⁶¹ When the old woman picked up this second diagram, it turned out to depict a woman, accompanied by three men, one of whom was dressed like a travelling merchant in his skullcap, the second was an official dressed in red, and the third was a scholar, who was also guarding a hoard of gold and silver. They were surrounded by servitors to wait upon them.

The old woman said, "This lady was born in the year *chia-tzu*.

Those born in *chia-tzu* or *i-ch'ou* are like gold in the sea;

But her fate is crossed by the 'three penalties' and 'six banes.'⁶²

Only by gaining ascendancy over her husband will she be all right."

"I already have," said Meng Yü-lou.

The old woman continued:

"You are gentle and congenial by nature,⁶³

And possess a good disposition.

When you are annoyed at anyone, they don't know it;

When you are pleased by anyone, they don't know it;

You do not display your feelings.

Throughout your life you will please your superiors, be respected by your inferiors,

And gain the love and favor of your husband.

But there is one problem.

No matter how many good turns you may do for others,

You will often fail to win their hearts.

Throughout your life you are fated to take the blame for the faults of others;

No matter how much trouble petty persons may make for you,

You will not be praised for your forbearance.

But since your heart is in the right place,

Even though petty persons should annoy you,

They will not succeed in making you give way."

"Just now," said Yü-lou with a smile, "when I took the heat for that ruckus with Father over the page boy's demand for money,⁶⁴ I guess that was an example of my:

Taking the blame for the faults of others."

"Can you tell whether or not this lady will have any sons in the future?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang.

"If she navigates her vicissitudes safely," the old woman said, "she may have a daughter, though it does not appear that she will have a son. As for longevity, that she will have."

"Now tell the fortune of this lady," said Yüeh-niang. "Sister Li, tell her the eight characters of your horoscope."

"I was born in the year of the sheep," said Li P'ing-erh with a smile.

"If it's the lesser sheep," said the old woman, "you would be twenty-six, and have been born in the year *hsin-wei*. What month were you born in?"

"I was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month," Li P'ing-erh replied.

The old woman started the tortoise on its circuit, and it came to an abrupt halt on another diagram designated "palace of fate." When the old woman picked up this diagram, it turned out to depict a woman accompanied by three officials, the first of whom was dressed in red, the second of whom was dressed in green, and the third of whom was dressed in blue. She was holding a child in her arms and was guarding a hoard of gold and silver and other valuables. Beside her there stood a demon with a blue face, protruding fangs, and red hair.⁶⁵

The old woman said, "As for this lady:

Those born in *keng-wu* or *hsin-wei* are like earth beside the road;

Throughout her life she will enjoy glory and luxury, wealth and honor.

She will have all she wants to eat, and all she needs to wear;

The husbands whom she attracts will be persons of distinction.

Her heart will be characterized by humanity and righteousness.

Gold and silver, riches and silk⁶⁶ will not be a matter of concern.

She is content to let herself be taken advantage of or exploited;

Indeed, she is disappointed if they do not take advantage of her.

But she will suffer from the 'matched shoulders' in her horoscope,
And find that, in everything, others will requite kindness with enmity.

Truly:

'Matched shoulders,' 'penalties,' and 'banes,' will make difficulties for her;
In the twinkling of an eye, they will exhibit a heartless knack for knavery.
It is preferable to encounter a tiger blocking the road to your 'three births';⁶⁷
Than to meet someone, before your very eyes, with two faces and three knives.

Pray don't take what I say amiss, lady, but you're just like a bolt of fine red silk that is, unfortunately, a little shorter than it ought to be. You should try not to let yourself get so upset over things. And, as for the prospects of your son, it's hard to say."

"He has already had a religious name bestowed upon him as a Taoist priest," said Li P'ing-erh.

"If he has already left lay life," said the old woman, "he should be safe. But there is another problem. This year the planet Ketu⁶⁸ impinges on your fate,⁶⁹ meaning that you may suffer a bloody catastrophe.⁷⁰ Only if you can avoid hearing the sound of weeping in the seventh and eighth months, will you be all right."

When she had finished speaking, Li P'ing-erh fished a five-candareen lump of silver out of her sleeve, and Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou each gave her fifty cash.

Just after they had sent the old woman who told fortunes by means of the tortoise oracle on her way, whom should they see but P'an Chin-lien, who came out from the rear compound with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said with a laugh, "I was just saying that you were not to be found in the back, and it turns out that you have all come out to the front here."

"We came out just now to see off the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery," explained Yüeh-niang. "Since then, all this while, we've been having our fortunes told by the tortoise oracle. If you had come a step earlier, we could have had her tell your fortune as well."

"Fortune-telling is not for me," said Chin-lien, with a shake of her head. "As the saying goes:

You may calculate a person's fate,

But you can't predict his conduct.

I remember that previous occasion when the Taoist practitioner was physiognomizing us and said that I would suffer a premature death. Who needs it? It only serves to make one depressed. What will be, will be.

If I die in the street, bury me in the street;

If I die on the highroad, bury me on the road;

And if I should fall into an open drain,

It will just have to serve as my coffin."

When she had finished speaking, she returned to the rear compound with Yüeh-niang and the others. Truly:

The myriad affairs are things that one cannot argue with;

One's whole life is entirely determined by one's destiny.⁷¹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Kan Lo's⁷² success came early, while Chiang Tzu-ya's⁷³ came late;
P'eng-tsu⁷⁴ and Yen Hui⁷⁵ attained longevities of differing length.
Fan Jan⁷⁶ was impoverished, while Shih Ch'ung⁷⁷ was a rich man;
However calculated, the differences were only in the timing.⁷⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 47

WANG LIU-ERH PEDDLES INFLUENCE

IN PURSUIT OF PROFIT;

HSI-MEN CH'ING ACCEPTS A BRIBE

AND SUBVERTS THE LAW

The wind agitates unruly waves, making
the breakers turbulent;
Aboard a lonely craft, obliquely moored,
one's sleep is anxious.
The cry of the isolated bird is shrill
beyond the cold clouds;
The drum of the relay station interrupts
the traveller's dreams.
Poetic fancy only enhances the greenness
of the poolside grass;
The river boats, without prearrangement,
rise on the evening tide.
Gazing into the void, I enumerate those
who truly understand me;
But there is only my old friend the moon
up there in the sky.

THIS POEM merely reiterates the fact that on the northern frontier carts and horses are the norm, whereas in the Chiang-nan region boats and oars are more convenient. Hence, it is certainly true that:

Southerners ride boats, and
Northerners ride horses.¹

The story goes that in the ancient city of Kuang-ling, or Yang-chou, in the Chiang-nan region, there dwelt a well-to-do commoner named Miao T'ienhsiu, who possessed property worth ten thousand strings of cash and was devoted to poetry and ritual.² He was thirty-nine years old and had no sons, but an only daughter, who had not yet been married. His wife, née Li, was bedridden with an intractable disease, so the affairs of the household had been entrusted to his favorite concubine, née Tiao, who was known as Tiao the Seventh. She was formerly a singing girl from a brothel on the main Yang-chou dock, whom Miao T'ien-hsiu had purchased for three hundred taels of silver and installed as a secondary wife in his household, where she reigned supreme in his affections.

Suddenly one day, an old Buddhist monk appeared at his door, claiming to be from the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Required, in the Eastern Capital, who stated that because his temple hall lacked a gilded bronze effigy of an arhat, he had arrived here in the course of his peregrinations, in the hope of calling on the faithful and raising a subscription. Miao T'ien-hsiu was not stingy but promptly agreed to donate fifty taels of silver to the monk for this purpose.

"It scarcely requires so much," the monk said. "Half of that amount would suffice to finish the image in question."

"Master, pray don't take offense at the meagerness of my donation," said Miao T'ien-hsiu. "If there is anything left over after the completion of the Buddhist effigy, you can expend it on the customary oblations."

The monk folded his hands in front of his chest and made him a bow in the Buddhist manner to thank him for his gift.

Before taking his leave, he said to Miao T'ien-hsiu, "Under the socket of your left eye there is a white emanation, which is a fatal sign and indicates that before this year is out you will suffer a great calamity. Because you have shown such a generous affinity for me, how could I refrain from warning you of this impending event? From now on, no matter what may come up, you should on no account venture outside of this locality. Take heed! Take heed!"³

Having finished speaking, he took his leave of Miao T'ien-hsiu and departed.

Less than half a month later, Miao T'ien-hsiu happened to wander into his back garden, where he caught sight of his servant Miao Ch'ing,⁴ who had always been a dissolute scamp, embracing and whispering to his concubine, née Tiao, beside a pavilion. Not having anticipated Miao T'ien-hsiu's abrupt arrival, they did not have time to conceal themselves. Having caught sight of them:

Without permitting any further explanation,

Miao T'ien-hsiu proceeded to give Miao Ch'ing a severe beating and swore to expel him from the household. Miao Ch'ing was intimidated by this threat and begged the neighbors to intercede on his behalf, which they had to do more than once before he was finally allowed to remain. But he continued to harbor acute resentment in his heart.

Unexpectedly, a certain maternal cousin of Miao T'ien-hsiu's named Huang Mei, a native of Yang-chou, who had obtained office as a provincial graduate, who currently served as assistant prefect of K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, and who was a man possessed of:

Broad erudition and extensive knowledge,

sent a man to Yang-chou one day to deliver a letter to his cousin, inviting him to come to the Eastern Capital for a visit. On the one

hand, he could enjoy the sights; and on the other, something might be done to improve his future prospects.

When Miao T'ien-hsiu received this letter, he was:

Unable to contain his delight,
and addressed his wife and concubine, saying, "The Eastern Capital is:

The purlieu of the imperial equipage,
a place where splendor and luxury are concentrated. I have long harbored the wish to see it but have lacked an opportunity. Now that my maternal cousin has sent me this invitation, it will truly serve to fulfill the wish of a lifetime."⁵

To this his wife, née Li, responded, "The other day, when that monk examined your features, he detected a portent of calamity and enjoined you not to leave the premises. Moreover, the capital is a long way from here, your property is a weighty responsibility, and if you leave your young child and sick wife at home, there is no telling whether this trip will actually improve your prospects. It would be better not to go."

Miao T'ien-hsiu did not accept her argument but instead angrily rebuked her, saying, "For a:

Man of mettle, inhabiting the space between Heaven and Earth,⁶

Whose will is symbolized by a mulberry bow and rubus arrows,⁷

to be unable to:

Journey at will about the empire, and

Appreciate the sights of the capital,

but be content merely to:

Grow old and die beneath his own windows,⁸

is to have lived in vain. Moreover, for someone like myself, who:

Harbors talent in his breast,⁹

and whose:

Purse is abundantly supplied,¹⁰

what reason is there to worry that success will not come my way? If I pay this visit, my maternal cousin is sure to have something good in store for me. Don't say another word about it."

Thereupon, he ordered his servant Miao Ch'ing to get together his baggage and accoutrements, provided himself with two trunks of silver, loaded a boat with merchandise, and prepared to embark for the Eastern Capital, taking a page boy and Miao Ch'ing with him. Thinking that:

Achieving success and fame would be like picking up a mustard stalk;¹¹

Obtaining a desirable post would be like spitting into one's hand,

he admonished his wife and concubine to take care of the household and set off on the appointed day.

It was at the end of autumn and the beginning of winter that he boarded his boat and departed from the dock in Yang-chou. After travelling for several days, they arrived at the Hsü-chou Rapids. Behold:

The stretch of white water,

Looked extremely menacing.

For a myriad li the water of the long rapids seems to be cascading;

As it strikes the islands on its way east they resound like thunder.¹²

The endless billowing of the snowy whitecaps¹³ causes people to fear;

When travelling merchants encounter it who is not affrighted?¹⁴

When they had proceeded to a place called Shan-wan, Miao T'ien-hsiu saw that it was getting late and ordered the boatmen to lay to for the night. It was one of those occasions on which:

His fated lot was running out;

Something was destined to happen.

Unbeknownst to him, the boat he had hired was a pirate boat, and the two boatmen were both evildoers, one of whom was named Ch'en the Third and the other Weng the Eighth. As the saying goes:

Without the help of an insider,

A household cannot be broached.¹⁵

Now this Miao Ch'ing held a deep grudge against his master, Miao T'ienhsiu, for the beating he had previously received at his hands. He had wanted to get revenge for some time but had not had an opportunity to do so.

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,

"Why don't I:

Thus and thus, and

So and so,

collaborate with these two boatmen in seizing my master, killing him, shoving his body into the water, and then dividing his property between us? If I return home and manage to plot the death of his invalid wife, his whole estate, together with his concubine, née Tiao, will all be mine."

Truly:

Flowering branches, beneath their leaves, conceal their thorns;

How can one know for sure the human heart contains no poison?¹⁶

This Miao Ch'ing, thereupon, proceeded to consult secretly with the two boatmen, saying, "In my master's leather trunks, in addition to a thousand taels of silver, there are two thousand taels worth of satin piece goods, and an ample quantity of clothing and so forth. If the

two of you are willing to conspire with me against him, I am willing to agree to an equitable division of the spoils."

Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth laughed, saying, "Since you have spoken, we need not deceive you, but we have had the same idea for some time."

That night, the sky was overcast and dark. Miao T'ien-hsiu and the page boy, An-t'ung, were asleep in the middle cabin, and Miao Ch'ing was in the stern sheets behind the scull. When it was nearly the third watch, around midnight, Miao Ch'ing deliberately started calling out, "Thief! Thief!"

Miao T'ien-hsiu, upon being startled out of his dreams, stuck his head out of the cabin door to see what was up, and Ch'en the Third, who was holding a sharp knife in his hand, stabbed him in the throat with a single thrust, and then shoved the body into the turbulent waves of the shallow. An-t'ung tried to escape, but Weng the Eighth struck him a blow from behind, which knocked him into the water.

The three conspirators then went into the cabin, where they extracted all the victim's property and money, satin goods and clothing, and proceeded to sort things out before dividing them up among themselves.

The two boatmen then said, "Brother, if we were to keep these piece goods, we would surely be caught. But, because you are a servant in his employ, if you transport these goods to market and offer to sell them, no one will suspect anything."

On this account, the two boatmen, after dividing the thousand ounces of silver in the leather trunk, and Miao T'ien-hsiu's clothing, etc., between them, proceeded to punt their boat back in the direction they had come from. Miao Ch'ing, on the other hand, engaged another boat, on which he conveyed his booty as far as the dock at Lin-ch'ing,¹⁷ where he saw it through the customs station, and then had it transported by land to Ch'ing-ho district, and stored in a licensed warehouse outside the city wall. When he encountered merchants from Yang-chou with whom he was familiar, he merely explained that his master was on another boat, behind him, and would soon arrive. But we will say no more for the moment about how Miao Ch'ing endeavored to dispose of his merchandise.

As the saying goes:

Though men may plan to do thus and so:

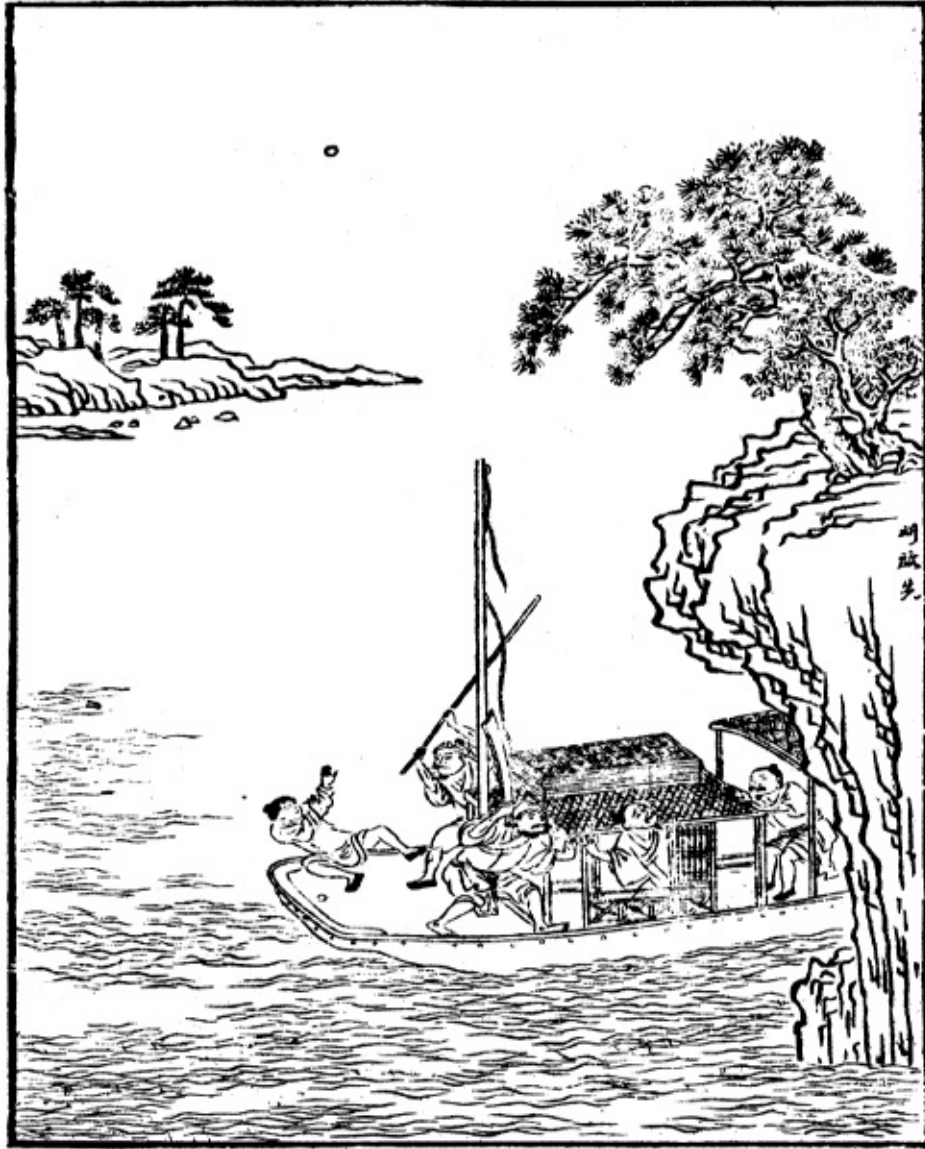
Heaven's principles may yet deny them.¹⁸

Alas for Miao T'ien-hsiu! Although:

He had always been a good man,
one fine day, he was done in by his own servant, and:

Failed to achieve a good death.¹⁹

Though it is true that he had:



Miao Ch'ing Connives in the Murder of His Master

Disregarded a well-meant admonishment,
it is also the case that:

One's allotted years are hard to evade.²⁰

Who could have anticipated that, although An-t'ung was knocked unconscious by the boatman and fell into the water, he fortunately escaped death. After bobbing up and down for a while among the reeds in the cove, he was able to climb ashore, where he proceeded to loudly lament his fate on the embankment.

Gradually:

The dawn began to glimmer,²¹
and there suddenly appeared a fishing boat, coming downstream from the upper reaches of the river, with an old man sitting on it, dressed in a hat of woven bamboo and a short coir rain cape. Upon hearing the sound of lamentation coming from deep among the reeds along the bank, he moved his boat closer to investigate and found that it was a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old boy, whose body was completely soaked with water. When he enquired into the story behind this, from first to last, he learned that his interlocutor was a page boy from Miao T'ien-hsiu's household who had suffered a criminal assault on the rapids. The old fisherman took him aboard his boat, poled it back to his home, provided him with a change of clothing, and gave him something to eat and drink.

He then went on to ask him, "Would you prefer to go back where you came from, or would you like to stay here and live with me?"

An-t'ung wept, saying, "My master has met with a calamity, and I don't know what has become of him.²² What home have I got to return to? I would prefer to stay here with you, sir."

"That's all right," said the old fisherman. "You can stay here with me for the time being. I'll gradually make inquiries into who your

assailants might be, and we can decide what to do then.”²³

An-t'ung bowed in gratitude to the old man and resigned himself to trying to make a go of it with him henceforth.

One day, it was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

On the last day of the year, the old fisherman, taking An-t'ung with him, had just come out to the port on the New Canal to sell his catch, when Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth, who had been drinking aboard their boat, happened to come ashore, dressed in Miao T'ien-hsiu's clothes, in order to buy fish.

An-t'ung recognized them and surreptitiously communicated this to the old fisherman, saying, “My master's wrong is about to be righted.”

The old fisherman said, “Why don't you prepare a deposition and lodge a complaint against them with the proper authorities? That ought to settle the case.”

An-t'ung then proceeded to prepare a deposition and presented it to the office of the Regional Military Command, which was responsible for security along that section of the Grand Canal, but Commandant Chou Hsiu rejected the complaint for lack of material evidence. He then presented his complaint to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and when Hsia Yenling saw that it involved accusations of armed robbery and murder on the part of criminal elements, he agreed to hear the case.

On the fourteenth day of the first month, he sent detectives, taking An-t'ung with them, to arrest the suspects. When they arrived at the port on the New Canal, they took Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth into custody and brought them before the bench. Upon interrogation, the two boatmen saw that An-t'ung was standing by to give evidence against them and, without even being subjected to torture, admitted to every particular of the charges. Their deposition stated that at the time of the crime, the victim's servant, Miao Ch'ing, was also present and had conspired with them to murder his master, after which, he had taken his share of the booty and departed. All three persons, both accused and accuser, were incarcerated pending the arrest of Miao Ch'ing, at which time the sentencing of the guilty parties would take place.

Because of the New Year's holiday, the officials and staff of the Provincial Surveillance Commission did not report to the yamen for the next two days in a row. Well before this time was up, however, a hanger-on at the gate of the yamen who specialized in leaking news had covertly tipped Miao Ch'ing off. Miao Ch'ing was panic-stricken by this news, locked the door of his room, and surreptitiously hid out in the home of the proprietor of the warehouse, a broker named Yüeh the Third.

Now this Yüeh the Third lived in a house, with a six-foot-wide frontage and three interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis, that was located right next door to that of Han Tao-kuo on the east²⁴ side of the stone bridge on Lion Street, and his wife was on very good terms with Wang Liu-erh. She constantly came over to Wang Liu-erh's place to visit, and when Wang Liu-erh had nothing else to do, she would visit her in return, so that the two of them had become quite intimate with each other.

When Yüeh the Third took a look at Miao Ch'ing and saw that:

His face exhibited a worried hue,

he asked what the trouble was and then said, “It's no big deal. The wife of the house next door is the mistress of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and her husband is the manager of one of his business enterprises. The wife is on such good terms with my spouse that, in all things, she is:

Obedient to her every whim.

If you want to ensure that nothing will come of this trouble of yours, as long as you're willing to spend what it takes, you should get my wife to go over and negotiate things with her counterpart next door.”

When Miao Ch'ing heard this, he promptly got down on his knees and said, “If there is any way you can enable me to escape this predicament I am in:

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it.”

Thereupon, he proceeded to write out an explanatory note and sealed up a packet of fifty taels of silver, along with two outfits of figured satin clothing, while Yüeh the Third directed his wife to go next door and explain the matter, thus and so, to Wang Liu-erh. The latter was as pleased as could be and took possession of the clothing, the silver, and the explanatory note, in order to await Hsi-men Ch'ing's next visit, but he failed to turn up.

On the seventeenth, when the sun began to set in the west, who should appear but Tai-an, riding along the middle of the street on horseback, with his master's felt bag under his arm.

Wang Liu-erh, who was standing at her front door, called him to a halt and asked, “Where are you headed?”

“I've been accompanying Father on a long trip to deliver some presents in Tung-p'ing prefecture,” replied Tai-an.

“Where's your master right now?” asked Wang Liu-erh. “Has he come back already, or not?”

“Father and Pen the Fourth,” said Tai-an, “have gone home ahead of me.”

Wang Liu-erh then invited him inside, explained the matter to him, thus and so, and showed him the explanatory note.

“Auntie Han,” said Tai-an, “don't underestimate the gravity of this case you are proposing to meddle with. Right now, the two boatmen who are in custody at the yamen have confessed, and he is the only other party implicated. If you come up with only these few taels of silver, they will not even suffice to take care of the servants in the case. Even if I were to do nothing else but broach the subject to him, Auntie Han, I would demand twenty taels of silver from you. Then, if I should manage to get Father to come over here, you can take the matter up with him however you like.”

“You crazy oily mouth!” laughed Wang Liu-erh.

“If you want something to eat,

You shouldn't offend the cook.”²⁵

If the endeavor succeeds, taking care of you will not be a problem. Even if we were not to get anything out of it ourselves, we would see to it that you were not shortchanged.”

“Auntie Han,” said Tai-an, “that's not it at all. As the saying goes:

The superior man is not ashamed to speak face to face.²⁶

Once the prior conditions are determined,

There may be room for further discussion."

Wang Liu-erh, thereupon, provided a selection of delicacies and invited Tai-an to have a drink.

"If I drink until my head and face are red," said Tai-an, and Father asks me about it, what am I to say?"

"What is there to be afraid of?" said Wang Liu-erh. "Just say that this is where you were."

Thereupon, Tai-an, after drinking only a single goblet of wine, prepared to depart.

"Whatever you do, I'm much indebted to you for speaking on my behalf," said Wang Liu-erh. "I'll be waiting here for the result."

Tai-an then proceeded to mount his horse and go straight home, where he handed over the felt bag he had been carrying and stood in attendance in the rear compound until Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had been taking a nap in his room, came out and sat down in an anteroom.

Tai-an casually approached him and, having nothing else to report, said, "As I was on my way home, Auntie Han called me to a halt and wanted me to ask you to go over there as soon as possible, because she has something important to say to you."

"What could that be?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll do as she suggests."

No sooner had he finished speaking than a certain school official named Liu came by to negotiate a loan for some silver. After he had taken care of this School Official Liu, Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse, put on his eye shades and an informal skullcap, directed Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to accompany him, and made his way to Wang Liu-erh's house. Once there, he dismounted, went inside, and sat down in the parlor, and Wang Liu-erh came out to greet him.

That day, because it was his turn to spend the night in the shop across the street, Han Tao-kuo had not come home, but his wife had bought a lot of provisions and arranged for Old Mother Feng to prepare them in the kitchen, in anticipation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival. The maidservant, Chin-erh, brought in the tea, and the woman served it to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ch'in-t'ung to take his horse to the house across the street, and close the front door after him.

The woman, who was circumspect about plunging right into the matter at hand, merely started out by saying, "Father, you must be exhausted by the successive days of entertaining at your place. I've heard that your son has been betrothed. Congratulations."

"It all started with the proposal of my Sister-in-law Wu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as a result of which we have arranged his betrothal with the Ch'iao family. Their household also has only this single daughter. If you stop to consider it, it's not an entirely appropriate match, but we decided, for better or for worse, to:

Add another tie to the existing ties,²⁷
between our families, that's all."

"It's fine enough that you should form a marriage alliance with them," said Wang Liu-erh, "the only thing is that since you now occupy such a high office, when you get together socially it could be embarrassing."

"What a suggestion!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After they had chatted for a while, the woman said, "I'm afraid you might be getting cold here. Why don't we go into my room."

On the one hand, she ushered him into her room, while on the other, she set out a chair next to the brazier for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down.

In due course, the woman took out Miao Ch'ing's explanatory note and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "He asked the wife of the broker Yüeh the Third, next door, to come over and speak to me about it. This Miao Ch'ing has been putting up at his warehouse and has been implicated, thus and so, by the two boatmen. His only hope is that his name may be eradicated from the case, so that he will not have to appear in court. He has presented me with some gifts in return for my good offices. For better or for worse, I hope that you will see fit to do what you can for him."

Hsi-men Ch'ing perused the explanatory note and then asked, "What were the gifts he offered you?"

Wang Liu-erh got the fifty taels of silver out of her trunk and showed them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "In the future, if his overture should prove successful, he has also promised me two outfits of clothing."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the silver and laughed, saying, "Is that all? What can you hope to do with such a paltry sum? You may not know it, but this Miao Ch'ing is the servant of a wealthy commoner from Yang-chou named Miao T'ien-hsiu, who conspired with the two boatmen on their boat to murder his master and dump him in the river, a case of conspiracy to commit murder with larcenous intent. Right now they are trying to dredge up the body but have not yet recovered it. Moreover, the evidence provided by the two boatmen before the bench has led to the finding of the page boy, Ant'ung, who had originally accompanied him, who has also given testimony, so that there are three witnesses against him. If he is brought before the court, he is sure to be judged guilty of a crime for which the penalty is death by slow slicing,²⁸ while the other two offenders will only be subject to decapitation.²⁹ At present, the two boatmen have also testified that he has two thousand taels worth of merchandise in his possession. What does he expect to accomplish with this paltry amount of silver? You might just as well return it to him immediately."

Wang Liu-erh thereupon went into the kitchen and sent the maidservant, Chin-erh, to call over Yüeh the Third's wife, to whom she returned the original gifts and explained the situation, thus and so.

If Miao Ch'ing had not heard about this nothing might have happened, but having heard about it, he felt as though he had been:

Doused with a bucket of water,

All the way from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.

Truly:

The shock affected all six of his vital organs, including liver and gall;

The fright damaged the three ethereal and seven material souls in his heart.

Without more ado, he invited Yüeh the Third to a conference and said, "Even if I have to give up this two thousand taels worth of merchandise, I am willing to do that, if I can only manage to save my life and get home safely."

"If that's what His Honor has to say from his exalted vantage point," opined Yüeh the Third, "it would seem that halfway measures will simply not suffice to influence the two officials involved. You'll have to set aside a thousand taels worth of merchandise for them,

and at least half of what is left over will be needed to take care of the adjutants, and the detectives who originally arrested the culprits.”

“On top of everything else,” said Miao Ch’ing, “I haven’t yet arranged the sale of the merchandise. How am I going to come up with the requisite silver?”

He then sent Yüeh the Third’s wife over to speak to Wang Liu-erh, saying, “If His Honor is willing to accept merchandise, I can deliver a thousand taels worth to him. If that does not suit him, I respectfully hope that he will allow me two or three days of grace, which will enable me to sell off the merchandise at a reduced price, after which I will come in person and present the proceeds at His Honor’s residence.”

Wang Liu-erh took the note containing this proposal back into her room and showed it to Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If that’s the way it is,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I’ll order the original detectives involved in the case to put off arresting him for a few days. But tell him to present the list of his proposed gifts immediately.”

Thereupon, the wife of Yüeh the Third, on receiving this oral instruction, went back to report to Miao Ch’ing, who was delighted by the news.

Hsi-men Ch’ing realized that there were people right next door, and thought it prudent not to extend his visit. After drinking a few goblets of wine and engaging in intercourse with the woman for a while, on seeing that his servant had come back to fetch him with his horse, he got up and returned home.

The next day, upon going to the yamen, at the early session of the court he did not bring up this case for a hearing, but instead ordered the detectives not to make any further arrests. Miao Ch’ing, on his part, sought the assistance of the broker, Yüeh the Third, in making contact with buyers that very night, in order to unload his merchandise. In less than three days he managed to dispose of it all and realized the sum of one thousand seven hundred taels of silver. Without touching his original gift to Wang Liu-erh, he augmented it with another fifty taels of silver and, in addition, presented her with four outfits of first-class clothing.

To resume our story, on the nineteenth, Miao Ch’ing counted out a thousand taels of silver, which he concealed in four wine jars, purchased a freshly butchered pig, and, waiting until after the lamps were lighted, had them carried to the gate of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s residence. The servants were all in on it, so Tai-an, P’ing-an, Shu-t’ung, Ch’in-t’ung, and the four prison guards who made the delivery were paid off with ten taels of silver. Tai-an also demanded another ten taels of silver for himself from Wang Liu-erh.

In a little while, Hsi-men Ch’ing came out and took a seat in the summer-house. No lamps were lit, and:

The light of the moon was dusky,³⁰
for it had just arisen.

The gifts were carried into his presence, and Miao Ch’ing, wearing black clothing, proceeded to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch’ing, saying, “Your humble servant has been the recipient of your life-saving grace. Though:

My body should be pulverized and my bones shattered,³¹

I can hardly hope to repay you either dead or alive.”³²

“As for this case in which you are involved,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I haven’t even properly looked into it yet. Those two boatmen are adamant in implicating you. If you should appear in court, you would be charged with a very serious crime. But since people have intervened on your behalf, I’m allowing you to escape with your life. If I were not to accept this gift of yours, you would not be reassured. I intend to give half of it to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, so the two of us will both participate in doing you this favor. You cannot afford to stick around any longer, but should set out for home this very night.”

“Where do you live in Yang-chou?” he went on to ask.

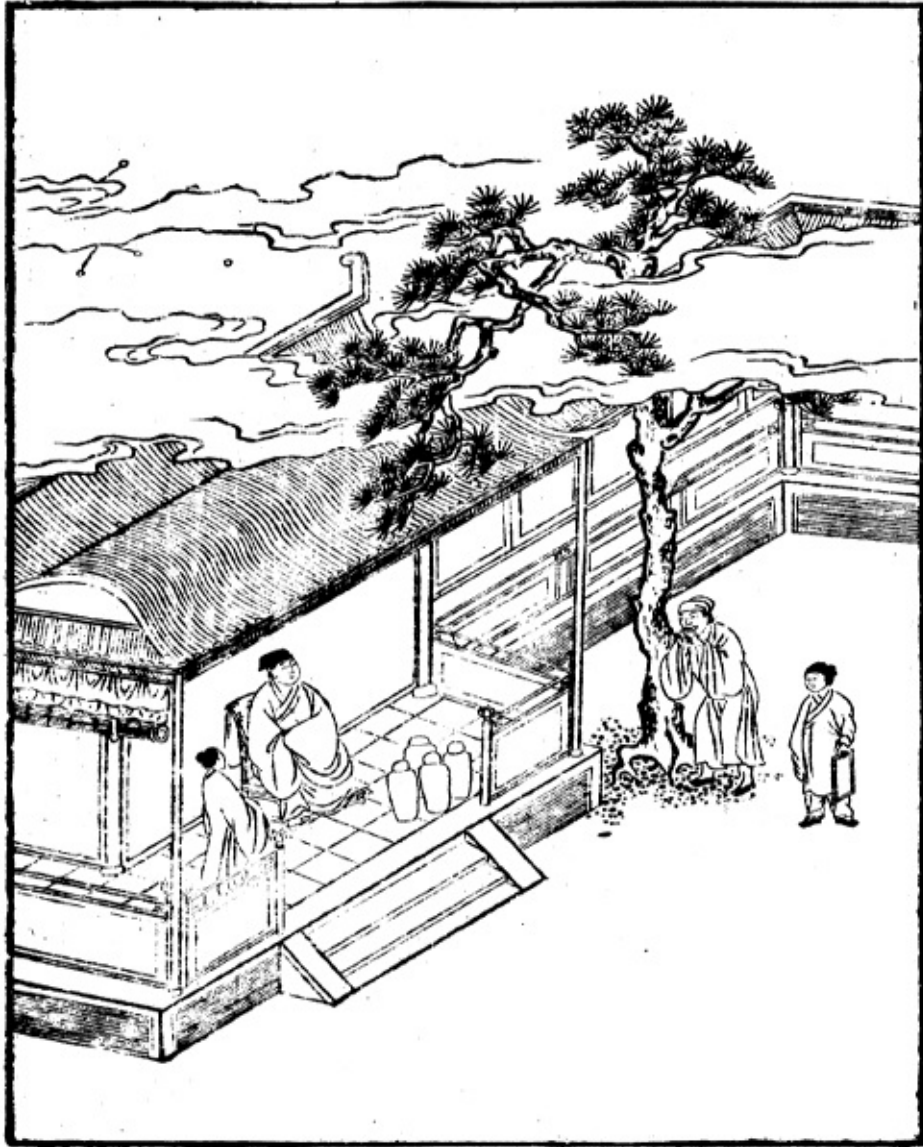
Miao Ch’ing kowtowed in reply, saying, “Your humble servant lives inside the city walls of Yang-chou.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing ordered that tea should be brought from the rear compound, and Miao Ch’ing stood underneath the pine trees as he drank it and then kowtowed once again, took his leave, and departed.

But Hsi-men Ch’ing called him back, saying, “Have you spoken to the detectives involved in the original arrest, or not?”

“I have already settled things satisfactorily with all the other people involved,” said Miao Ch’ing.

“In that case,” Hsi-men Ch’ing directed him, “you had better set out for home immediately.”



Hsi-men Ch'ing Takes a Bribe and Subverts the Law

Miao Ch'ing accordingly went out the gate, returned to Yüeh the Third's house, and proceeded to get his baggage ready for the journey. He found that he still had a hundred and fifty taels of silver on hand, of which he took fifty taels, together with a few remaining bolts of satin, and gave them to Yüeh the Third and his wife out of gratitude for their help. At the fifth watch, around 4:00 AM, they hired a long-distance pack animal for him, and he set out on his way to Yang-chou. Truly, he was:

As flustered as a dog who has lost his way home;³³

As flurried as a fish who has escaped the net.³⁴

We will say no more for the moment about how Miao Ch'ing escaped with his life, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He and Hsia Yen-ling came out of the yamen together when the court session was over and rode along with their horses side by side until they arrived at the entrance to Main Street, where Hsia Yen-ling was about to take his leave as they parted company.

But Hsi-men Ch'ing, without dismounting, raised his whip and said, "If my colleague has no objections, would you condescend to drop by my place for a chat?"

Having succeeded in inviting Judicial Commissioner Hsia to his home, Hsi-men Ch'ing dismounted with him outside the gate and proceeded into the reception hall, where, after they had exchanged the appropriate amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing conducted him to the summerhouse, and they loosened their clothing as the attendants served them with tea. Shu-t'ung and Tai-an then came in and set up a table for their entertainment.

"I really ought not to barge in this way and put my colleague to such trouble," said Hsia Yen-ling.

"Whoever heard of such a thing," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long, the two page boys brought in an assortment of refreshments in square boxes and set them down to one side. They

consisted of chicken feet, goose, duck, fresh fish, and other appetizers, making a total of sixteen bowls in all. After they had consumed this repast, and the utensils had been cleared away, another selection of savories suitable to accompany wine drinking was brought out, as well as little gold goblets with handles, on silver saucers, and gold-inlaid ivory chopsticks.

As they were drinking wine together, Hsi-men Ch'ing casually brought up the subject of Miao Ch'ing's case, saying, "This rascal yesterday impertuned a member of the gentry to come and intercede with me insistently on his behalf, and also presented me with something in the way of an inducement. Your pupil would certainly:

Not presume to take matters into his own hands,³⁵
and that is why I have invited my colleague here today, in order to consult with him about it."

Thereupon, he handed the gift card to Hsia Yen-ling, who read it and then said, "My colleague should feel free to decide the matter as he sees fit."

"As I see it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow we might as well continue proceedings against those two culprits on the basis of the actual booty in their possession. There is no need to proceed any further against this Miao Ch'ing. As for the original plaintiff, that page boy, An-t'ung, we can release him on bond until such time as the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu comes to light. It will not be too late to settle the case at that time. The gifts I propose to send over to your place."

"This last proposal of my colleague's is not right," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia. "Your view of the case is quite appropriate, and it is you who have taken the trouble to deal with it. Why should you have to share anything with me? That will never do."

They dickered about it, back and forth, for some time before Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing no alternative, agreed to split the gratuity evenly between them and arranged to have five hundred taels put into food boxes.

Judicial Commissioner Hsia got up from his seat and bowed in thanks, saying, "Since my colleague has chosen to favor me in this way, to refuse yet again would be to display a fastidious response to your lavish generosity.

I will never be able to thank you enough.
It is really quite embarrassing."

Only after accepting a few more cups of wine did he say goodbye and leave. For his part, Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith ordered Tai-an to take charge of the boxes, which still appeared to contain wine, and have them carried to Hsia Yen-ling's home. When they arrived there, Judicial Commissioner Hsia came out to the door in person to receive them, produced a return note, and presented Tai-an with two taels of silver, and the two orderlies with four mace apiece. But no more of this. Truly:

When heat reaches the proper level, the pig's head is dissolved;

When money reaches the right hands, the case is resolved.³⁶

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling had already colluded on a plan of action, and, the next day, when they went to the yamen and took their places on the bench, the clerks, adjutants, detectives, and inspectors, high and low, had all been taken care of by Yüeh the Third on Miao Ch'ing's behalf. The instruments of torture were conspicuously displayed, and Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth were brought out of the lockup and subjected to interrogation.

When their depositions reiterated that they had conspired with the servant of the deceased, Miao Ch'ing, Hsi-men Ch'ing became enraged, and shouted to the attendants, "Put them to the question. You two bandits have been active on the rivers and waterways for years, pretending to be engaged in riverine transportation, while actually devoting yourselves to plundering the property of your passengers, holding up merchants, and committing murder with larcenous intent."³⁷ Right now there is this page boy who testifies that you stabbed Miao T'ien-hsiu to death with a knife and threw him overboard, after which you wounded him by a blow with a stick that knocked him into the water as well. There is also the evidence provided by the fact that you are wearing items of his master's clothing. How can you have the nerve to try to implicate anyone else?"

He then had An-t'ung brought forward and asked him, "Who was it who stabbed your master to death and pushed him overboard?"

An-t'ung testified, "On the day in question, at the third watch of the night, Miao Ch'ing started calling out, 'Thief!' At which, when my master came out of the cabin to investigate, he was stabbed to death with one thrust of a knife by Ch'en the Third, and pushed overboard. I was then struck a blow with a stick by Weng the Eighth, which knocked me into the water, and barely escaped with my life. I do not know anything about the whereabouts of Miao Ch'ing."

"The testimony of this page boy has the ring of truth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How can the two of you get around it?"

Thereupon, he had a pair of ankle-squeezers put on each of them and had them struck thirty blows with a cudgel, with the result that their shinbones were crushed, and they:

Howled and writhed like stuck pigs.

More than half of their thousand taels worth of booty had been recovered, and the remainder had all been spent.

That very day, the judicial commissioners saw to the drafting of the necessary documents, sequestered the recovered booty, and forwarded the records of the case to Tung-p'ing prefecture. The prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen,³⁸ who was also on good terms with Hsi-men Ch'ing, made out the formal indictment according to the terms of the documents he had received and provisionally sentenced Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth to decapitation for the crimes of armed robbery and murder, while releasing An-t'ung on bond pending further developments.

One day, An-t'ung made his way to the Eastern Capital, where he sought out the yamen of the assistant prefect, Huang Mei, and lodged a complaint accusing Miao Ch'ing of having stolen his master's property and then bribed the judicial commissioners to remove his name from the case, and asking when this miscarriage of justice at his master's expense could be righted.

When the assistant prefect, Huang Mei, had heard him out, he wrote a letter on his behalf that very night, sealed it up with his written complaint, provided him with travelling expenses, and told him to deliver it to the office of the regional investigating censor of Shantung.

As a direct result of this act, the wrongdoing of Miao Ch'ing would be reinvestigated from the beginning, and:

Though Hsi-men Ch'ing's deeds were done in the past,

Today the chickens would come home to roost.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Good and evil, in the end, always turn out to have their causes;
Good luck and bad, misfortune and fortune, travel hand in hand.^{[39](#)}
If, all your life, you have done nothing to be ashamed of;
The midnight sound of knocking at the door will not disturb you.^{[40](#)}

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 48

INVESTIGATING CENSOR TSENG IMPEACHES

THE JUDICIAL COMMISSIONERS;

GRAND PRECEPTOR TS'AI SUBMITS

A MEMORIAL REGARDING SEVEN MATTERS

Some words of admonition:

Be alert to danger and recognize peril,
And you will finally avoid the meshes of the law.
Praise the good and recommend the worthy,
And you will attain a secure place for yourself.
Bestow kindness and practice virtue,¹
And you will ensure the success of your posterity.
Harbor venom and conceal treachery,
And your whole life will be subject to catastrophe.
To injure others for your own advantage,²
Is not, in the final analysis, a far-reaching plan.
To hurt your fellows to achieve success,³
Can scarcely be considered a long-range strategy.
Use of pseudonyms and disguised appearance,
Are always necessitated by resort to specious words.
Exposure to lawsuits and loss of property,
Are the inevitable consequences of inhumane conduct.⁴

THE STORY GOES that An-t'ung accepted the document and letter, took his leave of Assistant Prefect Huang Mei, and set out on the highroad to Shantung. Upon inquiry, he learned that the regional investigating censor was currently in residence at his office in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, that his name was Tseng Hsiao-hsü,⁵ that he was the son of the former censor-in-chief, Tseng Pu,⁶ had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1115, and that he was an official of absolute integrity and honor.

An-t'ung thought to himself, "If I say that I am delivering a letter, the gate-keepers are certain not to let me in. I had better stay here until they hang up the tablet announcing the category of cases to be heard, at which point I can make my way in on my knees and present both the letter and my complaint at the same time. When His Honor sees them, he will surely consent to adjudicate the case."

Thereupon, he put the text of the complaint, which he had long since prepared, in his breast pocket and remained outside the gate of the regional investigating censor's office. After he had waited there for some time, he heard the sounding of the cloud-shaped gong that announced the sessions of the court. The main gate and the inner gate were opened, and Investigating Censor Tseng took his place on the bench. When the first tablet was displayed, it stated, in large characters, "Accusations against imperial princes, distaff relatives of the imperial family, consorts of imperial princesses, and members of influential households." When the second tablet was displayed, it read, "Complaints against the regional military commission, the provincial administration commission, the provincial surveillance commission, and the officers and functionaries of the armies and guards." Finally, when the third tablet was displayed, it read, "Lawsuits among commoners over census registration, marriage, land ownership, and other subjects of litigation."

An-t'ung, accordingly, followed in the wake of this tablet as it was carried inside, and it was only after all the other cases had been disposed of, that he knelt down at the foot of the red steps leading up to the dais. The attendants standing to either side demanded to know what his business was, and only then did An-t'ung present his letter, holding it up with both hands as high as he could.

From his position on the bench, Investigating Censor Tseng was heard to call out, "Bring it up here."

The docket officers in attendance hurriedly came down from the dais and, taking the letter back up with them, placed it on the table before him, after which Tseng Hsiao-hsü proceeded to open and peruse it. Truly, what did the contents of the document say? The letter read:

Earnestly indited by his junior fellow graduate in the capital, Huang Mei, for the perusal of his mentor and fellow graduate the distinguished censor Tseng, courtesy name Shao-t'ing:

Since I forsook your illustrious countenance,⁷ a year has abruptly elapsed.⁸ Those who truly understand one are difficult to meet.⁹ The most satisfying intercourse is easily interrupted. This heart of mine is ardent,¹⁰ ever endeavoring to keep at your side. Last autumn, upon the unexpected receipt of your elegant epistle, when I opened and reverently perused it, my spirit was transported, and I felt exactly as though we were face to face in the capital as of old. Whenever I am feeling melancholy, I recite it once again, and find that it relieves my spirits. Not long after that, you returned south to visit your parents, and I heard the good news that you had been appointed regional investigating censor of Shantung. I am quite:

Unable to contain my satisfaction.¹¹
Congratulations! Congratulations!

In consideration of the fact that my fellow graduate is an exemplar of the great virtues of loyalty and filiality, whose integrity is like the wind and frost, whose mind is ever subject to the grindstone of self-cultivation, who is a shining light in the imperial court, and a frequent topic of remark in the discourse of the gentry, now that you have taken up your position as an investigating censor, it is truly the season for you to expose examples of official malfeasance, with a view to the reformation of public morality. In the light of my humble admiration for you, this is something that I cannot forget.

I venture to observe that my fellow graduate, who has always possessed a capacity for significant deeds, and who finds himself at an appropriate time for action, it being an era of sage enlightenment and rectitude, and a day when his venerable father is still alive and well, should take advantage of the opportunity to greatly extend his talent and faculties in the cause of improving law and morals, so as not to allow pettifoggery functionaries to manipulate the statutes, or treacherous malefactors to practice their deceptions.

How is it then that in the prefecture of Tung-p'ing there should be such an egregious lawbreaker as Miao Ch'ing, and such a victim of unrequited injustice as Miao T'ien-hsiu? I would not have thought that in an era of sage enlightenment such demons could exist. Since this falls within my fellow graduate's jurisdiction, it is to be hoped that he will adjudicate this miscarriage of justice and set the record straight.

The bearer, An-t'ung, is the body servant of the victim, and the carrier of a written complaint that I hope you will condescend to consider. I am unable to express myself more fully. Composed on the sixteenth day of the middle month of spring.

When Investigating Censor Tseng Hsiao-hsü had finished reading the letter, he asked, "Does he have a written complaint or not?"

The attendants hurriedly came down from the dais and said, "His Honor wants to know whether you have a written complaint or not."

An-t'ung thereupon reached into his breast, pulled out the complaint, and formally presented it.

When Tseng Hsiao-hsü had perused it, he picked up his brush and endorsed it with the words, "The prefectural officials of Tung-p'ing prefecture are hereby adjured to conduct an honest inquiry in order to ascertain the facts of the case, examine the corpse of the deceased, and submit a report with all the relevant documents."

He then ordered that An-t'ung should proceed to Tung-p'ing prefecture in order to await the outcome of the proceedings. An-t'ung hastily kowtowed, got up from his knees, and was allowed to exit through a side door, while Tseng Hsiao-hsü, for his part, put the written complaint, along with his endorsement, in a dispatch case, sealed it with his official seal, and sent someone to deliver it to Tung-p'ing prefecture.

When the prefect, Hu Shih-wen, saw that the case had been remanded to him by a higher authority, he was thrown into such consternation that:

He did not know where to put hand or foot,¹² and delegated the problem to the vice-magistrate of Yang-ku district, Ti Ssupin.¹³ This individual was a native of Wu-yang in Honan province, was rigid and upright by nature, and did not solicit bribes, but was so muddleheaded in hearing cases that everyone called him Turbid Ti.

Sometime before this mandate came down, he had set out to reconnoiter the banks of the canal in the hope of locating the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu. It turned out to be one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

Who could have anticipated that when Vice-Magistrate Ti Ssu-pin led his entourage in reconnoitering the banks of the canal to the west of the district seat of Ch'ing-ho, as they were going about their task, a whirlwind¹⁴ suddenly appeared in front of his mount, that refused to dissipate but kept pace with his horse as he proceeded.

"How uncanny!" remarked Ti Ssu-pin, reining in his horse, "You go follow this whirlwind wherever it goes," he ordered the runners in his entourage. "It's essential that we get to the bottom of this."

The runners did, indeed, follow in the wake of the whirlwind until it came to a halt just as they approached the port on the New Canal, and they went back to report this information to Ti Ssu-pin. The latter ordered them to take the local community elder into custody, and when they had used spades to excavate the soil of the embankment to a depth of several feet, they discovered a corpse, which actually displayed the scar of a knife wound on its throat. After ordering the coroner's assistant to complete his examination, he asked what the place that lay before them might be.

"The Tz'u-hui Ssu, or Temple of Compassionate Wisdom, is located not far from here," the runners reported.

Vice-Magistrate Ti then ordered that the resident monks of the temple be taken into custody and interrogated. They testified unanimously that during the tenth month of the preceding winter, when the temple was engaged in setting water lanterns afloat, they had found a corpse that had drifted into the inlet from upstream; that the abbot, out of compassion, had retrieved and buried it; and that they had no knowledge of the circumstances of the death.

"It is obvious," pronounced Vice-Magistrate Ti Ssu-pin, "that you monks conspired to kill this man and bury him here. No doubt he had valuables on his person, so you are unwilling to testify to the truth."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, he had the abbot subjected to a session with the head-press, two applications of the finger-squeezers, and then put into ankle-squeezers which were struck a hundred blows. The remaining monks were each given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo, after which he ordered that they all be incarcerated in the lockup.

When this information was conveyed to Tseng Hsiao-hsü, he ordered that the matter be reinvestigated and reported back to him, but the monks all claimed to be victims of injustice and refused to alter their testimony.

Tseng Hsiao-hsü thought to himself, "If these monks had really conspired to do him in, they would surely have thrown the corpse into the river. Why should they have buried it on the embankment instead? Moreover, there would have been too many people involved. There is something suspicious about this."

He therefore ordered that the monks should be kept in custody, and they had already been incarcerated for nearly two months when this formal complaint of An-t'ung's unexpectedly came into the picture, as a consequence of which, officers were deputed to escort An-t'ung to the site where the body had been discovered in order to identify the corpse.

When An-t'ung saw the body, he wept grievously, saying, "It truly is my master, and the wound inflicted by the knife of those bandits is still visible."

Thereupon, once the examination was completed, the results were reported back to Tseng Hsiao-hsü, who immediately released the monks in custody, while, on the other hand, he ordered a review of the documents in the case and had Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth interrogated once again. When they persisted in testifying that Miao Ch'ing had been the instigator of the plot, Tseng Hsiao-hsü was greatly angered and sent someone with an arrest warrant to go to the relevant prefecture in his jurisdiction and hale Miao Ch'ing before the court. At the same time he drafted a memorial impeaching the two judicial commissioners who had heard the case for having accepted bribes and put justice up for sale. Truly:

But Tseng Hsiao-hsü's review of this case righted an injustice.
Yet, though his orders were as stringent as the wind or thunder;
The wins and losses occurring in a dream are always unreliable.¹⁵

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, no sooner had Wang Liu-erh obtained the hundred taels of silver and four outfits of clothing for intervening on Miao Ch'ing's behalf, than she consulted with her husband, Han Tao-kuo, that very night and then busied herself all day and remained sleepless the following night, planning to have head ornaments, hairpins, and bracelets fashioned for herself, calling in a tailor to design clothes for her, and ordering the manufacture of a new fret of silver filigree. She also expended sixteen taels of silver to purchase an additional maidservant, named Ch'un-hsiang, to wait upon her, and, sooner or later, also serve the sexual needs of Han Tao-kuo. But no more of this.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing dropped by Han Tao-kuo's home and Wang Liu-erh ushered him inside and served him with tea. When he had finished drinking his tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear of the house to relieve himself and happened to notice that there was a terrace on the second floor of the adjacent house.

"Who does that belong to?" he asked.

"It's the terrace on the house of Yüeh the Third next door," replied Wang Liu-erh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Wang Liu-erh, "You tell him that he'd better take it down, or else. How can you allow him to interfere with the geomantic situation of your residence that way? If you won't, I'll have the local constable order him to do it."

Wang Liu-erh consulted with Han Tao-kuo about this, saying, "They're our neighbors. How can we broach the subject with them?"

"The best thing to do," said Han Tao-kuo, "would be to keep His Honor in the dark, buy a few sticks of lumber at the temple fair, and put up a terrace behind our own place over here. We can benefit by sun-drying bean paste on top of it, and using the room below for either a stable or a privy."

"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a louse of a senseless creature you are! Rather than erecting a terrace, wouldn't it be better to lay in some bricks and tiles, and construct two upper-story sheds?"

"If we merely put up two sheds," said Han Tao-kuo, "they won't be much use to us. We'd only use them for storage purposes. We might as well put up a single story, containing two small regular rooms."

Thereupon, they proceeded to lay out thirty taels of silver and had two flat-roofed rooms added to the back of their property. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an in charge of a considerable quantity of wine, meat, and baked wheat cakes for them to use in rewarding the artisans for their efforts. Among the residents of the street there were none who were unaware of this.

Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, upon obtaining these several hundred taels of silver, used them to enroll his seventeen-year-old son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, as a degree candidate in the military school of the local guard, where he became a government student. Every day he entertained his instructors and friends, with whom he practiced archery and horsemanship. Hsi-men Ch'ing got together with Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Battalion Commander Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the entire officers corps of the guard battalion to contribute toward the cost of presenting him with a commemorative scroll in celebration of the occasion. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had recently arranged for the construction of an artificial hill, summerhouses, and additional buildings on the site of his family graveyard, but, since the birth of Kuan-ko and his appointment as a battalion commander, he had not yet visited the family graves in order to sacrifice to his ancestors. After ordering Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, to assess the geomantic configuration of the site, he had a new gateway erected, a paved causeway leading to the tombs of his ancestors built, a mausoleum constructed, willows placed about the gate, pines and cypresses planted all around, and raised embankments situated on either side.

In anticipation of his visit to the graves of his ancestors on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, he planned to install a new plaque announcing his status as a member of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, slaughter pigs and sheep, and order the appropriate table settings. Prior to the festival itself, which fell on the sixth day of the third month that year, he sent out invitations to a lot of people, arranged for the transportation of the requisite accoutrements, wine, rice, and other culinary supplies, and engaged the services of musicians and tumblers, a troupe of players, the boy actors Li Ming, Wu Hui, Wang Chu, and Cheng Feng, and the singing girls Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Han Chin-ch'uan, and Tung Chiao-erh. The male guests he invited included Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Ch'iao Hung, his brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Manager Fu, Han Tao-kuo, Yün Li-shou, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, more than twenty people in all. The females invited were Militia Commander Chang Kuan's wife, Kinswoman Chang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Censor Chu's wife, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Hua Tzu-yu's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, Ts'ui Pen's wife, Big Sister Tuan, and, from his own household, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and the wet nurse, Ju-i, holding Kuan-ko in her arms. Altogether, twenty-four or twenty-five sedan chairs were required to accommodate them all.

Before the day in question, Yüeh-niang had spoken to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "There's no need to have the child taken out to the graveyard. On the one hand, he's not even a year old, and on the other hand, Dame Liu says that his parietal bones are not yet completely formed, and that he has a timorous disposition. It's a long way to the graveyard, and I fear he could become frightened. In my view, it would be better not to have him go, but to leave him here at home, where the wet nurse and Old Mother Feng can look after him, and let his mother go without him."

But Hsi-men Ch'ing would not listen to her, saying, "Really! Why shouldn't the two of them, mother and child, both go to the graveyard to kowtow to my ancestors? You put too much stock in the nonsense put out by that crone. The old whore! Even if it be true that the child's parietal bones are not yet completely formed, as long as you have the wet nurse wrap him up securely in a quilt while they are in the sedan chair, what is there to be afraid of?"

"Since you refuse to take anyone's advice," said Yüeh-niang, "you may do as you please."

Early on the morning of the day in question, the female guests all left their homes to forgather for the occasion, mounted their sedan chairs, and set off. But no more of this.

When they approached the family graveyard, five li outside the South Gate, they beheld from a distance that:

The verdant pines were luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses were dense.

The graveyard had been enhanced by the newly erected gateway, the two raised embankments on either side, and a stone wall surrounding the entire site. The paved causeway in the middle, the mausoleum, the spirit platform, the incense burners, and the candlesticks were all hewn out of white alabaster. The newly replaced plaque on the gate was inscribed in large characters, reading: The Ancestral Graveyard of Master Hsi-men, Commandant for Military Strategy of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. The main facade of the mausoleum was:

Encompassed by raised earthen embankments, and
A copse of trees with interlacing branches.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, clad in scarlet official attire, having seen to the setting out of the slaughtered pigs and sheep and other sacrificial offerings, and table settings, proceeded to pay formal homage to his ancestors. Only after the male guests had followed suit did the female guests do likewise.

As these acts of worship took place, percussion instruments, gongs, and drums were all sounded simultaneously, and the resulting din so frightened Kuan-ko that he hid himself in the wet nurse's breast, started to choke, and did not dare to move a muscle.

Yüeh-niang then called out, "Sister Li, how come you haven't had the wet nurse take the child back to the rear yet? Just see how frightened he is. I said there was no need to bring the child, but that obstinate good-for-nothing of ours insisted on having him wrapped up and brought along anyway. Just see how frightened he is."

Li P'ing-erh promptly came down from her seat, ordered Tai-an to have them stop beating the gongs and drums, and directed the wet nurse to quickly cover the baby's ears and take him back to the rear of the premises.

In a little while, after the sacrifices were finished, Master Hsü had recited the elegy to the dead, and the paper money had been burnt, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited the male guests to join him in the front reception hall, while Yüeh-niang invited the female guests to come with her to the summerhouse in the rear. They proceeded through the garden to get there.

To either side of the juniper hedges,
Were arrayed bamboo-lined walks and balustrades;
In all directions the flowering trees,
Stretched before them as far as the eye could see.

Truly:

The red peach blossoms and the green willows¹⁶ are traversed by shuttling orioles;
All of which were brought into being by the creativity of the Lord of the East.

Thereupon, the troupe of players put on a performance for the female guests in the summerhouse, while the four boy actors sang for a time in the front reception hall for the entertainment of the male guests, and the four singing girls took turns serving the wine. The four senior maidservants, Ch'unmei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ying-ch'un, waited on the female guests, holding flagons and pouring wine, after which they stood beside Hsi-men Tachieh's table and had something to eat.

After the female guests had feasted for some time, P'an Chin-lien, along with Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Li Kuei-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh, went into the garden together, where they enjoyed themselves on the swing for a while.

It so happens that behind the summerhouse Hsi-men Ch'ing had put a structure consisting of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor, and two less well-lighted inner rooms, each provided with a k'ang frame. Inside they were furnished with bed-curtains, and supplied with tables and chairs, comb-boxes, dressing mirrors, toilet stands, and the like, in order that female visitors to the graveyard would have a place to make themselves up and rest, or that casual visitors from the demimonde could be entertained. The rooms had been plastered so that they were as spotless as snow grottoes and were embellished with calligraphy, painting, zither, and chessboard,¹⁷ all of which were elegantly displayed.

The wet nurse Ju-i, who was looking after Kuan-ko, happened to be reclining just then on the gold-flecked k'ang frame, on which she had placed a little sleeping mat for the baby, with whom Ying-ch'un, who was standing by her side, was playing. What should they see at this juncture but P'an Chin-lien, who suddenly came in from the garden, all by herself, holding a sprig of peach blossoms in her hand.

Upon entering the room and seeing Ying-ch'un, she remarked, "So you've been here all this time, instead of waiting on us up front."

"Ch'unmei, Lan-hsiang, and Yü-hsiao are all up front," protested Yingch'un. "Mother told me to come back here to see how the baby is doing, and to bring two saucers of delicacies for Ju-i to eat."

Chin-lien noticed that there was a saucer of goose meat, a saucer of pig's trotters, and some pieces of fruit on the table.

When the wet nurse saw Chin-lien come in, she picked up Kuan-ko, and Chin-lien proceeded to tease him, saying, "Little oily mouth! When they struck up the gongs and drums a little while ago, you were so frightened you were speechless. Are you really as timorous as all that?"

Thereupon, she opened up her jacket of pale lavender silk and her gold lamé blouse, took the baby in her arms, held him fast in her embrace, and proceeded to kiss him, mouth to mouth. All of a sudden, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, and, seeing that Chin-lien was playing with the child, proceeded to do likewise.

"Little Taoist," said Chin-lien, "give your brother-in-law a kiss."

At which:

Strange as it may seem,
Kuan-ko actually giggled at him, and Ching-chi:

Without permitting any further explanation,
took the child into his arms and proceeded to give him a series of kisses.

"You crazy short-life!" protested Chin-lien. "It's all right to show your affection to the child, but you're mussing the hair over my temples."

Ching-chi flirted with her, saying, "You don't say. It's a good thing I didn't kiss the wrong person by mistake."

When Chin-lien heard this, fearing that the maidservants would catch on, she facetiously turned over the fan in her hand and proceeded to hit him with the handle, to such effect that Ching-chi wriggled like a carp.

"You crazy short-life!" she berated him. "Who has the patience to:

Bandy words or waggle tongues,
with you?"

"That's not the problem," protested Ching-chi. "You ought to pay more attention to other peoples' feelings. I'm wearing too thin a layer of clothing for you to hit me like that."

"Why should I pay any attention to your feelings for no good reason?" vociferated Chin-lien. "If you pester me that way again, I'll hit you just as hard."

When Ju-i saw the way they were mixing it up with each other, she took Kuan-ko into her arms and let Chin-lien and Ching-chi carry on as they liked. Chin-lien bent the sprig of peach blossoms in her hand into a wreath, which she surreptitiously stuck on top of Ching-chi's cap. When they came outside, they happened to encounter Meng Yü-lou, along with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Li Kuei-chieh, the three of whom were coming toward them from the other direction.

When Hsi-men Ta-chieh caught sight of the wreath, she asked, "Who's responsible for this bit of funny business?"



Chin-lien Puts a Wreath of Peach Blossoms on Ching-chi's Cap

Ching-chi took it off and went his way, without saying another word about it.

When four long scenes from a hsi-wen drama had been performed for the female guests, it was observed that:

The sunlight outside the window goes its way in a snap of the fingers;

The flower shadows in the banquet hall move among the revellers' seats.¹⁸

Evening was gradually coming on. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Pen the Fourth to provide each of the chair carriers with a bowl of wine, four baked wheat cakes, and a plate of precooked pork. Only after these viands had been properly distributed did the female guests prepare to mount their sedan chairs and set off, with the male guests following behind them on horseback, while Laihsing and the caterers, carrying their food boxes, slowly brought up the rear. Tai-an, Lai-an, Hua-t'ung, and Ch'i-t'ung accompanied the sedan chairs of Wu Yüeh-niang and company; Ch'in-t'ung and four orderlies followed after Hsi-men Ch'ing on his horse; while the wet nurse, Ju-i, all by herself in a small sedan chair, carried the baby in her arms, wrapped up tightly in a quilt.

As they entered the city, Yüeh-niang was still concerned enough about the baby to send Hua-t'ung back, instructing him, "Stick close to the wet nurse's sedan chair. I'm afraid the crowds may get rowdy as we enter the city."

When Yüeh-niang's sedan chair had entered the city, she parted ways with the sedan chairs of the female guests from the Ch'iao family and made her way home, where she descended from her chair and went inside. It was some time after that before Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi arrived home and dismounted from their horses.

Whom should they encounter there but P'ing-an, who met them at the gate and reported, "Today His Honor Judicial Commissioner Hsia came in person, dismounted, went into the reception hall, asked for you, and then left. After that, he has sent people to ask after you twice. I don't know what it's all about."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was troubled in his heart. When he arrived in the reception hall, whom should he see but Shu-t'ung, who came up to take his outer clothes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "When His Honor Hsia came today, what message did he leave for me?"

"He didn't divulge anything," said Shu-t'ung. "He merely asked where you had gone, saying, 'Send someone after him. I've got something important to say to him.' I told him, 'Today they've all paid a visit to the family graveyard to burn paper money to the ancestors and won't return until evening.' At which, His Honor Hsia said, 'I'll come back at noontime.' After that, he sent people to ask after you twice, and I told them that you had not returned yet."

Hsi-men Ch'ing's mind was not put to rest by this information, and he wondered all the more, "What could it be about?"

Just as he was in this perplexity, whom should he see but P'ing-an, who came in to report, "His Honor Hsia is here."

It was already dusk when Judicial Commissioner Hsia appeared, wearing informal clothes and a Tung-p'o hat,¹⁹ with two servitors in attendance.

He dismounted, came into the reception hall, exchanged the customary social amenities, and said, "So my colleague has paid a visit to his country estate today."

"Today we have been sweeping the graves and making sacrifices at my ancestral tombs," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Not knowing that my colleague would condescend to pay us a visit, I was not here to greet you myself. Forgive me. Forgive me."

"I have ventured to come," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "on account of a matter that I need to report to you."

"Let's go to the guest room over there and sit down," he went on to say.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung to open the door of the summerhouse and invited his guest to accompany him there for a chat, after which he dismissed all his attendants.

"Today," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "His Honor Li Ta-t'ien of the district yamen came to my place and reported, thus and so, that recently the regional investigating censor has submitted an impeachment to the Eastern Capital, in which both my colleague and myself are implicated. I ordered someone to make a copy of the draft for your perusal."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he:

Turned pale with consternation,
hastily took the copy of the draft, and proceeded to read it by lamplight. What did the text actually say?

Memorial Submitted by Tseng Hsiao-hsü, Regional Investigating Censor of Shantung

In re: An Impeachment of Venal, Refractory, and Unqualified Military Officials, Requesting that They Be Dismissed from Office with a View toward the Rectification of Law and Morals

Your servant has heard that to make a circuit of the four quarters in order to monitor the state of public morality is the responsibility of the Son of Heaven in making his tours of inspection. To impeach and repress official malfeasance in order to improve law and morals is the task of the censor in his endeavor to rectify government. In ancient times, according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, when the ruler went on his tours of inspection, the myriad states felt cherished and protected, the morals of the populace were ameliorated, the way of the ruler was made manifest, the four classes of people were rendered obedient, and the advantages of the sage king's administration were illuminated. Since the day last year that your servant accepted appointment as regional investigating censor of Shantung, the land of the ancient states of Ch'i and Lu, until the present time when my assignment is about to expire, I have successively inquired into the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the regional officials, both civil and military, who hold office in my jurisdiction, and am confident that I have succeeded in ascertaining the truth about them. Now that the end of my assignment is imminent, it is incumbent upon me to differentiate among them according to precedent, and report my conclusions to Your Majesty. In addition to the separate memoranda I have submitted regarding other regional officials from this jurisdiction, I ask that Your Majesty take cognizance of the following cases.

The judicial commissioner of the Ch'ing-ho office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, and concurrently, battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, Hsia Yen-ling, is a man whose mediocre talents and corrupt conduct have long excited public comment and besmirched the reputation of his unit. In the past, when he was in charge of herds in the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, he created so much trouble with his flagrant depredations that his speculations were exposed by one of his own subordinates. Now that he is a judicial commissioner in Shantung, his rapacious greed is once more so blatant that it has had to be restrained by his colleagues. He allowed his son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, to assume a false district of origin when taking the military examination, and then hired a stand-in to take the qualifying test for him, with the result that:

The esprit of the officer class is debased.²⁰

He permitted his servant, Hsia Shou, to appropriate funds while responsible for the payroll, thereby giving rise to the vituperation of the troops in his command, and exposing his ignorance of proper administration. In his relations with others he exhibits such a:

Servile countenance and obsequious posture,²¹

that his coevals call him "The Maidservant." In adjudicating cases he is so:

Equally indifferent to the pros and cons.²²

that his subordinates deride him as "The Puppet."

The assistant judicial commissioner, and concurrently battalion vice-commander, Hsi-men Ch'ing, was originally no more than a "bare stick" from the marketplace, who took advantage of his connections to obtain office, and has laid false claim to military accomplishment, while being so ignorant that he is:

Incapable of telling beans from wheat, and

Unable to recognize the simplest character.²³

He lets his wife and concubines roam the streets and alleys for their pleasure, thereby failing to maintain the purity of his household. He invites female musicians to join him for drinking bouts in the marketplace, thereby blemishing the reputation of the official class. He has even gone to the extreme of maintaining the wife of Mr. Han as his mistress, for the purpose of indulging his lusts, thus failing to regulate his conduct;²⁴ and taking the clandestine bribe of Miao Ch'ing, in order to cover up his crime, though the evidence of his guilt is manifest.

These two venal and incompetent officials have long been the objects of principled criticism, and should not be permitted to remain in office another hour. I respectfully hope that Your Majesty,

in his sage enlightenment, will deign to take note of this matter by ordering the appropriate board to conduct a thorough reinvestigation; and, if your servant's words prove not to be unfounded, direct that Hsia Yen-ling and his associate be promptly removed from office,²⁵ so that the norms of official conduct may be relied upon, and Your Majesty's sage virtue may be made eternally manifest.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing this document, he was so agitated that he and his companion could only:

Gaze at each other in consternation,

Too dumbstruck to utter a single word.

"My colleague," Hsia Yen-ling finally said, "in this situation, what are we to do?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "As the saying goes:

When armies come the general confronts them;

When waters overflow earthworks arrest them.²⁶

Once things have come to a head,²⁷

The Way is what man makes of it.

The only thing you and I can do is to prepare gifts and send people to the Eastern Capital as soon as possible, in order to entreat His Honor to intercede on our behalf."

Thereupon, Judicial Commissioner Hsia bid him a hasty farewell and went home, where he came up with two hundred taels of silver and two silver flagons for the purpose, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, on his hand, came up with a girdle of gold, inlaid with jade and assorted jewels, and three hundred taels of silver. The Hsia household chose their servant Hsia Shou for this assignment, while Hsi-men Ch'ing entrusted the job to Lai-pao. By the time these gifts had been properly wrapped up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had written a covering letter to the majordomo Chai Ch'ien, the two deputies had hired mounts for themselves and proceeded to set off on their mission to the Eastern Capital that very night. But no more of this.

To resume our story, from the time that Kuan-ko returned home from the visit to the family graveyard, he kept crying from fright all night and would not allow himself to be breast-fed, spitting up whatever milk he swallowed. This threw Li P'ing-erh into such consternation that she came and told Yüeh-niang about it.

"It's just as I said," responded Yüeh-niang. "The child is not even a year old and should not have been taken on an excursion outside the city walls. But that obstinate good-for-nothing of ours would not agree, no matter what the consequences might be. His only response was to say, 'Really! Why shouldn't the two of them, mother and child, go to the graveyard today to sacrifice to my ancestors? If you don't allow the mother and child to go, it will look as if you're afraid she might want to replace you or something like that.' He actually opened his eyes wide and shouted at me. And now, what are we to do?"

Li P'ing-erh really didn't know what to do. Moreover, because of the impeachment lodged against him by the regional investigating censor, Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy talking to Judicial Commissioner Hsia in the front compound about sending someone to the Eastern Capital to try to fix things up and was too preoccupied to pay any attention to the fact that the child of the house was unwell again. Yüeh-niang sent a page boy after Dame Liu to come and examine him and also engaged the services of a licensed pediatrician, with the result that, what with the:

Opening of gates and closing of doors,²⁸
the household was in a state of disruption all night long.

When Dame Liu had examined him, she said, "The child is suffering from the colic brought on by a fright and must have encountered the General of the Five Ways²⁹ along the road. It doesn't matter. Just burn some paper money on his behalf to send the General on his way and he'll be all right."

She also left behind two doses of medicine in the form of cinnabar pills. Only after he had swallowed these, together with a decoction of field mint and bog rush, did he quiet down and go to sleep, no longer crying from fright and spitting up his milk, but his fever had not yet receded. Li P'ing-erh promptly produced a tael of silver and gave it to Dame Liu with which to buy paper money. That afternoon she came back with her husband, Stargazer Liu, and a shamaness, who proceeded to burn paper money and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of Kuan-ko in the summerhouse.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was up at the fifth watch to send Lai-pao and Hsia Shou on their way, after which he and Judicial Commissioner Hsia were preoccupied with going to Tung-p'ing prefecture to get news from Prefect Hu Shihwen on whether or not Miao Ch'ing had been arrested.

When Yüeh-niang heard Dame Liu say that the child had been subjected to a fright along the road, she expressed resentment at the wet nurse, Ju-i, saying, "You didn't look after the child carefully enough, but must have allowed him to become frightened in the sedan chair along the way. Otherwise, why should he have taken ill this way?"

"I had him inside the sedan chair, wrapped up tightly in a quilt," protested Ju-i. "And he was not jounced about. When you sent Hua-t'ung back to accompany my sedan chair, he was perfectly all right, and I held him as he slept. It was only after we had entered the city, and were almost at the door of the house, that I felt a cold shiver go up his spine. Then, when we got home, he rejected his milk and started to cry."

Let us put aside for the moment the events in the household as they burnt paper money and invoked the gods on behalf of the child.

To resume our story, Lai-pao and Hsia Shou hastened on their way and in only six days found themselves in the Eastern Capital, where they went to the grand preceptor's mansion, gained access to the majordomo Chai Ch'ien, and completed the process of turning over the gifts proffered by their two households.

When Chai Ch'ien had read Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter, he said, "Censor Tseng's bill of impeachment has not yet been delivered, so you had better stick around for a few days. At present, the situation here is that His Honor has just submitted a memorial laying out proposals with regard to seven matters, but the imperial rescript in response to it has not yet come down. You might as well wait until this document comes down. After that, when Censor Tseng's memorial arrives, I'll be able to speak to him about it, and get him to issue a verbal notation in the Grand Secretariat, ordering that it be:

Directed to the attention of the appropriate board.³⁰

On my part, I'll then send someone with my card, instructing the minister of war, Yü Shen,³¹ to suppress the memorial so that it is not

resubmitted. Your master can relax. I guarantee that nothing will ever come of it.”

Thereupon, after the two men had been entertained with food and drink, they returned to their inn to rest and await further developments.

One day, the imperial rescript approving the memorial laying out proposals with regard to seven matters that had been submitted by Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching duly came down. Lai-pao prevailed upon one of the gatekeepers at the grand preceptor's mansion to copy the relevant material from the government gazette so that he could take it home and show it to Hsi-men Ch'ing. What seven matters did this memorial actually propose the implementation of?

Memorial Submitted by Ts'ai Ching, Grand Academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, Minister of Personnel, and Duke of Lu

In Re: The Exposition of His Ignorant Views, the Realization of His Modest Hopes, the Recruitment of Human Talent, the Achievement of Effective Results, the Amplification of Fiscal Resources, the Amelioration of the People's Condition, and the Strengthening of Your Majesty's Sage Administration

Proposal number one:³² The abolition of the system of recruiting scholars by examination, replacing it by allowing local schools to recommend candidates for bureaucratic appointment.

I venture to observe that the deterioration of cultural standards and the decay of public morals³³ are all due to the failure of the existing system of recruiting scholars to select candidates of genuine talent, with the result that cultural standards lack anything on which to rely. The *Book of Documents* says, “Heaven in giving birth to the people, made for them rulers, and made for them instructors.”³⁴ In the Han dynasty candidates were recommended for being filial and incorrupt. The T'ang dynasty established government schools. It was our dynasty that first established a system which combined examination and recommendation, but due to bias and corruption in its administration the candidates selected lack genuine talent, and the people are unable to rely upon their guidance. Your Majesty seeks after talent both awake and asleep, and strives for good government both early and late. Now, good government depends upon the cultivation of worthy men, and nothing contributes more toward the cultivation of worthy men than schools. From now on, in recruiting scholars, we should adhere to the precedents of antiquity, and allow local schools to recommend candidates for bureaucratic appointment, while abolishing the system of having prefectures and districts send candidates to the capital for examination by the Ministry of Rites. Every year an examination administrator can be designated to examine the students in the Superior College of the National University, in a fashion similar to that employed by the Ministry of Rites.³⁵ A system should also be established for recruiting scholars renowned for eight kinds of virtuous conduct. These eight kinds of virtuous conduct are filiality, brotherly love, cordiality with agnatic kin, good relations with affinal kin, trustworthiness with friends, kindness toward neighbors, loyalty to the ruler, and judiciousness in differentiating the right from the profitable. Scholars who possess these virtues should be admitted to the Superior College of the National University without examination.³⁶

Proposal number two: The abolition of the Financial Advisory Bureau.

I venture to observe that at the inception of the present reign, when the institutional structure was being determined, a Financial Advisory Bureau was set up under the Department of State Affairs,³⁷ the purpose of which was, on behalf of the ruler, to limit superfluous expenditure, and conserve the wealth of the people. Now, since Your Majesty acceded to the throne, you have neither valued exotic products from afar, nor overtaxed the resources of your subjects, but have set a personal example of frugality³⁸ in supplying your own needs. As a result, the empire is without customs that cannot be corrected, or expenses that cannot be reduced, while those in authority devote themselves to accomplishing the reformation of morals, and establishing the inviolability of the prohibitions, being neither lax in the beginning nor negligent in the end. The government is flourishing, morals are honest, and the state of the realm is characterized by the words abundance, prosperity, contentment, and greatness.³⁹ That being the case, what need is there for a Financial Advisory Bureau. Let it be completely abolished.⁴⁰

Proposal number three: The reform of the salt voucher system.

I venture to observe that the salt voucher system is a means of raising tax revenue for the state in order to supply the needs of border defense. At the present time, would it not be appropriate for Your Majesty to restore the salt administration system of your ancestors by ordering that the merchants who have received old salt vouchers in return for delivering grain and fodder to the Three Border Regions of Yün-chung, Shensi, and Shansi be required to exchange them for new salt vouchers from the southeastern Huai-Che region? The price of the new vouchers should be thirty percent of their face value in cash, with the remainder payable in old vouchers at seventy percent of their face value.⁴¹ Now merchants should go to the salt production areas designated on the vouchers in order to take delivery of the salt, and then, as in the case of the tea voucher system, after undergoing official weighing and inspection of their consignments, pay the required duty, receive their duly authorized certificates, and then proceed, within the designated time limits, to the areas in which they trade in order to sell the salt. If they exceed the time limits, their salt should be subject to confiscation, and they should be required to purchase new certificates. If they try to sell more than their certificates entitle them to, they should be subject to the penalties for salt smugglers. If this proposal is enacted, the tax revenues of the state will be regularly enhanced, and the logistic needs of border defense will be met.⁴²

Proposal number four: The standardization of the currency.

I venture to observe that currency is the blood and pulse of the state. It is essential that it circulate freely and not be subject to blockage. If it is subject to obstruction or blockage, so that it fails to circulate, how will the common people be able to cope, and on what will the tax revenues of the state depend? From the minting of “goose-eye” coins⁴³ in the latter days of the Chin dynasty⁴⁴ to the early years of the present reign, the coinage has been unacceptably heterogeneous, sometimes even being debased by adulteration with lead, iron, or tin. The residents along the border sell these coins to the barbarians, who melt them down in order to cast weapons, the harm resulting from which is not insignificant.⁴⁵ Would it not be appropriate to completely prohibit the circulation of these heterogeneous coins, and require them to be redeemed for the larger denomination coins that Your Majesty has minted during the Ch'ung-ning and Ta-kuan reign periods,⁴⁶ at an exchange ratio of ten to one, so that the common people will be supplied with a viable currency and the price of goods will not be subject to sudden inflation.⁴⁷

Proposal number five: The reinstitution of the system of government sale and distributive purchase of grain in order to alleviate scarcity.⁴⁸

I venture to observe that the government sale of grain at reduced prices is for the purpose of relieving the victims of famine. In recent years, whenever floods and droughts have succeeded each other, and the people have lacked sufficient food, Your Majesty has issued rescripts ordaining this method of relief. Recently, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, Han Li,⁴⁹ has submitted a memorial requesting the reinstitution of this system, which has elicited imperial assent. It is recommended that each of the subprefectures and districts affected should establish community institutions to carry out this system of government sale of grain at a reduced price and purchase of grain before it is harvested. The security groups within each ward, the wards within each village, and the villages within each township should promote the establishment of these community institutions. The households of each township should be divided into three categories, upper, middle, and lower, with the upper households required to contribute a quota of grain, the middle households half as much, and the lower households entitled to receive an appropriate allotment. The amount of money advanced to farmers for specified quantities of grain prior to the harvest is what is referred to as distributive purchase. If this method is followed, a system for government acquisition and distribution of grain for the benefit of the people will be implemented, and Your Majesty will be able to augment Your benevolence at little cost. It only remains to authorize the relevant prefects and district magistrates to rigorously carry it out. The benefit to be derived from this policy is not insignificant.

Proposal number six: The promulgation of a rescript ordering the subprefectures and prefectures of the empire to exact a commutation tax in lieu of corvée labor.

I venture to observe that at the inception of the present reign, because the threat of foreign invasion had not yet been put to rest, conscript soldiers and able-bodied males were assembled in the capital in order to provide logistic transport and strengthen the defenses of the state. Now that we have enjoyed peace for an extended period,⁵⁰ and the people are content with their occupations, it would be appropriate to promulgate a rescript ordering the subprefectures and prefectures of the empire to exact an annual commutation tax in lieu of corvée labor, at the rate of thirty strings of cash per capita, and transmit the proceeds to the capital in order to defray the cost of provisioning the border regions. By so doing we would achieve two ends with a single action,⁵¹ and thus somewhat relieve the demands on the people's strength.⁵²

Proposal number seven: The establishment of a Supervisorate of Palace Transport.

I venture to observe that since Your Majesty acceded to the throne you have refused to accept the presentation of musicians, beauties, dogs, and horses. The flowers and rocks for which You have expressed appreciation are all products of the mountains and forests in which most people have no interest. It is simply due to the excessive zeal with which the authorities have sought them out for presentation to the throne that the populace has been disturbed, which has injured the reputation of Your sage administration. If Your Majesty sees fit to curtail these excesses, it is proposed that a Supervisorate of Palace Transport be established, the expenses of which would all be defrayed out of the Palace Treasury, so that designated officials could be dispatched to obtain the desired products without disturbing the people of the subprefectures and prefectures.⁵³

An imperial decision with regard to these matters is hereby humbly requested.

The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read as follows:

Your proposals are highly relevant to the problems of the times, and serve both to augment Our feeling of delight, and demonstrate your penchant for loyal counsel. Let them all be enacted as proposed, and directed to the attention of the appropriate board.

Lai-pao had a copy made of the relevant material from the government gazette, after which, when Majordomo Chai Ch'ien had

written a reply to Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter, and provided them with five taels of silver for their traveling expenses, he and Hsia Shou took to the road and headed back toward Ch'ing-ho district. When they arrived there in due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing was at home, where he was:

Unable to get the matter off his mind, while Judicial Commissioner Hsia had been sending someone over twice a day to inquire after the news. As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing learned that Lai-pao and his companion had arrived, he summoned them into the rear compound and interrogated them about the facts of the case.

Lai-pao gave him a complete report on the above-mentioned events, saying, "When we saw Master Chai Ch'ien in the ministerial mansion, after reading your letter, he said, 'This affair should not be a problem. You can tell your master to relax. Right now, the regional investigating censor's term of office has already expired, and a new investigating censor has been appointed. And moreover, his bill of impeachment has not yet arrived in the capital. When his memorial arrives, I'll mention it to His Honor, and, no matter how serious the charges it contains may be, he'll merely issue a notation directing that it be:

Directed to the attention of the appropriate board.

His Honor can then send someone with his card instructing the minister of war, Yü Shen, to file the memorial without resubmitting it. In that case, even if he should have the ability to breach the gates of Heaven, it would be to no avail."

Only after hearing this report was Hsi-men Ch'ing's anxiety relieved.

He then went on to ask, "How did it happen that his memorial had not yet been delivered?"

"When we left," Lai-pao explained, "we traveled on horseback by day and night and succeeded in getting to the capital in only five days. It's not surprising that we got there first. On starting back, we encountered a group of mounted couriers, with jangling bells, one of whom was carrying a yellow dispatch case on his back, with a pair of pheasant tails stuck in it, as well as two serrated pennants. No doubt it was the sealed text of the memorial from the office of the regional investigating censor that was only then arriving."

"If his memorial was that late in getting there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "everything ought to be all right. I was afraid we might not have acted in time."

"You can relax, master," said Lai-pao. "I guarantee that nothing will ever come of it. But that is not the only thing I accomplished. I also learned of two other favorable developments that I can report to you."

"Really," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and what might they be?"

"His Honor the grand preceptor," said Lai-pao, "has recently submitted a memorial laying out proposals regarding seven matters, all of which have already been approved for enactment by imperial rescript. At present, His Honor's relative by marriage, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, Han Lü, has been authorized according to precedent to encourage salt production in the Three Border Regions of Yün-chung, Shensi, and Shansi by setting up charity granaries in every prefecture, subprefecture, commandary, and district for the government sale of grain at reduced prices. Among the common people, the top rank of the upper grade households will be required to contribute a quota of grain to these granaries for which they will receive granary vouchers that may be exchanged for salt certificates which entitle the holder to take delivery of specified quantities of salt. The old vouchers may be exchanged for new vouchers at seventy percent of their face value plus thirty percent in cash. The thirty thousand taels worth of vouchers that you formerly received, in partnership with your kinsman, Ch'iao Hung, for delivering grain to the Kao-yang customs station⁵⁴ can be exchanged for thirty thousand taels worth of salt certificates, to be allocated by the Ministry of Revenue. You might as well take advantage of the fact that His Honor Ts'ai Yün has been appointed salt-control censor there to send someone to the designated salt production area and take delivery of the specified quantity of salt. It should turn out to be a highly profitable transaction."



Lai-pao Passes the Mounted Courier Conveying the Impeachment

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Is this information really true?"

"If you don't believe me," said Lai-pao, "I've got a copy of the relevant material from the government gazette right here."

Pulling it out of his letter case, he handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to read. Upon glancing over the extensive vocabulary of characters in the text, Hsi-men Ch'ing called Ch'en Ching-chi in from the front compound to read it out loud to him. Ch'en Ching-chi succeeded in reading part way through it before coming to a halt, stumped by several unfamiliar characters. Consequently, Shu-t'ung was called in to read it. Now Shu-t'ung, having gotten his start in life as a "gate-boy,"⁵⁵ was able to read it through, all the way to the end, as fluently as flowing water, without making a single mistake. The seven proposals contained in the memorial were those enumerated above.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard them, he was delighted. He went on to read Majordomo Chai Ch'ien's letter, from which he learned that their gifts had all been safely delivered, and that the principal graduate Ts'ai Yün, upon an audience with the emperor, had, indeed, been appointed salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region. In his heart he felt:

Unable to contain his delight.

On the one hand, he sent Hsia Shou home with the injunction to, "Give your master the good news," while, on the other hand, he rewarded Lai-pao with five taels of silver, two bottles of wine, and a side of pork. After which, he went back to the master suite to rest. But no more of this.

Truly:

When a tree is tall it attracts the wind,⁵⁶ and the wind damages the tree;

When a man's name becomes too prominent, his prominence will do him in.⁵⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Success and failure, flourishing and decay, are controlled by fate;
Everything is determined by the year, month, day, and hour of birth.
Those who harbor ambition in their breasts may achieve their goals;
But those whose purses are devoid of money cannot depend on talent.⁵⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 49

HSI-MEN CH'ING WELCOMES INVESTIGATING CENSOR SUNG CH'IAO-NIEN; IN THE TEMPLE OF ETERNAL FELICITY HE ENCOUNTERS AN INDIAN MONK

With relaxed temperament and relaxed bosom
let the years go by;
People are dying and people are being born
before your eyes.
Whether it be exalted or whether it be lowly,¹
submit to your fate;
Though it be long or though it be short,²
do not repine.
Though you possess much or possess nothing,
forgo your sighs;
Whether you be wealthy or whether you be poor
is Heaven's decree.
Be content to accept your lifetime allotment
of clothing and wages;
Even a single day of undisturbed leisure³
is a day of immortality.⁴

THE STORY GOES that when Hsia Shou returned home and reported on his mission, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling immediately came over to express his gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My colleague has done me:

The favor of saving my life.⁵

Had I not been able to rely upon the powerful influence of your diffracted radiance, how could this affair ever have been brought to an end?"

"My colleague can relax," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile. "I figure that you and I did not do anything inappropriate. Let the censor criticize our conduct however he likes. His Honor will have a clear understanding of the case."

He then ordered that a table be set up in the reception hall and entertained his visitor with a meal. They chatted and laughed together until evening before Hsia Yen-ling said goodbye and went home. The next day they both went to the yamen and conducted their business as usual. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when the regional inspecting censor Tseng Hsiao-hsü saw that his memorial of impeachment had been submitted without eliciting any result, he realized that the two officials had succeeded in putting in the fix, and his heart was filled with ire. Because there were so many points in the seven proposals submitted by Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching that he deemed to be:

Either illegitimate or wrongheaded;
and because all of them were:

Injurious to those below while benefiting those above;⁶
when he returned to the capital for an audience in order to report on his assignment, he submitted a memorial in which he argued forcefully as follows:

The wealth of the empire should be allowed to circulate freely. To seize the economic resources of the people and accumulate them in the capital is not, I fear, the way to obtain a just administration.⁷
The proposed system of government sale and distributive purchase of the people's grain should not be instituted. The requirement that the coins currently in circulation be redeemed for larger denomination coins at an exchange ratio of ten to one should not be implemented. The salt voucher system should not be repeatedly changed. I have heard it said that if the people's resources are exhausted, who will there be to protect the country for You?⁸

Ts'ai Ching was enraged by this and submitted a memorial to Emperor Hui-tsung in which he accused Tseng Hsiao-hsü of "giving vent to slanderous words, and interfering with national affairs."

At this juncture, Tseng Hsiao-hsü was turned over to the Ministry of Personnel for investigation, and subsequently demoted to the position of prefect of Ch'ing-chou in Shensi. The regional investigating censor of Shensi at the time was Sung Sheng-ch'ung,⁹ who was the elder brother of Ts'ai Yu's wife. Ts'ai Ching secretly suborned him into traducing Tseng Hsiao-hsü for an alleged private transgression, as a result of which his servants were arrested and:

Tortured into giving evidence to substantiate the case.¹⁰

Ts'ai Ching consequently succeeded in having him removed from office and:

Banished to the southern extremity of the country,
in order to accomplish his revenge. But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, back at home, had already entrusted his granary vouchers to Han Tao-kuo, along with Ch'iao Hung's nephew, Ts'ui Pen, and sent them to report to the office of Vice-Minister Han Lü of the Ministry of Revenue at the Kao-yang customs station, in order to have them properly registered.

Meanwhile, he kept Lai-pao at home to take charge of ordering the provisions for an elaborate feast and then deputed him to ascertain when the salt-control censor Ts'ai Yün's boat would arrive in the vicinity.

One day Lai-pao learned that Ts'ai Yün's boat had left the capital at the same time as that of the new regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien,¹¹ and that they were about to arrive in the neighborhood of Tung-ch'ang prefecture. When he sent someone home to report this news, Hsi-men Ch'ing, together with Hsia Yen-ling, set out to meet them, while keeping the magistrates of the various prefectures, subprefectures, and districts, and the officers of the various guards, who had all gotten their attendants, men and horses, together for the same purpose, as completely in the dark as if they had been:

Locked tight in an iron bucket.

Lai-pao paid an advance visit to Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün's boat when it arrived at Tung-ch'ang prefecture and delivered a gift for the road from his master. It was only after this that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling came out some fifty li beyond the suburbs to meet them at the port on the New Canal, at a place called Pai-chia Ts'un, or Hundred Family Village. They first went aboard Ts'ai Yün's boat to pay their respects, and to communicate the fact that they wished to extend an invitation to Sung Ch'iao-nien as well.

"I understand," responded Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün. "You can be sure that he will accompany me on a visit to your mansion."

It was only then that the presiding magistrate of Tung-p'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen, together with the regional officials from all the subprefectures and districts in his jurisdiction, the officers of the various guards, the docket officers and government students, the Buddhist and Taoist authorities and Yin-yang masters, with their respective curricula vitae in hand, arrayed themselves in attendance to receive the new regional investigating censor. Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan, in command of contingents of men and horse, dressed in armor and carrying weapons, cleared the way so effectively that even chickens and dogs stayed out of sight, as they escorted Sung Ch'iao-nien, to the music of drums and wind instruments, into the office of the regional investigating censor in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. After all the attending officials had been introduced and given the chance to hand in their documents, the newly arrived censor was finally allowed to rest for the night.

The next day, who should appear but the gatekeeper, who announced that His Honor, the salt-control censor, Ts'ai Yün had come to pay him a visit. Sung Ch'iao-nien hurriedly ordered that the cases he had been examining be put away, while he straightened his headgear and came out to meet his visitor. When the two of them had finished exchanging amenities, they sat down in the positions of guest and host.

A little later, after tea had been served, Sung Ch'iao-nien asked, "Since my fellow graduate must make the deadline for reporting to his new post, when are you going to set out?"

"I plan to stay another day or two," Ts'ai Yün replied.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Meets the Boat of the Salt-Control Censor

He then went on to say, "There is an acquaintance of mine, Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing, who resides in Ch'ing-ho district and belongs to one of the great lineages of that place. He is honest and scrupulous by nature, is one of those who are:

Wealthy yet observant of the rites,¹²
and is also a protégé of His Honor the venerable Ts'ai Ching. Since I have a nodding acquaintance with him, and he has been good enough to come out to welcome me at a distance, I would like to pay a visit to his residence in order to pay my respects."

"Just who is this Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing?" asked Sung Ch'iao-nien.

"At present he is a battalion commander in the local guard and a judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission," replied Ts'ai Yün. "He is one of those who came to pay their respects to my fellow graduate yesterday."

Sung Ch'iao-nien ordered his attendants to fetch the curricula vitae that had been submitted to him the day before and, when he had located the names of Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling, said, "This must be the person who has some relationship with Chai Ch'ien, is it not?"

"That's the one," replied Ts'ai Yün. "Right now he is waiting outside and has asked me to accompany my fellow graduate in paying a visit to his place for a meal. But I don't know how my fellow graduate feels about it."

"I have only just arrived here," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "It would hardly be appropriate for me to go."

"What is there to be afraid of?" said Ts'ai Yün. "It would be doing a favor to Chai Ch'ien for the two of us to visit him. What harm could it do?"

Thereupon, orders were given to prepare their sedan chairs, and the fact that the two of them were about to depart for this purpose was duly promulgated.

No sooner was Hsi-men Ch'ing apprised of this news than he set out for home, together with Lai-pao and Pen the Fourth, riding fast horses, in order to arrive there ahead of his guests, and have time to make the necessary preparations for the feast. A hill-shaped screen-wall and gaily decorated bowers were erected outside his front gate. Musicians from the two Music Offices were engaged to provide music, and a troupe of Hai-yen¹³ actors, as well as a troupe of tumblers, were engaged to provide the entertainment.

It so happens that Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien dismissed most of the men and horse in his entourage, only retaining several squads of soldiers bearing blue flags to clear the way, along with the officials and functionaries in his suite, and set out, together with Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün, seated in two large palanquins, protected by double-tiered canopies, in order to pay a visit to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.

At the time, this had the effect of:

Dumbfounding Tung-p'ing prefecture,
While elevating Ch'ing-ho district.

Everyone said, "Even His Honor the regional investigating censor is sufficiently familiar with the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing to attend a banquet at his residence."

Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan all felt compelled to put in an appearance by leading contingents of the men and horse under their respective commands to station themselves at the mouths of the streets to left and right of the Hsi-men residence in order to maintain order. Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in black and attired in his official cap and girdle, came out a considerable distance to welcome his guests. On either side of the street, musicians struck up their drums and stringed instruments as his visitors made their way to the main gate and dismounted from their palanquins.

As they proceeded inside, Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün were both garbed in robes of scarlet brocade, decorated with an embroidered *hsieh-chih*, a mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, black silk caps, black shoes, and official girdles featuring plaques of "crane's crest red,"¹⁴ and were accompanied by attendants bearing two large flabella.

They saw before them a thirty-foot-wide reception hall, in which:

Speckled bamboo blinds were rolled high,¹⁵ and
Brocaded standing screens were arrayed,

while in the place of honor there stood two fancy table settings, of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, replete with:

High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery,
Ingot-shaped cakes, and cone-shaped piles of fruit,

all of them meticulously arranged.

The two officials, politely deferring to each other, entered the reception hall in order to exchange amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün ordered his retainers to proffer:

The customary presentation gifts,
consisting of two bolts of Hu-chou silk, the collected literary works of a well-known author, four bags of tender leaf tea, and an inkstone from Tuan-ch'i.¹⁶ Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien merely presented a single calling card on safflower red paper,¹⁷ which read, "Your devoted servant Sung Ch'iao-nien pays his respects."

Addressing himself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Your pupil has long been aware of your illustrious reputation but, having just arrived in this region, has not yet had an opportunity to fully express the extent of his admiration. I really ought not to impose upon you, but had it not been for my fellow graduate, Ts'ai Yün, who invited me to join him in paying our respects, how could I have been fortunate enough to gaze upon your distinguished countenance?"

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he knelt down to kowtow, saying, "Your servant is but an insignificant military official who is subject to your jurisdiction. The fact that, today, I have been fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of your disinterested attention, has had the effect of:

Shedding glory on my humble abode."¹⁸

Thereupon, he prostrated himself in order to pay his respects, exhibiting the utmost modesty in his courteous demeanor. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien returned his salutation, and they exchanged the customary amenities.

At this point, Censor Ts'ai allowed Censor Sung to take the position of honor on the left, while he took that on the right, and Hsi-men Ch'ing obsequiously kept them company with lowered head. After tea had been served:

Classical melodies saturate the ears;¹⁹

Drums and music resound to the heavens,

as the musicians began to play. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen to the serving of the wine, and sat down to preside over the feast, the various courses were presented from below.

Words are inadequate to describe the scene:

Only the rarest delicacies are arrayed;²⁰

The soup shows off its peach-red waves;

The wine overflows with golden ripples.²¹

Truly:

The singers and dancers display voice and color;

The tables, ten-foot square, are laden with food.²²

Hsi-men Ch'ing was aware of the large number of attendants that had accompanied his visitors, so, for the retinues of each of the two sedan chairs, he set aside fifty bottles of wine, five hundred snacks, and a hundred catties of precooked pork, which were duly accepted and taken outside. The personal servants, secretaries, "gate-boys," etc. were separately entertained in an ante-chamber, but there is no need to describe this in detail. Suffice it to say that it cost Hsi-men Ch'ing all of a thousand taels of silver to put on the banquet that day.

This Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, being a native of Nan-ch'ang in Kiangsi province, was impatient by nature. Without having stayed very long, after listening to the performance of but a single scene from a hsi-wen drama, he got up to go. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he repeatedly insisted upon his remaining a while longer.

Censor Ts'ai Yün chimed in from the side, saying, "Since my fellow graduate has nothing else to do, you might as well stay for a while. What need is there to return in such haste?"

"My fellow graduate can stay if he likes," responded Censor Sung, "but I need to get back to the Investigation Bureau in order to take care of some public business."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ordered his servants to pack up the contents of the two table settings, including the gold and silver utensils, in food boxes, making twenty carrier loads in all, and summoned the servitors of his visitors to take charge of them. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's lavish table setting consisted of two jugs of wine, two carcasses of mutton, two pairs of ornamental flowers fashioned out of gold filigree, two bolts of red satin, a set of gold salvers, two silver flagons, ten silver wine cups, two silver ewers with hinged lids, and a pair of ivory chopsticks. That of Censor Ts'ai Yün was the same. Lists of the contents of both table settings were duly presented.

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien repeatedly demurred, saying, "How could your pupil presume to accept these things?"

Thereupon, he directed his gaze at Censor Ts'ai Yün, who said, "This falls within my fellow graduate's distinguished jurisdiction.

It is only natural,²³

that he should accept. But how could I be worthy of such an honor?"

"It is but a paltry gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "no more than something to enhance a drinking bout, that's all. Why be so standoffish?"

By the time the two officials had done with their demurrals the table settings had long since been carried out the gate. Only then did Censor Sung, seeing that there was no help for it, order his attendants to accept the list of gifts and express his thanks.

"Today," he said, "on the occasion of my first visit in order to make your acquaintance, I have not only put you to the trouble of providing a lavish entertainment, but have also accepted your magnanimous gifts.

What can I do to be worthy of such largess?²⁴

It remains for me to find some way of repaying your generosity without fail."

Then, turning to Censor Ts'ai, he said, "My fellow graduate, stay a little longer if you like, but your pupil must announce his departure."

Then and there, he bade farewell and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed the wish to escort him for some distance, but Censor Sung would not allow it and, urgently pressing him to return, raised his hand in salute, got into his sedan chair, and went his way.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned inside to keep Censor Ts'ai company, he urged his visitor to join him in divesting themselves of their official caps and girdles and invited him back to the summerhouse in the interior of the garden where they could be more relaxed. He then ordered that the musicians be dismissed, and that only the actors need remain. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed his servants to provide new table settings for them, and to set out appropriate delicacies and viands so they could drink wine together.

"Today," said Censor Ts'ai, "it was presumptuous of me to join my fellow graduate Sung Ch'iao-nien in paying you a visit. On top of which, you have bestowed these wine vessels from your abundant storehouse upon me.

What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"

"The paltry nature of these gifts is embarrassing," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They are no more than tokens of my esteem."²⁵

He then went on to ask, "What is His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien's courtesy name?"

"His courtesy name is Sung-yüan," replied Censor Ts'ai. "That is to say, the *sung* of the expression *sung-shu*, or 'pine tree,' and the *yüan* of the expression *yüan-ch'üan*, or 'fountainhead.'"

He then went on to say, "Originally he repeatedly refused to come. It was only after your pupil had extolled your surpassing virtue, and intimated that you were acquainted with the venerable minister, that he finally agreed. He is also aware that your household has some kind of marriage relationship with that of Chai Ch'ien."

"I think it must be true," observed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that Kinsman Chai has spoken to him about me, but it appears that this gentleman, Sung Ch'iaonien, has a somewhat strange personality."

"Although he is, to be sure, a native of Kiangsi province," said Censor Ts'ai, "there really isn't anything strange about him. It's simply that this was his first meeting with you. It's not surprising that he should want to put on something of a show."

When he had finished speaking, he laughed.

"It's getting rather late today," Hsi-men Ch'ing then said. "There's really no reason for the venerable gentleman to return to his boat."

"Early tomorrow morning," said Censor Ts'ai, "I have to set sail on a long journey."

"If you do not see fit to reject me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why don't you stay overnight in my humble abode? Tomorrow morning your pupil will undertake to see you off with an appropriate libation at the roadside pavilion ten li outside of town."

"I have already benefited excessively from your generous regard," said Censor Ts'ai.

Then, turning to his retainers, he directed them, "All of you return outside the city gate, and come back to get me first thing tomorrow morning."

The crowd of his retainers all assented and took themselves off, leaving behind only two household servants to wait on him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that his guest's retainers had all departed, he got up from his place at the table, summoned Tai-an, and proceeded to:

Whisper into his ear in a low voice,

thus and so, "Go right away into the licensed quarter, single out Tung Chiaorh and Han Chin-ch'uan by name, and have them delivered to the rear door of the house by sedan chair, without letting anyone know what you are doing."

Tai-an, for his part, departed on his mission, while Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to his place at the table, in order to keep Censor Ts'ai

company while they drank together, and listened to the singing of the troupe of Hai-yen actors who stood to one side and performed for their entertainment.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked his visitor, "Venerable Sir, how long were you able to remain at home before returning to the capital? And is your venerable mother still able to get around, and in good health?"

"My elderly mother, as it happens, is doing all right," said Censor Ts'ai. "As for your pupil's sojourn at home, the half year passed by swiftly before I knew it. But, upon my return to the capital for an audience with the emperor, who would have thought that I would be impeached by Ts'ao Ho,²⁶ as a result of which your pupil, along with fourteen of his fellow graduates who were serving in the Historiography Institute, were all simultaneously demoted to provincial offices. In my case, I was appointed to the Censorate, and, most recently, selected for the post of salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region, while my fellow graduate, Sung Ch'iao-nien, was appointed to the position of regional investigating censor in your distinguished province. He is also a protégé of the venerable minister, Ts'ai Ching."

"At the present time," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what post is the venerable gentleman, An Ch'en, occupying?"

"An Ch'en," responded Ts'ai Yün, "has already been promoted to the position of secretary in the Ministry of Works and has been sent to Ching-chou to expedite the delivery of imperial lumber. He is doing all right for himself."

When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned the troupe of Hai-yen actors to come over and serve them with wine.

Censor Ts'ai instructed them, "Sing a song suite beginning with the tune 'Fisherman's Pride' for us."

The actors, standing beside them, clapped their hands to keep time and proceeded to sing to the tune "Fisherman's Pride":

Since our parting we are distant and there are no letters.

This ailment that causes no physical hurt or pain²⁷ is hard to get rid of.

Alas, in this desolate inn, who is there who knows me?

The message-bearing fish are submerged and the geese bring no letters.

As for that beauty from the three Isles of the Blest, who knows where she is to be found.

I yearn for her asleep and long for her in dreams.²⁸

On whose behalf do I endure these feelings?

Listlessly, listlessly wasting away,

I am just like a willow catkin tossed in the breeze.

Who knows when we will ever be able to meet again?

To the tune "Black Silk Robe"

Before my eyes the yellow chrysanthemums have just bloomed.

I wonder why that T'ao Yüan-ming²⁹ of mine has not returned home.

It makes me gaze into the distance until my eyes are worn out.

Lover of mine, why can't you do me a good turn?

Ever since he left,

I've been beset by lovesickness.³⁰

As confused as though drunk,

My tears continually flowing.

Who knows when we will ever be able to see each other again?

To the same tune

I love the peach blossoms that make up her face;

The bamboo shoots that form her ten slender fingers;³¹

I love the faint spring peaks of her eyebrows, like willows tangled in the mist;

I love the bright clarity of her pair of eyes, that remind me of autumn ripples;

The raven locks that adorn her temples;

The black silk filaments tied in a bun;

The pendant crescents of her sickle brows;

The sunset glow suffusing her countenance.

I can't help longing for her until my liver and intestines are sundered.

To the same tune

The drum on the battlements has begun to sound the watch.

I listen to the dying notes of the bugle³² as it plays taps on the watchtower.

Banging on my bed and pounding my pillow³³ several thousand times;

I give vent to long sighs as well as short³⁴ on a myriad occasions.

My spirits are distraught;

My words are inarticulate;³⁵

Forgetting to eat, neglecting to sleep,³⁶

I lie down in my clothes as my tears flow.

All day long I remain in a stupor, too tired to do anything.

To the same tune

Only on your account, all the livelong day I am given over to longing;

While you are there, playing and laughing in pursuit of pleasure.

Whenever I happen to call it to mind, my thoughts are suspended;

Every time the subject comes up, I am only the more resentful.

My regard for you is as deep as the sea;

My feelings are as weighty as mountains.³⁷

Our assignation was scarcely accidental;³⁸

Separation is the hardest thing to bear.

As the saying goes, "The lotus root may be broken, but the threads remain connected."³⁹

As they were singing, who should appear but Tai-an, who asked Hsi-men Ch'ing to step aside for a word with him.

"I have summoned Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan," Tai-an reported. "They came in through the back door and are sitting in Mother's room at the moment."

"You'd better give orders that their sedan chairs be carried out of the way somewhere," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They've already been carried out of the way," said Tai-an.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded back to the master suite, where the two singing girls stepped forward and kowtowed to him.

"I've invited the two of you here today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so that you'll be available to wait upon His Honor Ts'ai Yün in the grotto underneath the artificial hill this evening. At present he holds the post of regional inspector, so you can't afford to be remiss with him. If you do your best to accommodate him, I'll reward the two of you independently of whatever he may give you."

Han Chin-ch'uan laughed, saying, "There's no need for you to instruct us. We'll know what to do."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, with a wink, "He's one of those southerners, you know, who are enamored of the 'southern breeze.'⁴⁰ You mustn't be squeamish with him."

"Mother, just listen to him!" exclaimed Tung Chiao-erh. "Father, you're just like:

The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall;

The longer it stays there the hotter it gets.

Since we've already kowtowed before the prince's palace;

Would we refuse to drink the water from his well?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this as he made his way back toward the front compound. Just as he arrived at the ceremonial gate that separated the compounds, whom should he encounter but Lai-pao and Ch'en Ching-chi, who were carrying a card to show to him.

"Just now," said Lai-pao, "your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has made the suggestion that you take advantage of the fact that His Honor Ts'ai Yün is at leisure here at the moment, to broach this matter with him. I fear that tomorrow when he's getting ready to go, he'll be too busy to consider it. I've gotten your son-in-law to write our two names down on the card here."

"You come along with me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Lai-pao then followed him as far as the summerhouse, where he knelt down outside the latticework partition.

In the course of drinking with his guest, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought the subject up, saying, "There's a certain matter here that I'm reluctant to trouble you with."

"My dear Ssu-ch'üan,"⁴¹ responded Censor Ts'ai, "what have you got in mind? Just tell me what you'd like me to do. Your pupil would not presume to reject your command."

"Last year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in partnership with my kinsman Ch'iao Hung, we delivered a consignment of grain to the border, in return for which we were issued salt certificates that entitle us to take delivery of the specified quantity of salt at the seat of your distinguished jurisdiction in Yang-chou. All we are hoping for is that when our agents show up there, you will look upon the matter favorably, and allow them to take early delivery of the salt, as a token of your generous regard."

He then proceeded to proffer the card to him, and when Censor Ts'ai looked at it, he saw that it read, "The merchants Lai-pao and Ts'ui Pen, who hold previously issued salt certificates entitling them to thirty thousand taels worth of salt from the Liang-Huai region, request that upon presentation of the said certificates, they may take early delivery."

When Censor Ts'ai had perused it, he laughed, saying, "A thing like this is no big deal."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Lai-pao to come inside and kneel down, instructing him, "Perform a kowtow to His Honor Ts'ai."

"After I get to Yang-chou," said Censor Ts'ai, "the two of you can come straight to the Investigation Bureau and ask to see me. I'll let you take delivery of your salt a month before any of the other merchants."

"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are considerate enough to let them have it ten days earlier than the rest, that will be sufficient."

Censor Ts'ai Yün proceeded to put the card in question into his sleeve, while Shu-t'ung served them with wine, and the actors continued with their song suite, to the tune "The Tiger Descends the Mountain":

As the Mid-autumn Festival draws near,
I realize that my feelings have turned sour.
All I can see is the moon in the window;
I do not see the return of my lover.
The dinning sound of pounding laundry bats resounds in my ears;
With strident cries, the northern geese return to the south.
How could these things fail to increase the sadness in my heart?
I anticipate that this lovesickness,
Will be the ruination of my youth.
After the dusk has fallen,
As the night watches recede,
Only after trimming the silver lamp am I able to sleep.

To the same tune

Originally, when we held hands together,
Standing side by side beneath the moon,
We swore to be as faithful as the hills and seas;
And made an oath before Heaven,
That whoever should break faith and forget favor⁴² should revert apace to the Nine Springs.
How is it then that, all this time, news of you has been so inaccessible,
That all I can do is cast my lot in coins?
Neglecting to sleep, forgetting to eat,
Who is there to express concern for me?
After the dusk has fallen,
As the night watches recede,
Only after trimming the silver lamp am I able to sleep.

CODA

If azure Heaven is only willing to do me a good turn,
Send my lover back to my pillow side as soon as possible.⁴³
So that this student will no longer have to sleep alone.

By the time they had finished singing it was lamplighting time, and Censor Ts'ai said, "I have put you to a great deal of trouble all day. I think we had better call a halt to the drinking."

Whereupon, he got up from his place at the table, and his attendants prepared to light him on his way.

"There's no need to light the lamps yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. May I invite you, Venerable Sir, to adjust your toilet in the interior."

Thereupon, he conducted his visitor on a tour of the garden. When they arrived back at the Kingfisher Pavilion, they found that:

Speckled bamboo blinds were hanging low,

Candles burned brightly in silver stands,⁴⁴

and a complete new feast had already been laid out for them. In the interim, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for his servants to provide the troupe of Haiyen actors with food and wine, reward them for their services with two taels of silver, and send them on their way; and Shu-t'ung had cleared away the used utensils from the summerhouse and closed the postern gate.

What should they observe at this point but the two singing girls, resplendently dressed, waiting for them beneath the steps, who now came forward and;

Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
kowtowed to them. Behold:

Graceful of figure, comely of countenance, garbed in golden threads,
Without even disturbing the fragrant dust, she descends the stairs,
When her time comes, the sprinkling water will moisten her silk skirt,
Just like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain returning from her rainmaking.

When Censor Ts'ai Yün caught sight of them:

Though he wished to advance, he couldn't;

Though he wished to retire, he was unable.⁴⁵

"Ssu-ch'üan," he protested, "how can you show me such generous regard? I fear that it will never do."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "How does this differ from the way in which, in former times, Hsieh An enjoyed himself in the Eastern Mountains?"⁴⁶

"I fear that I do not measure up to the genius of Hsieh An," said Censor Ts'ai. "But you, Sir, do possess the discriminating taste of Wang Hsi-chih."⁴⁷

Thereupon, he held hands with the two singing girls beneath the moon, looking for all the world like Liu Ch'en or Juan Chao upon their arrival in the T'ien-t'ai Mountains.⁴⁸ Upon entering the pavilion, and seeing that it contained all the cultural artifacts that he remembered from his previous visit, he asked for paper and writing brush that he might compose a memorial of the occasion.

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Shu-t'ung to comply with his wishes, and he promptly supplied an inkstone from Tuan-ch'i, ground the ink until it was appropriately dark, and spread out a sheet of brocade notepaper before him.

Now this Censor Ts'ai Yün possessed the talent of a principal graduate, after all, so:

Taking the writing brush in hand,⁴⁹

Without altering a single stroke,⁵⁰

Engendering characters like dragons and serpents,
under the lamplight, he:

Dashed off a composition with a single flourish,⁵¹
producing a poem, which read:

It has been more than half a year since I visited your home;
The cultured decor of your studio is just the same as before.
When the rain is over, Shu-t'ung opens up the herb garden;
As the breeze returns, immortals pace among the flower beds.
As we near a state of inebriation, how swiftly the cups fly;
When our poems are finally composed, the clepsydra urges us on.
Our impending separation only adds another source of regret;
Who knows when the day will come that I visit you again?

When he had finished his composition, he had Shu-t'ung paste it on the wall in order to commemorate the occasion.

He then asked the two singing girls, "What are your names?"

"My surname is Tung," one of them replied, "and my given name is Chiaoerh. My companion's name is Han Chin-ch'uan."

"Do the two of you have courtesy names?" Censor Ts'ai went on to ask.

"We are but unknown singing girls," replied Tung Chiao-erh. "Where would we get courtesy names from?"

"There is no call for you two to be so modest," said Censor Ts'ai.

Only after he had enquired repeatedly did Han Chin-ch'uan respond, "My courtesy name is Yü-ch'ing, or Jade Darling."

"And my humble courtesy name is Wei-hsien, or Crape Myrtle Fairy," said Tung Chiao-erh.

When Censor Ts'ai heard the words "Crape Myrtle Fairy," his heart was filled with delight, and he consequently devoted special attention to her. After Shu-t'ung had been ordered to bring in a table with an inlaid chessboard on its surface, they laid out the pieces, and Censor Ts'ai played a game with Tung Chiao-erh, while Hsi-men Ch'ing kept them company, and Han Chin-ch'uan stood to one side, holding a flagon with which to serve them with wine.

Clapping his hands to keep time, Shu-t'ung sang a song for them, to the tune “Jade Lotus Blossoms”:

The east wind sends willow catkins flying;
By jade flagstones orchid shoots are small.
The resplendence of the spring scene would tax the skill of an artist to depict.
Over the top of the wall, red-rouged beauties⁵² are seen to smile.
Once finished with their swinging,⁵³ they are drenched in perfumed sweat.
In pursuit of fragrant flowers,
One does not repine over the distance.
Behold, at last I see the banner of the wine shop fluttering beyond the apricot blossoms.

By the time he finished singing, Censor Ts'ai had won the chess game with Tung Chiao-erh. After drinking a cup of wine as a forfeit, she toasted Censor Ts'ai in turn. Han Chin-ch'uan, for her part, replenished Hsi-men Ch'ing's wine, and he drank a cup to keep them company. Shu-t'ung then continued to sing, to the same tune:

The wind turns over the trailing plantain fronds;
The rain scatters the pearls on the lotus leaves.
I see a beauty with spit curls like cicada wings adorning her temples.
Her beige silk fan coquettishly half conceals her lotus blossom cheeks;
The art with which her variegated sleeves flutter rivals that of Hsiao-man.⁵⁴
Her eyes are autumn ripples.
It is hard for us both to cope with our emotions;
Which makes me so despondent and lonely that tears lie crisscross on my face.

When they had finished their drinks, the two of them proceeded to play another game, and this time Tung Chiao-erh was the winner, whereupon she promptly proffered a cup of wine to Censor Ts'ai. Hsi-men Ch'ing, in his position on the sidelines, again drank a cup of wine to keep him company. Shu-t'ung then continued to sing, to the same tune:

Yellow chrysanthemums are blooming everywhere;⁵⁵
As other varieties of verdure begin to wither.
Little crickets chirrup incessantly on the empty steps.
The Herd Boy, as always, is at his post night after night;
Why is it, then, that the Weaving Maid is not to be seen?⁵⁶
Lovesick as I am,
What am I to make of my confused dreams?
On her account, my tears have soaked the memento of her phoenix-toed shoes.

When he finished the song, Censor Ts'ai said, “Ssu-ch'üan, it's getting late, and:

I cannot handle the effects of the drink.”⁵⁷

Thereupon, he walked outside and stood under the flowering trees. At the time, it was around the middle of the fourth lunar month, and the moon had just arisen.

“Venerable Sir,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “it's early yet, and Han Chin-ch'uan has not yet had a chance to offer you a cup of wine.”

“That's true,” said Censor Ts'ai. “Call her out, and I'll drink a cup while standing under the flowers here.”

Thereupon, Han Chin-ch'uan took a large gold goblet in the shape of a peach, filled it with wine, and proffered it to him with her slender hands, while Tung Chiao-erh stood by his side and offered him some fruit. Shu-t'ung, clapping his hands to keep time, then sang a fourth song to the same tune:

The snow falls like scattered pear blossoms;
The wings of roving bees are no longer seen.
In front of the small window, magpies perch on withered branches.
It is disheartening to learn of the advent of those who brave the snow to look for plum blossoms.
One suddenly becomes aware that the bronze tanks of the clepsydra are marking extended intervals.
These heartbreaking events,
Make me think of the sadness of separation.
On her account, I cannot set aside the writing brush with which I compose love letters.

When Censor Ts'ai had finished his drink, he poured out a cup to reward Han Chin-ch'uan and then begged off, saying, “Ssu-ch'üan, the wine is too much for me today. Have your esteemed servant take it away.”

Thereupon, taking Hsi-men Ch'ing by the hand, he said, “Worthy Sir, your:

Lavish hospitality and surpassing virtue,
are:

Forever suspended in this heart of mine.⁵⁸

If you were not:

Bone and flesh of this culture of ours,⁵⁹

How could you ever have come thus far?⁶⁰

As for that loan that you formerly made to me:

It is a conspicuous burden on my mind.⁶¹

and I have already said as much to Chai Ch'ien in the capital. If, at some future date, I should:

Advance so much as an inch in my career,

I could hardly fail to repay your surpassing virtue.”

“Venerable Sir,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

“How can you say such a thing?⁶²

You need not give it a thought.”

When Han Chin-ch'uan saw the way that Ts'ai Yün was holding hands with Tung Chiao-erh, she understood the situation and tactfully withdrew to the rear compound.

Upon her arrival in the master suite, Yüeh-niang asked her, "Why have you come back here instead of spending the night with him?"

"He chose to keep Tung Chiao-erh with him," Han Chin-ch'uan said with a laugh. "If I had not come back here, what would I have done with myself over there?"

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing also said good night and returned to the front compound, where he summoned Lai-hsing and instructed him, saying, "Early tomorrow morning, at the fifth watch, prepare food boxes with the requisite wine and rice, snacks and other refreshments, and hire a chef to accompany them to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate, where I plan to provide a farewell collation for His Honor Ts'ai Yün. Also engage the services of two boy actors, and see that nothing goes amiss."

"Tomorrow is the eve of the Second Lady's birthday," said Lai-hsing, "and there won't be anyone here at home to take care of things."

"Have Ch'i-t'ung stay behind to buy the necessary provisions," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "and engage a cook to prepare things on the big stove in the rear compound."

In no time at all, Shu-t'ung and Tai-an had cleared away the used utensils and procured a pot of high-grade tea, which they took into the garden for Ts'ai Yün to rinse out his mouth with. In the studio within the Kingfisher Pavilion, quilts and pillows were all properly laid out on the bed. Censor Ts'ai noticed that Tung Chiao-erh was holding a folding fan made of speckled bamboo with a gold-flecked surface, on which there was depicted in ink-wash a variety of aquatic orchid beside the flowing water of a level stream.

"Might I trouble Your Honor," said Tung Chiao-erh, "to do me the favor of writing a poem on the face of this fan for me?"

"I don't have any subject at hand," said Censor Ts'ai, "so I'll allude to your courtesy name, Crape Myrtle Fairy."

Thereupon, under the lamplight, he was inspired to take up a writing brush, with which he indited a quatrain on the fan.

The little courtyard with its empty portico⁶³ is silent and undisturbed;
Above the garden pool the moon has arisen, bathing the window gauze.
Having encountered each other by chance,⁶⁴ the time is not yet too late;
The Secretary of the Hall of Purple Myrtle confronts the myrtle blossom.⁶⁵

When he had finished writing out the poem, Tung Chiao-erh hastily kowtowed to him in gratitude, and the two of them, after performing the necessary preliminaries:

Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, together with Ts'ai Yün's personal servants, retired to sleep together in the parlor. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

Early the next morning, Censor Ts'ai presented Tung Chiao-erh with a single tael of silver, sealed up in an ostentatious packet of red paper.

When she returned to the rear compound and showed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he laughed, saying, "That's the typical behavior of a civil official. Where would he come up with the big money to reward you more appropriately? This is the very best you could hope for if you were to consult your fortune with the bamboo sticks."⁶⁶

He then went on to instruct Yüeh-niang to give each of the singing girls five mace of silver, and see that they were sent on their way through the rear door.

Shu-t'ung, meanwhile, fetched some water for Ts'ai Yün to wash his face with, and helped him perform his toilet and put on his clothes, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out to the front compound to keep him company as he ate his breakfast congee in the reception hall. By this time, his subordinates were already standing by with his sedan chair and horse, ready to accompany him on his way. As he took his leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he thanked him again and again.

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "As for that matter that your pupil mentioned to you yesterday, after you arrive at your post, Venerable Sir, were I to send you a letter about it, if you should see fit to pay it some attention, I would be much indebted to you."

"Worthy Sir," said Censor Ts'ai, "even if you should not deign to honor me with an elegant epistle, if your esteemed servant were to show up with the merest note:

There is nothing I would not do on your behalf."⁶⁷

When they had finished speaking, the two of them mounted their horses together and, followed by their attendants, proceeded to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city, where Hsi-men Ch'ing had borrowed the abbot's quarters in which to provide a farewell libation before seeing off his visitor. Lai-hsing and the chef that he had hired for the occasion had long since made all the necessary preparations, and the two boy actors, Li Ming and Wu Hui, played and sang for their entertainment. After a few cups of wine had been consumed, without sitting very long, Censor Ts'ai got up to go. His chair-bearers, horse, and palanquin were waiting for him outside the temple gate.

As Ts'ai Yün was about to set out, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought up the matter of Miao Ch'ing, saying, "He is an acquaintance of your pupil's. Because he was falsely implicated in a case adjudicated by the former regional investigating censor, Tseng Hsiao-hsü, a warrant for his arrest has been sent to Yang-chou, and the final disposition of the litigation awaits his apprehension. Since this matter has already been adequately dealt with, if you should happen to run into His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien, I hope that you will:

Put in a word on his behalf,⁶⁸
for which we would both be very grateful."

"That's no problem," said Censor Ts'ai. "When I see my fellow graduate Sung Ch'iao-nien, I'll mention it to him, and, even if he has been taken into custody, he'll be released. That's all there is to it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing once again expressed his gratification with a bow.

Gentle reader take note: Later on, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was on his way to Chi-nan to take up his post, he happened to be

in conference with Censor Ts'ai Yün aboard his boat on the canal, when the arresting officers brought Miao Ch'ing before him. "This has to do with a case adjudicated by His Honor Tseng Hsiao-hsü," said Censor Ts'ai, "so why should you concern yourself with it?" As a result, he was released and allowed to return home. At the same time, a directive was sent down to Tung-p'ing prefecture, ordaining that the two boatmen should be:

Executed without waiting for the customary season,⁶⁹
and that An-t'ung should be set at liberty. Truly:

Though men may plan to do thus and so:
Heaven's principles may yet deny them.

There is a poem, designed to explicate the difficulties that human feelings make for people, which goes as follows:

Justice and human feelings are frequently in conflict;
Human feelings and justice⁷⁰ are difficult to reconcile.
If one insists upon doing justice, human feelings will suffer;
If one gives way to human feelings, justice will lose out.

The prefect of Tung-P'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen, had already been suborned by Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling in connection with this case, so there was nothing he would not do on their behalf. I would say more about it, but this is a subsequent event.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to see his visitor off as far as his boat, but Censor Ts'ai would not permit it, saying, "Worthy Sir, there is no need for you to escort me for such a distance. I will simply bid you farewell here and now."

"Pray take care of yourself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and permit me to ask after you by means of my paltry servant in the future."

When they had finished speaking, Censor Ts'ai got into his sedan chair and departed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the abbot's quarters and took a seat. The abbot then came in to offer him some tea. He wore a Vairocana hat on his head and was attired in a cassock. A young novice brought in the cups of tea in their raised saucers, and after presenting them withdrew. The abbot saluted his visitor by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion. Hsi-men Ch'ing returned the compliment by saluting him in return.

Noticing that:

His snowy eyebrows were glistening white,
he asked the abbot, "How old are you?"

"This humble monk is seventy-four," the abbot replied.

"You're still looking remarkably healthy," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"And what is your religious name?" he went on to ask.

"This humble monk's religious name is Tao-chien,⁷¹ or Stand Hard," replied the abbot.

"And how many disciples do you have?"

"I have only two young acolytes," the abbot replied. "But there are thirty-odd monks in this temple."

"This temple of yours," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is certainly capacious enough. But it is sadly in need of repair."

"There is no need for me to dissemble," said the abbot. "This temple was originally erected by His Honor Chou Hsiu. But the monastic treasury does not contain enough in the way of money or grain to maintain it. So it is in danger of falling down."

"So this is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I noticed that his country estate is not far from here. This shouldn't be a problem. If you petition His Honor for permission to prepare a subscription list, and circulate it elsewhere in the usual way, when you come to my place, I will undertake to contribute something toward its upkeep."

Tao-chien promptly pressed his palms together and expressed his gratitude by saluting him in the Buddhist manner.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to extract a single tael of silver from his letter case, with which he thanked the abbot, saying, "I've put you to a good deal of trouble here today."

"This humble monk did not know that you were coming," said Tao-chien. "So I was unable to prepare a vegetarian repast."

"I would like to go inside in order to adjust my toilet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Tao-chien promptly called for a young novice to show him the way to a side door.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished adjusting his toilet, he observed that behind the abbot's quarters there was a large thirty-foot-wide meditation hall, occupied by a considerable number of itinerant monks, who were beating on wooden fish and reciting sutras. Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Without premeditation or forethought,
strolled inside to take a look and noticed a monk whose physique was out of the ordinary, and whose appearance was grotesque. His leopard-shaped head with its sunken eyes was the color of purple liver and was crowned with a cock's comb-like chaplet. He wore a long flesh-colored gown. The whiskers beneath his chin bristled unevenly, and he had a shiny annular ridge around the base of his head. Truly, he was:

An authentic arhat, of the most extraordinary aspect;⁷²
A one-eyed dragon, undivested of his fiery temperament.



In the Temple of Eternal Felicity He Meets an Indian Monk

He had fallen into a trance on his meditation couch, so that his head was drooping, his neck had subsided into his upper trunk, and a trickle of jade-white mucus was dribbling from his nostrils.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished observing him:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,

"This priest must surely be a monk of high attainments, possessed of extraordinary powers. If not, how could he exhibit such an unusual appearance? I might as well wake him up and ascertain the truth of the matter."

Thereupon, raising his voice, he called out to the monk, "Where do you come from, and what temple are you attached to, that you have arrived here in the course of your peregrinations?"

The first time he called out to him, there was no response; and the second time, he also failed to reply; but the third time, behold, that monk on his meditation couch jerked himself erect, gave his torso a stretch, opened his one good eye, sprang up from his relaxed position, nodded his head toward Hsi-men Ch'ing, and said, in a coarse voice, "Why are you interrogating me?

I neither alter my given name when abroad,

Nor change my surname when at home.

I am a foreign monk from the land of India in the Western Regions, who has descended into the mundane world from Cold Shivers Temple, beneath Navel Waist Peak, in Dense Sperm Forest.²³ Having come here in the course of my peregrinations I plan to distribute medicine in order to cure people. In calling upon me this way, sir, what have you got to say?"

"Since you plan to distribute medicine in order to cure people," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "were I to ask you for some restorative

medication, might you have such a thing, or not?"

"I do! I do!" exclaimed the monk.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Were I to invite you to my home, would you come, or not?"

"I'll come! I'll come!" asseverated the monk.

"Since you say you'll come," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well start out at once."

The Indian monk straightened himself erect, picked up his iron staff from the head of the bed to support himself with, hitched the leather pouch containing his two medicine gourds onto his back, stepped down from the meditation hall, and strode outside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an, saying, "Hire two donkeys, and escort His Reverence back home right away. You can wait for me there. I'll be along directly."

"There's no need to go to all that trouble, sir," said the Indian Monk. "You can mount your horse and go right ahead. Even without the aid of a donkey, I guarantee I'll be there before you."

"He certainly must be a monk of high attainments, possessed of extraordinary powers," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to himself. "If not, how could he talk so bluntly?"

Fearing that he might get away, he ordered Tai-an, "Make sure, whatever you do, not to let him out of your sight."

Thereupon, he took his leave of the abbot, mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his retinue, headed straight into the city on his way home.

That day was the seventeenth day of the fourth month, which happened to be Wang Liu-erh's birthday. It was also the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and some female guests had been invited to the house to celebrate it. That afternoon, Wang Liu-erh, having no one else at hand to send, deputed her younger brother, Wang Ching, to come and invite Hsi-men Ch'ing to visit her. She instructed him that when he got to the gate of the house, he should seek out Tai-an, and no one else, in order to deliver her message.

When he failed to find Tai-an at the gate, he decided to stand and wait, and he remained standing there for a good two hours. At this juncture, Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh came out to see off Auntie Li the Third as she got into her sedan chair. When they noticed a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boy, with his hair done up in a topknot, standing there, they asked who he was.

The young man, unthinkingly, came up to them and kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, saying, "I'm from the Han household, looking for Brother An, to have a word with him."

"What Brother An is that?" asked Yüeh-niang.

P'ing-an, who was standing to one side, was afraid that Yüeh-niang would realize that he came with a message from Wang Liu-erh if he said anything amiss, so he stepped forward and pulled him aside, explaining to Yüeh-niang, "He's been sent from Manager Han's place to speak to Tai-an, and find out when Manager Han will be coming home."

By so doing, he managed to pull the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes, so that she said nothing more about it, and returned to the rear compound.

Not long after this, Tai-an and the Indian monk arrived at the gate before Hsi-men Ch'ing did. Tai-an had been constrained to walk so fast that his two legs ached, and:

His whole body was covered with sweat,⁷⁴ which made him as resentful as could be; whereas, the Indian monk seemed to be completely relaxed and was not even short of breath.

P'ing-an told Tai-an all about how Wang Liu-erh had sent Wang Ching to speak to him and explained, "Who could have anticipated that the First Lady happened to come out just then in order to see off Auntie Li from the licensed quarter as she got into her sedan chair. Catching sight of her, he:

Recklessly and impulsively,⁷⁵ came right up to the First Lady and kowtowed to her. When the First Lady asked who he was, he said he was from the Han household. Fortunately, I was standing nearby and was able to pull him aside. After that, when the First Lady asked me, I explained that he had been sent from Manager Han's place to find out when Manager Han would be coming home. At that, the First Lady had nothing further to say, so that, luckily, no horse's hoof was exposed to view. Later on, if Mother asks you anything about it, you'd better say the same thing."

Tai-an had been put through his paces until his eyes were staring out of his head, and all he could do was fan himself with his fan.

"Has this turned out to be my unlucky day, or hasn't it!" he complained. "Father insisted that I escort this lousy baldpated jailbird home, for no good reason. It's some distance, I can tell you! From that temple outside the city gate all the way here, I never once had a chance to rest my legs along the road. I've been walking so fast:

Each new breath has not had a chance to catch up with the last.

Father wanted me to hire donkeys for us, but he refused to ride one. If he preferred to walk, that's no matter, no matter at all, but it has really been hard on these two legs of mine. The soles of my shoes are worn through, and my feet are blistered. What a provoking business!"

"What has Father invited him home for, anyway?" said P'ing-an.

"Who knows?" said Tai-an. "He tells me he's hoping to obtain some kind of medicine from him."

As they were speaking, what should they hear but the sound of an escort shouting to clear the way, as Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the Indian monk was at his gate, he exclaimed, "Master, you must really be a god among men to have actually gotten here before me."

As he spoke, he ushered him inside and offered him a seat in the large reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Shu-t'ung to take his outer garments and changed into an informal skullcap, before sitting down to keep him company.

The Indian monk opened his eyes wide and observed that:

The chamber was lofty and spacious, and

The courtyard was secluded and imposing.⁷⁶

Over the door there was suspended:

A glossy-green beaded portiere,

woven of shrimp's whiskers,
with a tortoiseshell pattern.
On the floor there was positioned:
A rug fashioned of woolen yarn,
displaying a pair of lions,
playing with a brocade ball.²⁷
In the center of the room there was:
A soap-colored table in raised relief,
on bulging "mantis belly" legs,
with cabriole "dragonfly feet."²⁸
On the table there was displayed:
A vertical marble monolith,
mounted on a ringlike stand,
like the base of Mount Sumeru.
All around it there were placed:
Folding armchairs of swollen shape,
with backs of nan wood,
and loach-head finials.
On the two walls were displayed:
Hanging scrolls, replete with
damask borders and agate knobs,
adorning purple bamboo rollers.

Truly:

While painted drums of alligator hide,
resound in courts and halls;
The banquet table, wrought of ebony,
is loaded with wine vessels.

When the Indian monk had seen his fill, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him, "Master, do you drink wine, or not?"

"I consume both wine and meat," proclaimed the monk.

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly directed a page boy, "When you go back to the kitchen, don't bother to bring any vegetarian fare, but serve us with regular food and wine."

That day, being the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, there were delicacies of every kind to be had in the kitchen. Once the table was set in place, all that had to be done was to serve the feast.

To begin with, there were four saucers of nuts, and four saucers of appetizers. Then there were another four dishes to complement the wine, namely, one saucer of bullhead, one saucer of duck preserved in a fermented wine mash, one saucer of black-bone chicken, and one saucer of still wriggling male sculpin. Still another four dishes to go with the rice were then served, to wit, a saucer of walnut kernels blanched with ramshorn scallions, a saucer of finely minced goat-meat hash, a saucer of fatty stuffed sheep's-gut sausage, and a saucer of shiny smooth slippery loach. Yet another two courses were then forthcoming. One of which was a soup served in a bowl containing two meatballs straddling a gristly roulade of pork, and called "The Lone Dragon Toys with a Pair of Pearls," while the other was a large platter of overstuffed steamed pork buns, the heads of which were bursting open.

Hsi-men Ch'ing encouraged the Indian monk to eat his fill. He then ordered Ch'in-t'ung to fetch a round-handled chicken-crop flagon, open the red clay stopper, and pour gush after gush of the whitish, yin-replenishing, liquor, painstakingly distilled in the Province of the Loins, into a high-stemmed goblet in the shape of a drooping lotus seedpod, which he presented to the Indian monk. The Indian monk put it to his lips and drank it off with one gulp.

Thereupon, after the table had been cleared, another two courses were presented. One, a saucer of inch-thick horseback sausages, and the other, a saucer of salt-cured goose necks. These were supplemented by two more stimulating dishes for the enjoyment of the Indian monk as he drank his wine. One, a saucer of bitter melon, and the other, a saucer of oozing overripe red plums. After these had been consumed, a large bowl of eel noodles, along with a serving of spring rolls, was also provided for the Indian monk to dispose of.

In no time at all, the Indian monk was so stuffed that the eyes were starting out of his head, and he said, "I'm already:

Drunk on wine and satiated with food.

It's time to call a halt."

Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned his attendants and had them remove the table at which they had been drinking, after which he besought his visitor to supply him with the promised medication to enhance his performance of the arts of the bedchamber.

The Indian monk responded, "I have in my possession a remedy that was:

Perfected by the Lord Lao-tzu himself, and
Transmitted by the Queen Mother of the West.
For the wrong person it will not prove effective;
To the wrong person it must never be transmitted.
It will work only for one with the right affinity.

Since you have entertained me so lavishly, Sir, I will provide you with a few pills thereof."

Thereupon, he groped out one of the gourds in his pouch, from which he decanted some hundred or so pills, saying, "You must only take one pill at a time, not any more than that, and wash it down with a draft of distilled spirits."

Shifting then to the other gourd, he squeezed out a glob of about two-tenths of an ounce of pink ointment, saying, "Be sure to use no more than twothousandths of an ounce at a time. Don't use too much of it. If your organ becomes uncomfortably congested, use

your hands to knead your thighs on either side of it, and slap them a hundred or so times. Only then will you be able to ejaculate. You must employ these medications sparingly, and not lightly let them fall into the hands of other people.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing respectfully received the proffered items with both hands, saying, “Permit me to inquire, what efficacy does this medication possess?”

The Indian monk said:

“Its shape is like a hen's egg;
Its coloring is gosling yellow.
It has been thrice refined by the Lord Lao-tzu;
And transmitted by the Queen Mother of the West.
Examined externally, it is as worthless as dung;
Inspected internally, it is rarer than carnelian.
It may be compared to gold, but not acquired with gold;
It may be compared to jade, but not procured with jade.
Though you be girdled with gold and garbed in purple,⁷⁹
Though you occupy spacious structures and high halls,⁸⁰
Though you own the lightest furs and sleekest horses,⁸¹
Though you manifest the talents of a pillar of state,
Once you have this medication firmly in your grasp,
Your body will be impelled into the bridal chamber.
Within the chamber, spring reigns eternally;
Beyond the mundane, vistas are ever-fragrant.
Your jade pinnacle will never be impaired;
Your cinnabar field will glow in the dark.
After one battle, your spirits remain valiant;
As the duel continues, your vigor is enhanced.
No matter how captivating and voluptuous your favorites,
Though you possess twelve beauties in their rosy makeup;
You may engage with them however you wish,
Remaining stiff as a spear all night long.
If used for long, your appetite will be insatiable;
It will stir your testicles and stiffen your organ.
In a hundred days your hair will regain its color;
In a thousand days your stamina will be augmented.
It will strengthen your teeth and brighten your eyes;
Only when yang is in the ascendant will yin diminish.
If you are not able to believe these claims,
Mix it in with rice and feed it to your cat.
For three days it will indulge itself without restraint;
On the fourth day it will be too overheated to stand it.
A white cat will be transformed into a black one,
Its excretory functions will stop and it will die.
In the summer months you should sleep in the breeze,
In the winter you should submerge yourself in water;
But should you ever be unable to ejaculate,
Your hair will drop out and leave you bald.
If you use a thousandth or so of an ounce at a time,
Your organ will become erect and stronger than ever;
You will be able to handle ten women in one night,
And your reservoir of sperm will not be exhausted.
Older women will contract their brows in dismay;
Prostitutes will find it hard to accommodate you.
If you should ever lose interest in the battle,
Wishing to retire your warriors from the field,
Swallow a mouthful of cold water,
So as to retain your sperm intact.
Your pleasures may thus extend throughout the night,
And spring colors will pervade your nuptial chamber.
This present is offered only to the cognoscenti,
As a recipe for their lasting self-preservation.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he wanted to ask him for the prescription, saying:

“In engaging a physician you should engage only the best;

In prescribing drugs you should impart the prescription.

Master, if you do not give the prescription to me, should I happen to run out of it at a later date, where could I hope to find you? No matter how much you want for it, I will be happy to comply.”

He then ordered Tai-an, “Go back to the rear compound as quick as you can and fetch me twenty taels of silver to give to this Indian monk in exchange for the prescription for this medication.”

The Indian monk laughed, saying, “I am someone who has left home to become a priest, and:

Wanders like a cloud among the four quarters.

What would I want this money for? Pray take it back, Sir.”

He then got up to take his leave.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that he would not give him the prescription, he said, “Master, if you won't accept money, I have a forty-foot-long bolt of muslin, which you could use to clothe yourself with.”

So saying, he immediately ordered his attendants to fetch it and proffered it to the Indian monk with both hands. Only then did the monk express his thanks by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion.

As he was about to go out the gate, he enjoined him one more time, “Don't use too much of it. Take heed! Take heed!”

When he had finished speaking, he hitched his pouch onto his back, fastened his staff to it, went out the gate, and proceeded nonchalantly on his way. Truly:

Suspended from his staff he bears on high the dyad sun and moon;

In his straw sandals he traverses all nine divisions of the realm.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Maitreya Buddha,^{[82](#)} as a mendicant monk, has appeared in China;

His calico bag is hanging from the tip of his walking staff.^{[83](#)}

No matter how many myriad transformations you can perform;

Every incarnation must cope with its own burden of sorrow.^{[84](#)}

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 50

CH'IN-T'UNG EAVESDROPS

ON THE JOYS OF LOVEMAKING;

TAI-AN ENJOYS A PLEASING RAMBLE

IN BUTTERFLY LANE

Heaven has bestowed the rouge with which
to dab their ruby lips;
Their faces, blithe as the eastern breeze,
are wreathed in smiles.
Their fragrant hearts, needless to say,
are replete with delight;
Their inebriated faces constantly suggest
new forms of satisfaction.
Kingdom-topping beauties are oft disposed
to agitate their patrons;
Inclining toward the sun, without a word,
they flirt with but a smile.
How many men in the world of the Red Dust,
with sorrow-laden brows,
Are wont to visit flowery groves, to seek
for intimate companions?

THE STORY GOES that the day in question was the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and Nun Wang from the Kuan-yin Nunnery, as she had promised, had invited Nun Hsüeh of the Lotus Blossom Nunnery and her two disciples, Miao-feng and Miao-ch'ü, to come help celebrate the occasion. Wu Yüeh-niang, on hearing that Reverend Hsüeh had arrived, and having heard her to be a nun renowned for her exemplary conduct, hastened out to welcome her.

She was attired in the headdress of an immaculate nun, was clothed in a dull brown tea-leaf-colored cassock, had been shaved so closely as to produce a bluish, finely polished pate, and presented an imposingly corpulent figure, with a pondlike mouth and piglike cheeks. As she came in, she pressed her palms together in front of her chest and saluted Yüeh-niang and the others in the Buddhist fashion.

As she did so, Nun Wang said, "This is the mistress of the household, and these are her fellow ladies."

This threw Yüeh-niang and the others into such consternation that they made haste to return her salutation. Impressed by her proclivity for:

Raising her brows and batting her eyes,¹

Assuming attitudes and putting on airs;²

and observing that she was given to:

Hairsplitting and logic-chopping;

in speaking to her, the words "Reverend Hsüeh" were seldom out of their mouths; while she, in turn, addressed Yüeh-niang with the words "Lay Bodhisattva,"³ or "My Lady." Yüeh-niang treated her with the greatest possible respect.

That day Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang were also present. Yüeh-niang had prepared tea for her guests, as well as vegetarian fare in the form of various dishes and treats, all of which were laid out on a large table, making a more than ordinarily sumptuous repast. Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples, Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng, were only thirteen or fourteen years old and were naturally very good-looking. They stood by her side and helped themselves to the refreshments on the table.

When they were finished with their tea, they all sat down in the master suite, along with Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in order to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound on the Buddhist Dharma. What should they see at this juncture but Huat'ung, who came in from the front compound carrying a load of used utensils.

Yüeh-niang took the occasion to ask him, "Has that meat- and wine-consuming Buddhist priest left yet?"

"He has just gotten up to go," reported Hua-t'ung. "Father has gone out to see him off."

"Where did he invite that priest to come here from?" asked Sister-in-law Wu.

"He is a priest that Father brought back with him after going to a temple outside the South Gate to see off Censor Ts'ai Yün," replied Yüeh-niang. "He consumes both meat and wine. Father wanted to get the prescription for some medication from him and offered him silver for it, but he said he had no need for it and refused to take any money. Who knows what sort of business he's up to? He's been gorging himself all day, before taking himself off."

When Nun Hsüeh heard this, she said, "As for eating meat and drinking wine,⁴ these two acts are hard to justify. In the final analysis, it is we Buddhist nuns who are more likely to keep our vows. What do these male monks care about such things? Is it not stated in the *Great Buddhist Canon* that for every mouthful of such substances that you consume you will be required to make

recompense in a subsequent incarnation?"

When Sister-in-law Wu heard this, she said, "For people like us who eat meat all day long, there's no telling how much evil karma we will have accumulated by the time we're reincarnated."

"As for venerable bodhisattvas such as yourself," Nun Hsüeh asserted, "it's all due to the good fortune you have cultivated for yourselves in former incarnations that you are destined to bask in glory and luxury, and enjoy wealth and distinction.² It is just as it is with the five grains; if you do not plant them in the spring, when autumn comes, how can you hope to reap a harvest?"

We will say no more about this conversation for the moment.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came inside after seeing off the Indian monk, whom should he see but Tai-an, who quietly stepped forward and said, "A little while ago, Auntie Han sent her younger brother over here to extend you an invitation. She said that today is her birthday, and that she hoped, whatever happens, that you will be able to come over and pay her a visit."

Ever since acquiring the aphrodisiac from the Indian monk, Hsi-men Ch'ing had made up his mind to go there in order to try it out with the woman, but how could he have anticipated that she would actually send him an invitation. Since this development coincided precisely with his own wishes, he immediately ordered Tai-an to prepare his horse and sent Ch'in-t'ung ahead to deliver a jug of wine in honor of the occasion.

Thereupon, he went straight into P'an Chin-lien's quarters, picked up the bag of sexual implements, attired himself in casual clothes and an informal skullcap, put on his eye shades, and headed straight for Wang Liu-erh's house, with Tai-an in attendance.

Upon dismounting and going inside, he gave directions, saying, "I'll keep Ch'in-t'ung here to wait on me, while Tai-an can go home with the horse. If anyone at home asks, just say that I'm in the shop on Lion Street going over the accounts."

Tai-an assented with the words, "I understand," after which he mounted the horse and went home.

When Wang Liu-erh came out to greet her visitor, she was wearing her chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, held in place with gold filigree pins and combs, along with ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece. Her head was uncovered, and she was attired in a jade-colored silk vest, over a linen blouse, and a white-waisted drawnwork skirt with a single border.

After kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and sitting down beside him, she said, "Having some free time, I've invited you to come relax and visit together. Also, thank you very much for the wine you sent over."

"I had forgotten that it was your birthday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was obliged to go outside the South Gate to see someone off today and have only just gotten back."

He then pulled a pair of hairpins out of his sleeve and presented them to her, saying, "This is in honor of your birthday."

The woman, accepting them and looking them over, saw that they were a pair of gold hairpins in the shape of the character for long life, and exclaimed, "What fine workmanship!"

She then hastened to bow to him in thanks.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also gave her five mace of silver and said to her, "Weigh out five candareens, and get my page boy to buy a bottle of southern distilled spirits for me to drink."

Wang Liu-erh laughed at this, saying, "Father, you've grown tired of other wines have you? So now you've come up with the idea of trying southern distilled spirits."

Thereupon, she promptly weighed out five candareens of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung out with a bottle in hand to buy it for him.

Wang Liu-erh then helped Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his outer garments and invited him into her room to sit down, while she took the trouble to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,

before personally shelling some nuts for him. She had ordered her maidservant to brew some fine tea, which she brought out for Hsi-men Ch'ing to drink. A small table was set up in the room so they could play cards together. Only after they had played for a while did they put the cards away and fall to drinking. But let us put this aside for the moment and say no more about it.

Let us now return to the story of Tai-an. By the time he returned home with the horse, he had been hard at work all day and was utterly exhausted from trying to keep up with the Indian monk. He went straight to his room in the front compound and lay down for a nap. It was not until lamplighting time that he woke up, rubbed his eyes, and, seeing that it was already late in the day, went to the rear compound to fetch a lantern with which to go back for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

As he was standing there, Yüeh-niang said to him, "Earlier today, after Father had seen off the Indian monk, he didn't even come inside to change his clothes, but took off somewhere before anyone was aware of it. Really now, whose place has he gone off to drink at?"

Tai-an was at a loss for words but finally said, "Father hasn't gone to anyone else's place. He's at the shop on Lion Street going over the accounts with Lai-pao."

"Even if he were going over the accounts," said Yüeh-niang, "it wouldn't take him all day."

"After finishing the accounts," said Tai-an, "he's probably having himself a drink."

"Without anyone to keep him company?" said Yüeh-niang. "No doubt he's drinking all by himself, for no good reason! It's obvious that your story is duplicitous. What was that young man up to who came looking for you from Han Tao-kuo's household a while ago?"

"He came to ask when Uncle Han was coming home," said Tai-an.

"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang vociferated. "Who knows what kind of mischief you're up to?"

Tai-an did not dare say any more on the subject.

Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to fetch a lantern for him, saying, "You tell him that the Second Lady is waiting for him at home to celebrate the eve of her birthday."

Hsiao-yü accordingly fetched a lantern and turned it over to Tai-an, who made his way out to the shop in the front compound.

What should he see there but Shu-t'ung and Manager Fu, sitting together at the counter, on which there were laid out a bottle of wine, two sets of cups and chopsticks, several bowls and saucers, and a platter of beef tripe, while P'ing-an was on the way in from outside with two bottles of preserved fish in fermented mash.

Just as they were settling down to enjoy their wine, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in, put his lantern down, and said, "Great! I've arrived just in the nick of time."

Then, catching sight of Shu-t'ung, he said in jest, "What a fine wanton you are! What are you doing here? I've been looking all over for you, and it turns out you've been hiding in here all the time drinking wine."

"Just what did you want me for?" said Shu-t'ung. "Have you been harboring the wish to be my grandson for a spell?"

"Why you 'sweetie' of a page boy!" cursed Tai-an. "You have the nerve to talk back to me, do you? I was looking for you so I could fuck you in the ass."

Thereupon, stepping forward, he held him down on his chair and gave him a kiss.

Shu-t'ung pushed him away with both hands, complaining, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! You've not only scraped the tartar right off my teeth, but knocked the hat off my head."

When Manager Fu saw that his hat was lying on the floor, he exclaimed, "It's a brand new lantern-shaped hat."

Then, turning to P'ing-an, he said, "Pick it up, or, I fear, it might get stepped on."

Shu-t'ung grabbed it out of his hands and threw it onto the k'ang, his face turning bright red as he did so.

"What a fine wanton you are!" said Tai-an. "I was just teasing you, and you're all hot and bothered."

Whereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he lifted him up by the legs, forced him down onto the k'ang, and spit a mouthful of saliva into his mouth, as hard as he could, knocking the wine over in the process, so that it ran all over the surface of the counter.

Manager Fu was afraid the account books would get wet, so he promptly grabbed a towel and started mopping it up, saying, "You can be sure it won't be long before the way the two of you are horsing around will turn nasty."

"A fine wanton you are!" said Tai-an. "Whose countenance have you procured that's made you so squeamish today?"

Shu-t'ung, whose hair had gotten all rumpled, complained:

"A game's a game;

A joke's a joke,

but you've spit a mouthful of filthy jizz all over me."

"Why you lousy hick of a 'sweetie'!" said Tai-an. "As though this were the first time you've ever swallowed jizz. From first to last, who knows how much jizz you may have swallowed?"

P'ing-an poured out a goblet of wine and gave it to Tai-an, saying, "You drink this off, and then go on to fetch Father. If you have anything left to say, you can say it to him when you get back."

"Just wait till I've come back from fetching Father," said Tai-an, "and I'll have something to say to him. If I don't fix it so that 'sweetie' of a page boy starts:

Seeing spirits and seeing ghosts,⁶

he won't take me seriously. As for my saliva, am I someone:

Not sired by a human being,⁷

that I must be expected to keep my mouth sucked dry?"

Thereupon, having drunk the wine, he picked up a houseboy from the duty room in the gatehouse to carry the lantern for him and rode on horseback to Wang Liu-erh's place.

After calling for someone to open the door, he asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Where's Father?"

"Father's asleep in the bedroom," replied Ch'in-t'ung.

Thereupon, the two of them closed the door and made their way back to the kitchen in the rear of the house.

Old Mother Feng said to him, "So Master Tai-an has finally shown up. Your Auntie Han has been expecting you, but you were not to be seen. She has set aside a portion of something for you."

She then opened a kitchen cabinet and pulled out a platter of donkey meat, a saucer of preserved roast chicken, two bowls of birthday noodles, and a carafe of wine for him.

Tai-an ate for a while and then offered Ch'in-t'ung some wine, saying, "Come over here. I can't manage all of this wine. The two of us might as well finish this carafe off between us."

"It was set aside for you," said Ch'in-t'ung. "Drink it yourself."

"I've just had a goblet a little while ago," said Tai-an.

Thereupon, the two of them proceeded to finish it off together.

When they were done, Tai-an said, "Old Mother Feng, I've got something to say to you. Don't be offended. It seems to me that you're supposed to be keeping house for the Sixth Lady, and yet here you are, right now, keeping house for Auntie Han. When I get home, just see if I speak to the Sixth Lady about it, or not."

Old Mother Feng gave him a playful slap, saying, "You crazy monkey! You'll drop dead in your tracks someday! Cut it out!

Those may be words but they don't make utterances.

If you go home and say that sort of thing, you'll have her upset with me for the rest of my life, and I won't dare go near her."

While Tai-an and Old Mother Feng were bandying words, who would have thought that Ch'in-t'ung had stationed himself under the window of the bedroom in order to surreptitiously eavesdrop on the events within.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had swallowed a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, and washed it down with distilled spirits. After taking off all his clothes, he had gone to bed in order to engage in sexual intercourse with the woman. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he opened the bag of sexual implements, fastened the silver clasp around the base of his penis, fitted the sulfur-imbued ring around his turtle head, and, pinching up one and a half thousandths of an ounce of the pink ointment the Indian monk had given him, which he kept in a little silver box, daubed it in the eye of his urethra. In no time at all, the medication began to take effect. His organ became engorged with rage,

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,

Its sunken eye grew round, and
Its distended blood vessels were all exposed.
It was the color of purple liver, was six or seven inches long, and more than ordinarily thick and large.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Secretly delighted in his heart,⁸
thinking to himself, "Sure enough, this Indian monk's medicine is something else."

The woman, who had stripped herself stark naked, sat in his lap and pumped his organ with her hand, saying, "No wonder you wanted distilled spirits to drink, since it turns out that this is what you're up to."

She then went on to ask, "Where did you get this medication?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily recounted the whole story, from the beginning, of how he had obtained the medicine from the Indian monk.

He then started out by telling the woman to recline faceup on the bed, supporting her back on a pair of pillows, while she guided his organ to its destination with her hand. His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before he was able to achieve any penetration. The woman's vaginal secretions then began to overflow, until, in a little while, it felt smoother, and the knob of his glans was completely submerged.⁹ Hsi-men Ch'ing was exhilarated by the spirits he had consumed and gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts,¹⁰ until he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.¹¹

The woman, for her part, was drunk with lecherous desires. Reclining languidly on the pillows, she gave vent to incessant groans of satisfaction, protesting again and again, "My big-dicked daddy! This whore of yours is going to die at your hands today."

She then went on to say, "Whatever else you do, save some energy to play around with my backside."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, turned the woman over so she was kneeling on the edge of the bed, plunged his organ into her orifice, lifted up her haunches, and slammed away at her with all his might. As he slammed away at her:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

"Daddy," the woman said to him. "Keep on slamming away at this whore of yours. Don't stop. Better yet, why don't you move the lamp over, so you can get a better view of the fun?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, moved the lamp closer, told the woman to stick her two feet straight back, and then straddled them, while he lifted up her thighs, assumed a squatting position, and proceeded to thrust away. The woman, from her position below him, stimulated her clitoris with one hand, while raising her haunches to meet him, and making quavery noises without end.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to the woman, "When your husband gets home, I'll send him to Yang-chou, along with Lai-pao and Ts'ui Pen, in order to take delivery of a consignment of salt. Then, after they have taken delivery of the salt, and sold it, I'll send him to Hu-chou to arrange a shipment of woven silk goods. How would that be?"

"My good daddy!" exclaimed the woman, "Send him wherever you want, just so he's out of the way. What's the point of keeping the cuckold idle at home?"

She then went on to ask, "As for the shop, who will you put in charge of it?"

"I'll keep Pen the Fourth at home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have him take care of the business in his stead."

"That's all right, then," said Wang Liu-erh. "Let Pen the Fourth take care of it."

While the two of them were engaging in sexual intercourse, who would have thought that Ch'in-t'ung, from his vantage point outside the window, heard everything so clearly that he might well have ejaculated:

"Is it not delightful?"

Tai-an, who happened to come in from the back and noticed him eavesdropping beneath the window, gave him a playful slap, saying, "What's the point of listening to them for no good reason? We'd do better to take advantage of the time before they get up to go out somewhere on our own."

Ch'in-t'ung, accordingly, accompanied him outside.

"You don't know about it," said Tai-an, "but in the little lane right behind here, two fine young girls have recently shown up. When I was riding over on horseback just now, I went by there and got a look at them. They're working at that place, the madam of which is called Lu Ch'ang-t'ui, or Longleg Lu. One of them is named Chin-erh, and the other is named Sai-erh, and they're both no more than fifteen or sixteen years old. If we get the houseboy I brought with me to act as a lookout for us here, we can go over there and have some fun for a while."

He then instructed the houseboy, saying, "You stay here and listen at the gate. We're going out onto the street to relieve ourselves. If they start looking for us inside, just step over to the mouth of the little lane there and call for us."

When he had finished giving his instructions, the two of them, traversing the moonlit ground, strode into the little lane.

It so happens that this lane was called Butterfly Lane, and there were ten or more establishments along it whose owners made their living by operating unlicensed houses of prostitution. Tai-an was already inebriated, and it seemed like half a day before his calls succeeded in getting anyone to open the gate.

It so happened that the procurer and the madam, Longleg Lu, were engaged, just then, under the lamplight, in weighing out the day's take of silver on a big scale with its yellow yard. When they saw that two intruders had barged in like avenging spirits, they promptly blew out the lamp in their inner room. The procurer, who recognized that Tai-an was a head servant in the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, came out and offered him a seat.

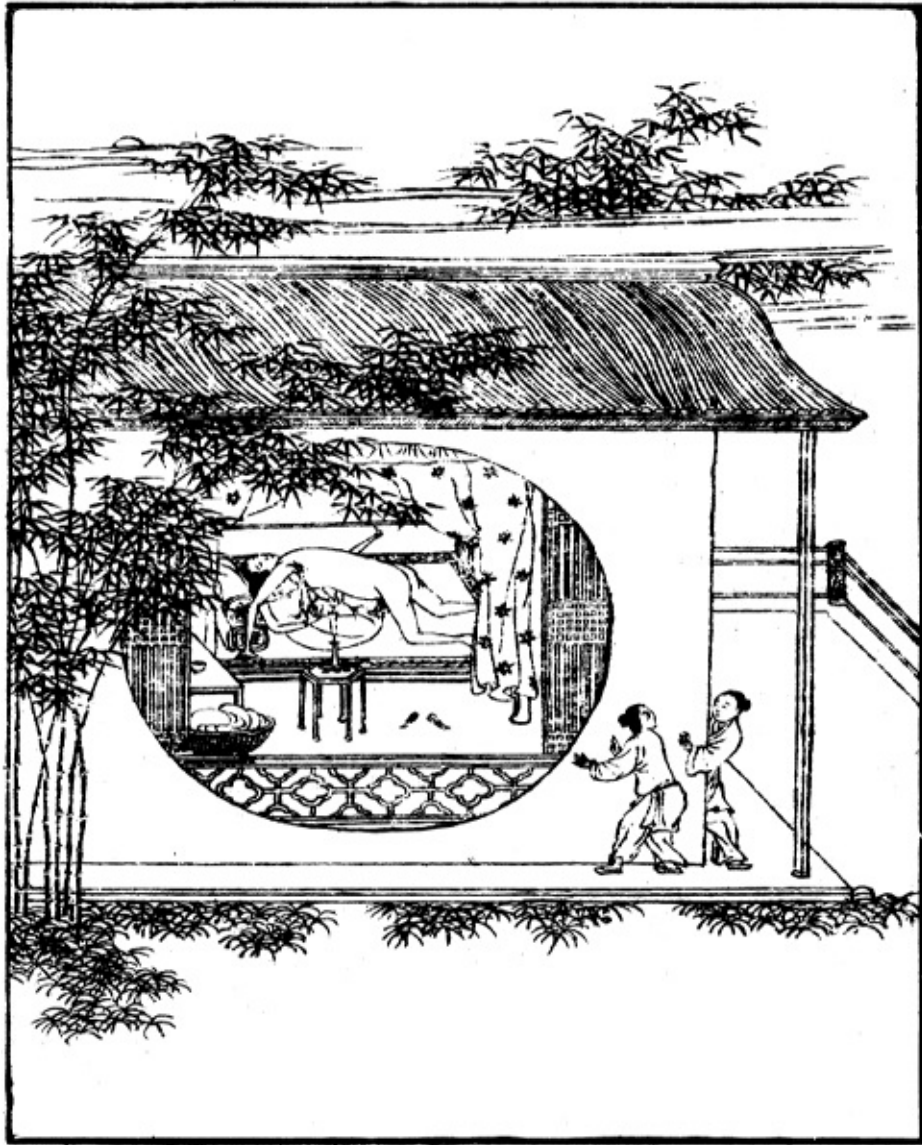
"Call out the two girls," demanded Tai-an, "so they can sing a song for us, and then we'll go."

"I'm afraid you've come a step too late, sir," explained the procurer. "The two of them are both engaged with customers just now."

Without permitting any further explanation,

Tai-an swept into the interior in large strides, where he found it to be as dark as a cave, since none of the lamps were lit. On the k'ang there were two senior wine-making artisans, wearing white felt caps.

One of them had already lain down on the k'ang, while the other had just finished taking off his foot-bindings and asked, "Who is that coming into the room?"



Ch'in-t'ung Eavesdrops on the Joys of Lovemaking

"I'll fuck your mother's hole!" exclaimed Tai-an, and, without any warning, he sent a clenched fist whistling into him, leaving the wine-maker with no alternative but to complain vociferously as he flew outside, without even putting on his foot-bindings and stockings. The other one, also, crawled up off the surface of the k'ang, and:

Stumbling at every step,
followed him outside.

"Light up the lamps!" called out Tai-an, and he cursed, saying, "Those lousy uncivilized vagrants! They actually had the nerve to ask who I am, did they! It's lucky for them I didn't choose to pluck them clean, just now, but let them get away, for no good reason. How do you suppose they would have liked it if I had them dragged into the yamen and given a taste of our new ankle-squeezers?"

Longleg Lu came forward at this point, lit the lamps, and, bowing repeatedly, said, "Temper your rage, my good brethren. They're from out of town and don't know who's who. You've got to make allowances for them."

Then she instructed Chin-erh and Sai-erh, "Come on out and sing a song for your two uncles."

Lo and behold, the two of them, with their hair done up in casual "bag of silk" spiral buns, wearing bleached white blouses, and red and green silk skirts, came forward and said, "We didn't know that our two uncles were coming today, and it's already late at night, so we have been caught unprepared."

Four saucers of pickled vegetables were then laid out, in addition to which there were saucers of duck eggs, dried shrimp, preserved fish mash, salted fish, the meat from a braised pig's head, dried sausage, and the like.

Tai-an proceeded to embrace Sai-erh where he was sitting, while Ch'in-t'ung, for his part, hugged Chin-erh. Tai-an noticed that Sai-

erh was wearing a pink silk scent bag, so he reached into his sleeve for a handkerchief, and the two of them exchanged love tokens. In a little while, wine was decanted, and Sai-erh poured out a cup and offered it to Tai-an.

Before this, Chin-erh had already taken up a *p'i-p'a*, and, after proffering a cup of wine to Ch'in-t'ung:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
she sang a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

The camp of mist and flowers,
Is truly difficult to endure.
One simply never has the spare time to sit down and relax.
One's days are spent welcoming visitors and treating guests.
The livelihood of the entire establishment is totally dependent on me alone.



Tai-an Enjoys a Pleasing Ramble in Butterfly Lane

When night falls, I am also the one under pressure from the loan sharks.
As for the old procuress,
She doesn't care whether I am dead or alive.
I have to stand outside the door until the late watches of the night;
But, when evening comes, who bothers to ask whether I am hungry or full?
If I manage to last another three to five years in the camp of mist and flowers,
The chances of my surviving are few, while the chances of my dying are many.
I can't help the fact that the tears in my eyes come and go like shuttles.¹²
Only when the iron tree shall blossom forth,¹³
Will I ever be able to harvest my garden and reap my just reward.¹⁴

When Chin-erh had finished singing, Sai-erh poured another cup of wine and offered it to Tai-an, after which she took over the *p'i-p'a* and sang another song to the same tune:

When I enter my room,
And look around me,
All I can see is that *p'i-p'a* hanging on the plastered wall.
I notice that the *p'i-p'a* is covered with dust.
Reaching into my sleeve and pulling out a handkerchief,
I brush away the dust.
Holding it in my arms, I tune the strings, and play a lonesome melody,
My tears gushing like a spring.
When I possessed that lover of mine, how happy we were,
But now that my lover has gone, he's abandoned me just like that neglected *p'i-p'a*.
When he was here, how we used to sing together and play together;
But at the present time, I am left all by myself.
I can't help shedding tears of desolation.
The keepsake remains, and I will hold on to it,
But I don't know where that man of mine is to be found.

Just as she was in full voice, the houseboy suddenly appeared to call them away.

The two of them hastily got up to go, and Tai-an said to Sai-erh, "We'll come to see you again another day."

When he had finished speaking, they went out the door and returned to Wang Liu-erh's place, where they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had just gotten up, and the woman was having a drink of wine with him.

The two of them went into the kitchen, and Tai-an asked, "Old Mother Feng, has Father been looking for us?"

"Father has not been looking for you," said Old Mother Feng. "He merely asked if the horse had come back, to which I replied that it had. That's all he had to say."

The two of them sat down in the kitchen and asked Old Mother Feng for some tea. After each of them had drunk a cup of tea, they had the houseboy light the lantern and lead the horse outside.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to get up and go, the woman said to him, "Father, this is nice heated wine. Have another cup. Or, perhaps, you're going to have more to drink when you get home."

"I'm not going to drink any more when I get home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he picked up the wine and drained another cup.

"Now that you're going," the woman asked him, "when will you come by for another visit?"

"I won't come back until I've sent your husband and the others off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he had finished speaking, a maidservant brought him a cup of tea to rinse out his mouth with, and Wang Liu-erh saw him to the door. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing mount his horse and go home.

To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien and the rest had assembled in Yüeh-niang's room to listen to Nun Hsüeh's two disciples sing Buddhist songs for their entertainment, and it was only after the first watch that she returned, temporarily, to her own quarters.

Upon her arrival there, she thought to herself, "A while ago, when Yüeh-niang accused Tai-an of being duplicitous in his response to her, I wonder what he was up to."

With this in mind, she looked in the bedroom for the bag of sexual implements but couldn't find it.

She called for Ch'un-mei and interrogated her, but she said she hadn't taken it.

"A while ago, when you weren't here," she reported, "Father came into the room and fumbled about in the drawers of the cabinet on the rear wall of the bedstead, before going off somewhere. Who knows where that bag is to be found?"

"When did he come in here," Chin-lien asked, "without my knowing about it?"

"Mother had just gone back to the rear compound to see Nun Hsüeh," said Ch'un-mei, "when Father came in, wearing an informal skullcap. I asked him what he was up to, but he didn't reply."

"He must have taken those things off to the place of some whore in the licensed quarter," opined Chin-lien. "When he gets home, I'll subject him to a thorough interrogation."

Who could have anticipated that when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, seeing that it was late at night, he didn't even go back to the rear compound. Ch'in-t'ung, carrying the lantern, escorted him as far as the postern gate leading into the garden, from which point he made his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Ch'in-t'ung then took the lantern back to the rear compound and turned it over to Hsiao-yü, who put it away.

At this time, Wu Yüeh-niang, along with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and the two nuns, were sitting together in the master suite.

Yüeh-niang asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Has Father come home?"

To which Ch'in-t'ung replied, "Father is here. He's gone to the Sixth Lady's quarters in the front compound."

"Just look at him!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "How unprincipled can you get? Everyone is waiting for him here, and he doesn't even bother to come in."

Li P'ing-erh hastened out to the front compound and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The Second Lady is in the rear compound, waiting for you to come celebrate the eve of her birthday. Why have you come into my quarters for no good reason?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed, saying, "I'm drunk. Tomorrow will do just as well."

"Even if you're drunk," said Li P'ing-erh, "you could go back to the rear compound and share a cup with her. If you refuse to go, you can hardly avoid upsetting the Second Lady."

Thereupon, by means of vigorous urging, she succeeded in getting Hsi-men Ch'ing to go back to the rear compound.

After Li Chiao-erh had offered him a cup of wine, Yüeh-niang said, "What were you doing today, drinking all by yourself at the house over there, until this time of night?"

"I was drinking with Brother Ying the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"There you are," said Yüeh-niang. "Just as I said, without a companion, how could anyone drink all by himself?"

Having said this, she dropped the matter and made an end of it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not sit around very long before picking up his feet and stealing off to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound.

It so happens that, as a result of taking the Indian monk's medicine at Wang Liu-erh's place, he was still so much in the grip of the aphrodisiac that, even after fooling around with the woman all day, although he was on the verge of ejaculation, he had been unable to get himself off. His organ was stiffer and harder than ever and resembled an iron pestle.

When he arrived in her quarters, he had Ying-ch'un help him off with his clothes and then climbed into bed, intending to sleep with Li P'ing-erh. Li P'ing-erh had not expected him to return and was already asleep on the bed with Kuan-ko.

Turning her head around, and seeing who it was, she said, "You might as well have gone to sleep in the rear compound. What are you coming back here for? The child has just dropped off and is sleeping soundly. I'm really not in the mood for it, and besides, my period has come on, and it wouldn't be convenient. Go and sleep in someone else's quarters, why don't you, instead of coming here to pester me."

Before she knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck, held her down, and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy slave! Your daddy has it in his heart to sleep with you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly exposed his organ for Li P'ing-erh to see.

Li P'ing-erh was frightened to death and exclaimed, "Ai-ya! How did you ever manage to make it that big?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and explained how he had taken the Indian monk's medicine, saying, "If you refuse to sleep with me, I'll be so randy it will be the death of me."

"What am I to do?" said Li P'ing-erh. "My period came on two days ago and isn't over yet. It would be better to wait a while until it's over, and then I'll sleep with you. Today, you might just as well spend the night at the Fifth Lady's place. It's all the same."

"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I don't know why, but the only thing I want to do is sleep with you. Right now, do I have to:

Sacrifice a chicken in order to plead with you?

On the other hand, you could get a maidservant to fetch some water, and wash yourself before sleeping with me. That ought to take care of it."

"You make me laugh," said Li P'ing-erh. "Where have you been drinking today, to make you drunk enough to come home and give me such a hard time? Even if I were to wash myself, I still wouldn't be clean. For a man's body to be contaminated by a woman's menses is not only filthy, but bad luck as well. If I should die as a result of this, you'll look for me in vain."

Thereupon, unable to resist his pressure any longer, she had Ying-ch'un fetch some water and washed her private parts clean before getting into bed in order to engage in sexual intercourse with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Strange as it may seem,

when Li P'ing-erh finally succeeded in coaxing Kuan-ko to sleep, no sooner did she crawl over to the other side of the bed, than the child woke up. After this had happened three times in a row, Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to get the child's toy clapper-drum¹⁵ to keep him amused, and take him over to the wet nurse's room. Only then were the two of them able to:

Enjoy themselves to their heart's content.

Hsi-men Ch'ing seated himself inside the bed curtains, while Li P'ing-erh got down on all fours beside him, allowing Hsi-men Ch'ing to insert his organ into her vagina from the rear. This position enabled him, under the lamplight, to observe his organ, as well as her snow-white bottom. Using both hands, he embraced her haunches in order to:

Observe the sight as he went in and out.

Half of his organ had already been engulfed, and he could hardly contain his excitement. Li P'ing-erh was afraid that his organ would carry blood out with it, so she continually wiped it off with a handkerchief. Hsi-men Ch'ing engaged in thrusting and retracting for a long time, gripping her around the hips with both hands, and kneading away at her. His organ penetrated her all the way to the root, without leaving even a hairsbreadth outside, while the pubic hair beneath his navel prickled her bottom, and he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.

Li P'ing-erh said, "Daddy! Slow down a bit. You're thrusting so hard it really hurts inside."

"If you're hurting," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll let go and be done with it."

Thereupon, he reached for the tea on the bedside table, and swallowed a mouthful of cold tea. Instantaneously, his semen arose and he:

Ejaculated like a geyser.

Truly:

His four limbs are suffused with pleasure;

His entire body a mass of spring feelings.

Only now did Hsi-men Ch'ing fully realize what a marvelous medicine he had obtained from the Indian monk. By the time they went to sleep, it was the third watch.

To resume our story, when P'an Chin-lien saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she merely assumed that he had taken the bag of sexual implements in order to enjoy himself with her, and failed to ascertain what he had been up to on the outside. That night she could only:

Silently gnash her silvery teeth,

close the door, and go to sleep.

Wu Yüeh-niang invited Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang to spend the night with her in the master suite. Nun Wang took the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that she had procured, along with the medication concocted by Nun Hsüeh, and surreptitiously handed them over to Yüeh-niang.

Nun Hsüeh instructed Yüeh-niang, saying, "If you select a *jen-tzu* day,¹⁶ take these preparations with some wine, and then sleep with your husband that night, you will be sure to conceive. But you must not let even a single person know what you are doing."

Yüeh-niang promptly put the medications away and bowed in gratitude to the two nuns.

"I waited expectantly for you throughout the first month," Yüeh-niang said to Nun Wang, "but you never came."

"That's a fine thing to say!" protested Nun Wang. "I was going to come and see you, but then I said to myself, 'I might as well wait until the Second Lady's birthday in the fourth month, when I'll be able to come together with Reverend Hsüeh.' Who would have thought that, thanks to the Reverend here, I was able to procure the critical ingredient. It is the afterbirth of the firstborn child of a certain family's daughter-in-law. It just so happened that Reverend Hsüeh was there and was able to obtain it surreptitiously from the midwife, with whom she was familiar, for three mace of silver. We have brought it here after cleansing it with alum water, dehydrating it according to formula in a vessel containing a new pair of coupled male and female tiles, sifting it through a heavy gauze sieve, and then mixing it into the talismanic potion provided by Reverend Hsüeh."

"I fear I have put the two of you, Reverend Hsüeh and Reverend Wang, to a lot of trouble," said Yüeh-niang.

Thereupon, she brought out two taels of silver for each of them and said, "In the future, if I should in fact conceive, I will also provide Reverend Hsüeh with a bolt of dark brown silk with which to make a cassock."

Nun Hsüeh placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "I am most grateful for the Bodhisattva's good-heartedness."

As the saying goes:

You may peddle a load of truths for ten days without making a sale;

While, in a single day, a load of falsehoods will actually sell out.¹⁷

Truly:

If persons of this ilk were really capable of attaining Buddhahood;

The monks and nuns dwelling in this world would overflow like water.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 51

YÜEH-NIANG LISTENS TO THE

EXPOSITION OF THE DIAMOND SUTRA;

LI KUEI-CHIEH SEEKS REFUGE

IN THE HSI-MEN CH'ING HOUSEHOLD

Too ashamed to face the phoenix mirror,
I grieve over my pink face;
Propping my fragrant cheek upon my hand,¹
I am too indolent to sleep.
My slender waist is so emaciated that
my turquoise belt is loose;
As tears flow over my powdered face,²
my golden hairpin falls out.
The annoying conduct of my fickle lover
produces an aching sorrow;
It disturbs my fragrant heart³ until
my resentment is unending.
When will I be able to avail myself
of the eastern wind;
To blow my handsome lover all the way
to my pillow side?

THE STORY GOES that when P'an Chin-lien realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken the bag of sexual implements and gone to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she was so upset that she was unable to sleep all night long and secretly stored up resentment in her heart.

The next day, upon learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to the yamen, and that Li P'ing-erh was still combing her hair in her quarters, she lost no time in going back to the rear compound, where she said to Yüeh-niang, "Li P'ing-erh has been criticizing you severely behind your back. She said, 'Elder Sister puts on the airs of a grande dame, ordering people around as though she were holding court. It was someone else's birthday, but you insisted on taking charge. It was your husband who got drunk and came into my quarters when I was not there, but you shamed me before the others for no good reason, causing me to lose face. I was so upset by this that I went back up front and insisted that Father return to the rear compound, but after a while, somehow or other, he didn't remain there, but chose to come back to my quarters.' The two of them engaged in intimate conversation all night long and managed to expose everything but their hearts and entrails to me in the process."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, how could she help but be upset.

Turning to Sister-in-law Wu and Meng Yü-lou, she expostulated, "Luckily the two of you were here yesterday and saw what happened. I didn't say anything against her. When the page boy brought in the lantern, I merely asked him, 'Why hasn't Father come inside?' To which he replied, 'He's gone into the Sixth Lady's quarters.' I then said, 'The Second Lady is waiting here. How can he be so unprincipled as not to come inside?' If you stop to consider it, there was nothing intended to reflect upon her. How can she say that I put on the airs of a grande dame, or order people around as though I were holding court? She may think of me as a whorish wife, but I have always treated her as a decent person. It so happens that:

In knowing people, you can know their faces, but you can't know their hearts.⁴

How is one to judge what people are really like?

She turns out to be nothing but:

A needle in a wad of cotton;

A thorn in the flesh.

Who knows what tales she may have told our husband about me behind my back? No wonder she departed so resolutely for the front compound yesterday. My clever sister! Never fear! Even if our husband should choose to spend all his days in your quarters, without coming out, don't think that it would affect this heart of mine one way or the other. I relinquish him to the lot of you. You can do whatever you like. It's not as though I can't abide maintaining my widowhood. Remember how it was, not long after he married me, when for some time that lousy ruffian and I:

Had nothing to do with each other, either indoors or out.⁵

How do you suppose I managed to survive that?"

Sister-in-law Wu intervened from the sidelines, saying, "Sister-in-law, that's enough! Take the child into consideration. It has always been true that:

A grand councilor must have enough room in his gut to float a boat,⁶

The head of a household is a receptacle for catching dirty water.⁷

The good things that take place should be kept to yourself;

The bad things that happen should also be kept to yourself.”⁸

“Sooner or later,” said Yüeh-niang, “I’m going to confront her about those two charges of hers. I’ll demand to know just how it is that I put on the airs of a grande dame, or order people around as though I were holding court.”

This statement flustered Chin-lien so much that she blurted out, “Elder Sister! You’d better be magnanimous with her. As the saying goes:

A great person does not deign to notice the faults of petty persons;⁹

What petty person is there who has never committed some indiscretion?

As for the things she says about us to our husband behind our backs when she’s got him in her room, who is there among the rest of us who hasn’t been victimized by her allegations? After all, my quarters and hers are separated by only a common wall. If I didn’t make allowances for her, there’d never be an end to it. Whatever she does, she depends upon that child of hers to take advantage of the rest of us. And she has fine things to say too. For example, she says that in the future, when that child of hers grows up, he will:

Requite favor with favor, and

Requite enmity with enmity.¹⁰

So it looks like the rest of us are fated to die of starvation. You don’t know the half of it.”

“My dear lady!” said Sister-in-law Wu. “How could she have said any such thing?”

Yüeh-niang had nothing further to say about it, but, as the saying goes:

When an injustice is witnessed on the road,¹¹

Someone will always try to shed light on it.¹²

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had been, for some time, on extremely good terms with Li P’ing-erh. Whenever she was out of needles and thread, or shoe uppers, Li P’ing-erh would supply her with what she needed, giving her even the best quality satins and silks, or two or three fine handkerchiefs at a time. It goes without saying that she also surreptitiously supplied her with cash when the need arose. On that day, when she overheard these allegations about her, how could she help telling her about it.

Li P’ing-erh was in her quarters at the time, engaged in making a silk cord and amulet for her child to wear on the Dragon Boat Festival, along with different-colored little silk *tsung-tzu*, and tigers adorned with apotropaic artemisia leaves.¹³ When she saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh come in, Li P’ing-erh offered her a seat, so she could look on with her as she continued with her work.

“Bring some tea for the young lady to drink,” Li P’ing-erh instructed Ying-ch’un.

As they drank the tea, Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, “When you were invited back to the rear compound for tea a while ago, why didn’t you come?”

“After seeing Father off,” said Li P’ing-erh, “I thought I would take advantage of the morning coolness to start making up these miscellaneous things for the child to wear.”

“This is not just talebearing,

mind you,” said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, “but something has come up that I thought I should tell you about. It is reported that you said that Mother puts on the airs of a grande dame. You must have done something to annoy the Fifth Lady. In the rear compound, while speaking, thus and so, to Mother, she lodged a whole string of accusations against you. Right now, Mother wants to confront you about this. You mustn’t say that I told you about it or she might take it amiss, but you ought to prepare something to say about it when you have to explain it to her.”

Nothing might have happened if Li P’ing-erh had not heard about this, but having heard these words, she could not even lift the needle she was holding in her hand. Her two arms went soft on her, and she was rendered speechless for some time.

Facing Hsi-men Ta-chieh with the tears falling from her eyes, she said, “Young lady, I never said so much as a word of idle talk on this subject. Last night, while I was in the rear compound, on hearing the page boy say that Father had gone to my quarters, I came out front and urged him to go back to the master suite. Since when did I ever say a word against anybody? Your mother has always been so kind to me, do you really think that I’m so:

Unconscious of right and wrong,¹⁴

as to say that sort of thing? And even if I were to have done so, to whom would I have said it? There has to be some evidence for such an allegation.”

Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, “When she heard Mother say that sooner or later she was going to confront you about these charges, she became flustered. If it were up to me, the two of you ought to have it out between you, like:

The gong on the one hand,

And the drum on the other.”

“As though I could hope to contend with that mouth of hers!” exclaimed Li P’ing-erh. “All I can do is leave it to Heaven. One way or the other, she is constantly plotting against me. Mother and son, it won’t come to an end until she manages to underhandedly do away with one or the other of us.”

When she had finished speaking, she started to cry. Hsi-men Ta-chieh sat down and endeavored to comfort her for a while.

Whom should they see at this point but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, “The Sixth Lady and the young mistress are invited to come and eat.”

She then returned to the rear compound. Li P’ing-erh dropped her needlework and accompanied Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to the master suite. She did not eat anything, however, but returned to her quarters and went to bed. When Hsi-men Ch’ing came home from the yamen, he found her asleep and asked Ying-ch’un about it.

“Mother hasn’t eaten a thing all day,” reported Ying-ch’un.

This threw Hsi-men Ch’ing into such consternation that he went over to her and demanded, “Why haven’t you eaten anything? Tell me what’s the matter.”

He also noticed that her eyes were red with weeping and asked insistently, "What's troubling you? Tell me about it."

Li P'ing-erh promptly got up, rubbed her eyes, and said, "My eyes are sore. That's all. There's nothing wrong with me. I just didn't feel like eating anything today."

She did not utter a word about what had happened. Truly:

A whole breastful of intimate concerns,

Resides in what is not expressed in words.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Do not suppose that a beautiful woman is always foolish;
No amount of brightness and cleverness¹⁵ may do her any good.
It is only because she is so well versed in human affairs,
That she has brought a bellyful of grief upon herself.¹⁶

While Hsi-men Ta-chieh was in the rear compound, she said to Yüeh-niang, "I asked her about it, and she asserted, 'I never said anything of the sort. And to whom am I alleged to have said it?' Moreover:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,

she turned to me and wept, repeating that, in view of the kindness that Mother has always shown her, how could she ever have brought herself to say such a thing?"

"I simply don't believe it," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Sister Li is such a good person. How could she ever have said such a thing?"

"I imagine," said Yüeh-niang, "that the two of them must have had some minor falling out over who knows what, and that, when she was unable to induce our husband to act on her behalf, she came back to the rear compound and made these groundless allegations, making me out to be an object of obloquy. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is."

"Sister-in-law," said Wu K'ai's wife, "from now on you must be on your guard lest you do her an injustice. It's not that I'm just engaging in gossip behind her back, but she's worth more than a hundred P'an Chin-liens. She's good-hearted by nature. In the two or three years since she became a member of our family she hasn't made so much as a false step."

As they were talking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying a large bag made of blue cloth on his back.

"What have you got there?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Thirty thousand taels worth of salt certificates," said Ch'in-t'ung. "Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pen have just arrived back from registering the granary vouchers in exchange for them at the Kao-yang customs station. Father said to see they were given something to eat. Right now, they're weighing out the silver and packing things up. Day after tomorrow, on the twentieth, which is an auspicious day, the two of them, along with Lai-pao, are to set off for Yang-chou.

"I fear my brother-in-law will be coming inside," said Sister-in-law Wu. "The two nuns and I will go visit for a while in the Second Lady's quarters."

Before she had even finished speaking, who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who lifted aside the portiere and came in. This so flustered Sister-in-law Wu, along with Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang, that they lost no time in running off to Li Chiao-erh's quarters.

But they were not quick enough to avoid being seen by Hsi-men Ch'ing, who interrogated Yüeh-niang, saying, "That was Nun Hsüeh, the lousy fat shaven-pated whore! What's she doing here?"

Yüeh-niang replied, "How can you persist in being so:

Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued?

It's really outrageous. What's she ever done to annoy you? And how do you know that her name is Hsüeh?"

"You don't know the feats she's capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She inveigled the daughter of Vice Commissioner Ch'en into visiting the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, of which she was the abbess, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, where she engaged in illicit intercourse with a young scamp named Juan the Third. Who could have anticipated that this Juan the Third died on top of the young woman's body. Nun Hsüeh was an accessory before the fact, having received ten taels of silver for her cooperation. When the matter came to light, and she was brought into the yamen, I saw to it that she was stripped of her clothing, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and ordered to marry a husband and return to lay life.¹⁷ How is it now that she has not returned to lay life? How do you suppose she would like it if I had her dragged into the yamen and given another taste of the squeezers?"

"As though you didn't know any better!"

expostulated Yüeh-niang. "You persist in:

Blaspheming gods and profaning Buddhas.

Since she is a devoted Buddhist, I imagine that:

Her good roots continue to exist.

Why should she return to lay life for no good reason? You may not be aware of it, but she is known for her exemplary conduct."

"Just ask her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if she exhibits such exemplary conduct, how many men she can take on in a single night?"

"Stop talking so deliriously," said Yüeh-niang, "or you'll provoke me into a real tirade."

She then went on to ask, "When are you sending those three off on their mission?"

"I have just now dispatched Lai-pao to confer with our kinsman Ch'iao Hung," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He's going to put up five hundred taels, and I'm going to put up five hundred taels. The twentieth is an auspicious day, so they can start off then."

"Who will you put in charge of the silk goods store?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"I'll get Pen the Fourth to substitute for him," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang opened a trunk and got out the silver, which was duly weighed out and turned over to the three servants, who were in the summerhouse at the time, looking after the packing for their trip. Five taels of silver were weighed out for each of them, and they were told to return to their homes and take care of packing their personal belongings. But no more of this.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who walked into the summerhouse and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was

supervising the packing.

"What are you having packed up, Brother?" he inquired.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained to him all about how, on the twentieth, he was sending Lai-pao and the others to Yang-chou to take delivery of the salt.

Raising his hand in salute, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Congratulations, Brother. When they get back from this trip you're sure to reap a large profit."

Hsi-men Ch'ing offered him a seat, on the one hand, while calling for tea, which they proceeded to drink together.

He then went on to ask, "When are Li the Third and Huang the Fourth going to receive payment of the silver that is due them?"

"They should receive payment no later than the end of this month," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They said to me the other day that right now, in Tung-p'ing prefecture, there is another contract being let for the purveying of twenty thousand taels worth of incense, and they would like to ask if you couldn't help them out in this temporary exigency¹⁸ with the loan of another five hundred taels of silver. When they receive the payment for their current contract, they will bring it over to you, without touching so much as a candareen of it."

"As you can see," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm in the process of preparing to send my agents off to Yang-chou, but I'm so strapped for cash that I've had to borrow five hundred taels of silver from my kinsman Ch'iao Hung. Where would I come up with any additional silver?"

"They have repeatedly urged me," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to remind you that:

One guest does not trouble two hosts.

If you refuse to help them out in this exigency, where else would you have them go?"

"The shop of Hsü the Fourth, on the east side of the street outside the city gate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "owes me some money. I could transfer five hundred taels of what he owes me to them. How would that be?"

"That's the spirit," said Ying Po-chüeh.

As they were speaking, whom should they see but P'ing-an, who came in carrying a card and said, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling has sent Hsia Shou with an invitation for Father to pay him a visit tomorrow."

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the invitation, which read, "So and so."

"The reason I have presumed to come visit you today," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is because there is something I want to tell you about. You know about this affair concerning Li Kuei-chieh from the quarter, I suppose. Has she not come to see you?"

"She hasn't been here since she left in the first month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know about any affair concerning her."

Ying Po-chüeh then set out to explain matters, saying, "It so happens that the third son in the household of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan is married to the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en¹⁹ in the Eastern Capital. In the first month of this year, when they went to the Eastern Capital to wish him a happy new year, the old eunuch gave the two of them a thousand taels of silver as a new year's present. You may not know it, but this niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang's is as pretty as a picture. Really, if an artist were able to depict even half of her beauty, she would still present an elegant appearance. With someone like that at home, one would expect you to stick to her, but every day he allows Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang, the three or four of them, to inveigle him into carrying on in the licensed quarter. He has deflowered Ch'i Hsiang-erh, that little slavey from the Ch'i Family Establishment on Second Street, and has also been frequenting Li Kuei-chieh's place. He has even taken to pawning his wife's head ornaments, which has angered her so much that she has tried to hang herself at home. Who would have thought that the other day, earlier this month, she went to the Eastern Capital to celebrate the old eunuch's birthday and told him all about it. The old gentleman was so angry that he sent the names of these fellows to Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and Chu Mien has issued a mandate to the authorities of Tung-p'ing prefecture ordering that they be taken into custody. Yesterday Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang were all apprehended at Li Kuei-chieh's place. Li Kuei-chieh, herself, managed to hide out at Greenhorn Chu's place next door, where she spent the night, but today, she says, she is going to come to your place to beg for your help."

"As I have said," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "during the first month they had already latched onto him and were inveigling him into trying to borrow money under false pretenses, first from this place, and then from that. Pock-marked Chu was trying out his new tricks right in front of me even then."

When he had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I'm going. In a little while, I fear, Li Kuei-chieh is likely to show up. No matter whether you agree to help her out or not, she'll accuse me of interfering with you if she knows I've been here."

"Why not stay a little longer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got something else to say to you. As far as Li the Third is concerned, don't promise him anything until I've had a chance to collect that silver that's owed to me outside the city gate, and given you the go-ahead."

"I understand," said Ying Po-chüeh.

By the time he went out the front door, Li Kuei-chieh's sedan chair was there, and she had already gotten out of it and gone inside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the act of instructing Ch'en Ching-chi to ride a mule outside the city gate to Hsü the Fourth's place and dun him for the money, when whom should he see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came into the summerhouse to fetch him, saying, "The First Lady would like you to come back to the master suite. Li Kuei-chieh has come to pay a call."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound where whom should he see but Li Kuei-chieh, who was wearing plain tea-colored clothing, without any makeup, and had a white drawn-work kerchief fastened around her head.

With her:

Cloudy locks in disarray, and her

Flowery countenance dispirited,

she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and started to weep, saying, "Father, I don't know how it is that I've been implicated in this unlucky business. Truly:

Though you sit in your house behind closed doors,

Catastrophe may yet strike you out of the blue.

This Wang the Third is someone we weren't even acquainted with, but Pock-marked Chu and Blabbermouth Sun, for no good reason,

brought him by our place looking for a cup of tea. My elder sister was not at home, and I figured that we'd be better off having nothing to do with them, but my mother, who is getting more demented by the day, was just setting out for your place that day to celebrate my aunt's birthday. It would have been better if she had just gotten into her sedan chair and gone her way, but when she saw the way that Pockmarked Chu was groveling about on his knees to her, she came back inside and said to me, 'Sister, wouldn't it be treating them shabbily not to go out and serve them a cup of tea?' After which she headed off for your place here. I had just locked the door and refused to come out, when who could have anticipated that a crowd of men should come bursting in from outside and:

Without permitting any further explanation, apprehended the three of them and took them away. Wang the Third managed to bolt out the gate and escape, while I succeeded in hiding out in the house next door, so there was nobody left in the place. When I sent the male servant here to fetch my mother, she was so frightened when she got home that her soul fled, and all she wanted to do was commit suicide. And today the black-robed lictors from the district yamen, with an arrest warrant in hand, raised a hue and cry about the place all morning before finally taking off. Right now, it seems, I am wanted by name to answer to interrogation in the Eastern Capital. Father, if you refuse to take pity on me and do something to rescue me, what am I to do? Mother, for your part, won't you say something to him on my behalf?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, and said, "Get up."

He then went on to ask, "What other names are there on the arrest warrant?"

"The other name is that of Ch'i Hsiang-erh," said Li Kuei-chieh. "He has deflowered Ch'i Hsiang-erh, and spent his money at her establishment, so that is only appropriate. But if our place has ever seen so much as a candareen of his money, may the pupils of our eyes drop out. If he ever laid a hand on me, may I develop an abscess in every hair follicle."

Turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang said, "That's enough of that. Lest she continue making these horrific oaths, why don't you speak up on her behalf?"

"At the present time," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has Ch'i Hsiang-erh been arrested or not?"

"Ch'i Hsiang-erh is hiding out in the home of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family," said Li Kuei-chieh.

"If that's the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can stay at our place here for a few days. If anyone comes looking for you, I'll send someone to the district yamen to plead on your behalf."

Thereupon, he called for Shu-t'ung and instructed him, "Quickly, write out a calling card and deliver it to His Honor Li Ta-t'ien in the district yamen. Just say that Li Kuei-chieh's services are constantly required here, and ask him to see if there isn't some way to avoid having her haled into court."

Shu-t'ung assented and went off on his errand wearing his livery of black silk. It was not long before he returned with a reply from District Magistrate Li.

"His Honor Li," reported Shu-t'ung, "sends his greetings to you but says that, although with regard to any other matter he would not presume to reject your command, this is a case of a certified document issued by his superiors in the Eastern Capital, ordering the district authorities to take the designated persons into custody. The district is only responsible for apprehending the persons named. As a favor to you, he would be willing to relax the deadline by a couple of days, but if you want to avoid having her haled into court altogether, you will have to address yourself to his superiors in the Eastern Capital."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he thought to himself silently for a while and then said, "Right now Lai-pao is due to set out in a day or two, so there's no one available to send to the Eastern Capital."

"That's all right," said Yüeh-niang. "If you were to send the other two ahead and keep Lai-pao here, so he could go to the Eastern Capital and address himself to this matter on Kuei-chieh's behalf and then catch up with them later, it wouldn't be too late. Just look at the state this fright has put her in."

At this, Li Kuei-chieh hastened to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent someone to summon Lai-pao and told him, "You are not to go on the twentieth after all. I'm going to send the other two ahead of you. Tomorrow you can set out for the Eastern Capital instead and negotiate this matter on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh. When you see Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, make sure that whatever he does he sends someone to speak about this matter at the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard."

Kuei-chieh promptly prostrated herself before Lai-pao, which threw him into such consternation that he kowtowed in return and backed off, saying, "Sister Kuei, I'll go."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told Shu-t'ung to write a letter for him, thanking Majordomo Chai Ch'ien for all the trouble he had been put to earlier in connection with Regional Investigating Censor Tseng Hsiao-hsü, and also sealed up twenty taels of silver in lieu of a seasonal gift and entrusted it to Laipao along with the letter.

This pleased Li Kuei-chieh so much that she took out five taels of silver and offered it to Lai-pao to defray his expenses on the road, saying, "When you come back, Brother Pao, both my mother and I will see that you are amply rewarded."

Hsi-men Ch'ing would not allow this and told Kuei-chieh to take back her money, while he directed Yüeh-niang to provide another five taels of silver for Lai-pao's expenses.

"That doesn't make any sense," said Kuei-chieh. "Since I'm the one who's begging Father to intervene on my behalf, am I to put him to extra expense?"

"Do you take me for such a laughingstock," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I can't come up with five taels of silver for his traveling expenses, but have to get the money from you?"

Only then did Li Kuei-chieh put her silver away, bowing to Lai-pao again and again, while saying, "I'm imposing on you, Brother Pao, but I hope, whatever happens, you'll be able to start out tomorrow, or it may be too late."

"I'll be on the road by the fifth watch tomorrow morning," said Lai-pao.

Thereupon, he took the letter and went off to Han Tao-kuo's home on Lion Street. Wang Liu-erh was in the house at the time, engaged in sewing up some underwear for her husband.

When she saw through the window that it was Lai-pao, she promptly said, "If you have something to say, please come inside and sit down. He's not at home right now, having gone to the tailor's to pick up some clothes, but he'll be back any moment."

She then summoned Chin-erh and said, "Why don't you go across the street to Tailor Hsü's place and fetch your master? Tell him that Mr. Lai-pao is here."

"I have presumed to come over," explained Lai-pao, "in order to tell you that it turns out I won't be able to go off with your husband tomorrow. Another karmic impediment has come up, and the master has decided to send me off to the Eastern Capital in order to intercede on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh from the licensed quarter. Just now, she kowtowed repeatedly in front of Father in an act of formal obeisance and supplication, at which Mother consulted with Father, and then said, 'That's all right. If you are willing to make a trip to the Eastern Capital to intercede in this matter on her behalf, we can let Han Taokuo and Ts'ui Pen go on ahead, and it won't be too late for you to catch up with them after you get back.' So I'll have to set out early tomorrow morning, and the letter has even been entrusted to me just now."

He then went on to ask, "Sister-in-law, what's that you're working on?"

"It's his underwear," replied Wang Liu-erh.

"You can tell him there's no need to take a lot of clothes with him," said Lai-pao. "That area is the cradle of production for silks and gauzes, satins and damasks, so he needn't worry about not having clothes to wear."

As they were speaking together, Han Tao-kuo arrived home.

After the two of them had exchanged salutations, and the above matters had been explained to him, Lai-pao went on to ask, "When the day comes, where am I to look for you two in Yang-chou?"

"The master has directed," said Han Tao-kuo, "that we should put up right on the docks at the inn of a merchant named Wang Po-ju. He says that his own late father and the father of Wang Po-ju were on good terms with each other, that the rooms in his inn are spacious and can accommodate many traders, and that it is a safe place to store merchandise without having to worry about it. The best thing to do would be to look for us there."

Lai-pao then went on to say, "Sister-in-law, when I set out for the Eastern Capital tomorrow, do you have any shoes and foot-bindings, or things like that, that I can deliver to your daughter in the minister's residence?"

"I don't have anything," said Wang Liu-erh, "except for two pairs of hairpins that her father has had made for her, and two pairs of shoes, if we could trouble you to deliver them to her."

Thereupon, she wrapped these items up in a handkerchief and handed them to Lai-pao, on the one hand, while on the other, she called for Ch'unhsiang to prepare something to eat and decant some wine. The woman then hastily set aside the needlework she had been doing and saw to the setting up of a table.

"Sister-in-law," said Lai-pao, "don't go to all that trouble. I can't stay for long. I've got to go home and pack my bag so that I'll be ready to start off tomorrow."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Wang Liu-erh with an ingratiating smile, "how can you start:

Waxing supercilious before you enter the door?

When your fellow employee's household offers you such a farewell collation, you ought to have a cup to drink."

She then went on to complain, "Han Tao-kuo, how can you be so sober-sided? The table isn't steady on its feet. See if you can't steady it, and offer Uncle Pao a seat. You're acting like a mere bystander."

Thereupon, dishes of food were brought out, and wine was poured and offered to Lai-pao. Wang Liu-erh joined them at the side of the table, and the three of them sat down to drink.

After Lai-pao had drunk a few cups, he said, "I'd better get home. If I stay any later, I'm afraid the gate back there will already be closed."

"Have you hired your mount or not?" asked Han Tao-kuo.

"I'll hire it first thing tomorrow morning," said Lai-pao.

He then went on to say, "You might as well turn over the keys to the shop, and the account books, to Pen the Fourth, so you won't have to spend the night there. A good night's rest at home will prepare you for the journey."

"What you say is true enough," said Han Tao-kuo. "I'll hand them over to him tomorrow."

Wang Liu-erh poured out another goblet of wine and said, "Uncle Pao, if you'll just finish off this cup, we won't presume to keep you any longer."

"Sister-in-law," said Lai-pao, "if you want me to drink it, could you warm it up a little?"

Wang Liu-erh promptly poured it back into the flagon and told Chin-erh to reheat it, after which she filled his cup and proffered it to Lai-pao with both hands, saying, "I'm afraid we don't have anything worth eating in order to go with Uncle Pao's wine."

"That's a fine thing to say, Sister-in-law!" protested Lai-pao. "After all:

The normal formalities do not apply in the home."²⁰

So saying, he lifted up his wine in order to toast the woman, and the two of them drained their cups together, before he got up to take his leave.

Wang Liu-erh then handed the gifts for her daughter back to him, saying, "Might I trouble you, Uncle Pao, whatever happens, when you get to the minister's mansion, to ask how my daughter is getting along? I'll be relieved to know."

Thereupon, she bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations," after which she and her husband saw him to the door.

We will say no more for the moment about how Lai-pao went home, packed his baggage, and set out for the Eastern Capital the next day, but return to the story of Yüeh-niang, who was in the master suite engaged in serving tea to Li Kuei-chieh. Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the two nuns were all visiting together with her there.

At this juncture, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai showed up and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "A document has been sent down from Tung-p'ing prefecture, deputing the seal-holding officers of the Left and Right Battalions of our Ch'ingho Guard to supervise the repair of the local Charity Granary. The edict of authorization states that if the work is completed by the deadline in the sixth month, they will be promoted one grade, but that if they fail to meet the deadline, they will be subject to investigation and impeachment by the provincial regional inspector. If my brother-in-law has the silver to spare and could lend me a few taels to defray the cost of the work, I would be able to return every bit of it as soon as I receive reimbursement for these expenses."

"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "whatever you need is yours for the asking."

"If you'll deign to help me out," said Wu K'ai, "twenty taels ought to do the trick."

They then went back to the rear compound and spoke to Yüeh-niang about it. Hsi-men Ch'ing had her get out twenty taels and turn them over to Wu K'ai. After drinking a cup of tea, they came out again. Because there were female guests being entertained in the master suite and it was inconvenient to accommodate them there, Yüeh-niang had suggested that he invite her brother to stay a while and have some wine with him in the main reception hall.

As they were drinking their wine, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to report, saying, "As for that debt that you're trying to collect from Hsü the Fourth outside the city gate, he sends you his regards but asks that you give him another couple of days' grace."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I need the money here right now. Why should I give him another couple of days' grace? You go right back there and give that dog of a whore's spawn a piece of my mind."

When Ch'en Ching-chi had agreed to do so, Wu K'ai offered him a seat, and he bowed to him in response before sitting down to one side. Ch'in-t'ung promptly provided him with chopsticks and a wine cup, and they continued to drink together in the front compound.

To resume our story, in the rear compound, Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Tachieh were all keeping Li Kuei-chieh company as they drank wine in Yüeh-niang's room. To begin with, Big Sister Yü, who had been performing the story of Chang Chün-jui's sightseeing visit to the Temple of Universal Salvation²¹ for a while, finally put down her *p'i-p'a*.

Meng Yü-lou, who was located at her side, poured out some wine and offered her a serving of food, saying, "What a lousy blind millstone-turning donkey you are! You've been singing for us all day, and you'll probably say we don't even take care of you."

P'an Chin-lien, for her part, picked up a piece of pork shank with her chopsticks and teased her by dangling it provocatively in front of her nose.

Li Kuei-chieh then said, "Sister Yü-hsiao, if you'll hand me Big Sister Yü's *p'i-p'a*, I'll sing a song for my aunt and Sister-in-law Wu."

"Kuei-chieh," said Yüeh-niang, "you've got enough on your mind as it is. There's no need for you to sing."

"It's no problem," said Kuei-chieh. "Let me sing. Now that Mother and Father have agreed to intervene on my behalf, I'm not anxious about things any more."

Meng Yü-lou smiled at this, saying, "Li Kuei-chieh is a true child of the quarter. She can alter her demeanor at will. When she first arrived just a little while ago, her brows were knit, and she was so anxious she couldn't even drink her tea. But now:

She talks, and she laughs."

Thereupon, Li Kuei-chieh:

Deftly extended her slender fingers,

Impulsively plucked the icy strings,

and proceeded to sing for a while. As she was still singing, who should appear but Ch'in-t'ung, who was engaged in bringing in the utensils from the front compound.

Yüeh-niang asked him, "Has Brother-in-law Wu left yet?"

"He has already left," replied Ch'in-t'ung.

"I fear Brother-in-law will soon be coming inside," said Sister-in-law Wu. "We'd better bestir ourselves."

"Father won't be coming back to the rear compound," said Ch'in-t'ung. "He's gone to the Fifth Lady's quarters."

When P'an Chin-lien heard that he had gone to her quarters, she was unable to remain in her seat and could hardly wait to take off, but she felt embarrassed to leave too precipitously.

Yüeh-niang, without even waiting for her to make a move, said, "Since he's gone to your quarters, you'd better get going, lest you end up as a kinswoman with an empty womb."

"A likely story!" protested P'an Chin-lien; but although her mouth remained adamant, her feet carried her quickly away.

When she arrived in the front compound and went into her quarters, she found that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already taken a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, gotten Ch'un-mei to help him off with his clothes, and was sitting inside the bed curtains on the bed.

On seeing this, Chin-lien laughed, saying, "My child, what a good boy you are today, going to bed without even waiting for your mother. I've been in the rear compound, just now, keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang, while listening to Li Kuei-chieh sing, and being compelled to have a few cups too many. All by myself, in the dark shadows, staggering along with:

One step high, and

One step low.²²

I've only just managed, somehow or other, to make it home."

Then, calling to Ch'un-mei, she said, "If you've got some tea, pour out a cup for me."

Ch'un-mei proceeded to pour a cup of tea for her, and Chin-lien drank it; after which she gave her a meaningful moue, which Ch'un-mei correctly understood. She had long since heated some water for her in the adjacent room, where the woman shook some sandalwood and alum into it, washed her private parts, took down her hair under the lamplight, retaining only a single gold hairpin, took up the mirror with which to apply a new coat of rouge to her lips, and put a breath-sweetening lozenge into her mouth, before coming back into the bedroom. Ch'un-mei fetched her sleeping shoes from the head of the bed, helped her exchange them for the ones she had on, put the latch on the door, and went out.

The woman then proceeded to move the lampstand closer to the bed, where she placed it on a table, let down half of the silk bed curtain with one hand:

Took off her red drawers, and

Exposed her jadelike body.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was sitting on the pillow, with two clasps fastened around his organ, which had caused it to swell to a prodigious size, exposed it for her to see. When the woman caught sight of it under the lamplight, it gave her quite a start. It was so thick she

could hardly get her hand around it, empurpled and tumid, it was more than she could encircle with her thumb and forefinger.

Casting an amorous glance at Hsi-men Ch'ing, she said, "My guess would be that you can hardly deny having already taken a dose of that monk's medicine in order to work it up to such dimensions, with the sole intention of giving me a hard time. But:

The best wine and the finest meat,
Get eaten by Community Head Wang.

Whoever it is that you've tried it on first has reduced you to no more than:

The bested general of a defeated army,²³

by the time you bother to show up in my room here. Am I only fit to be fucked by what's left of that spent prick of yours? And you claim not to be practicing favoritism! No wonder the other day, when I wasn't in my room, you made off to her quarters with that bag of implements without anyone being the wiser. So it turns out that she was the one you were up to your business with that night. And yet she contrives to protest her own virtue in front of others. As for you, you're simply nothing but an incorrigible three-inch good-for-nothing! Come to think of it, I'd be better off if I refused to have anything to do with you though I live to be a hundred."

"You little whore," Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed with a laugh, "come over here. If you have the talent to suck it to ejaculation, I'll forfeit a tael of silver to you."

"You're delirious," the woman said. "No matter what it is that you've imbibed, you expect me to put up with it."

Thereupon, she lay down diagonally across the mat, grasped his organ with both hands, and engulfed it with her ruby lips, saying as she did so, "What a big thing it is! It stretches my mouth till it hurts."

When she had finished speaking, she either:

Sucked it audibly as it moved in and out; or
Explored the mouth of his urethra with the tip of her tongue; or
Licked the frenum underneath his turtle head; or
Held it in her mouth to nibble and toy with as it came and went; or
Brushed it back and forth against her powdered cheek;
Titillating it in a hundred different ways.

His organ was stiffer and harder than ever and stood up, tumid and perpendicular.

In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells itself erect.

Hsi-men Ch'ing bent his head in order to observe the woman's fragrant flesh by the flickering light underneath the silk bed curtains. With her slender fingers, she took hold of his limber organ with both hands and popped it into her mouth, moving back and forth as she did so under the lamplight.

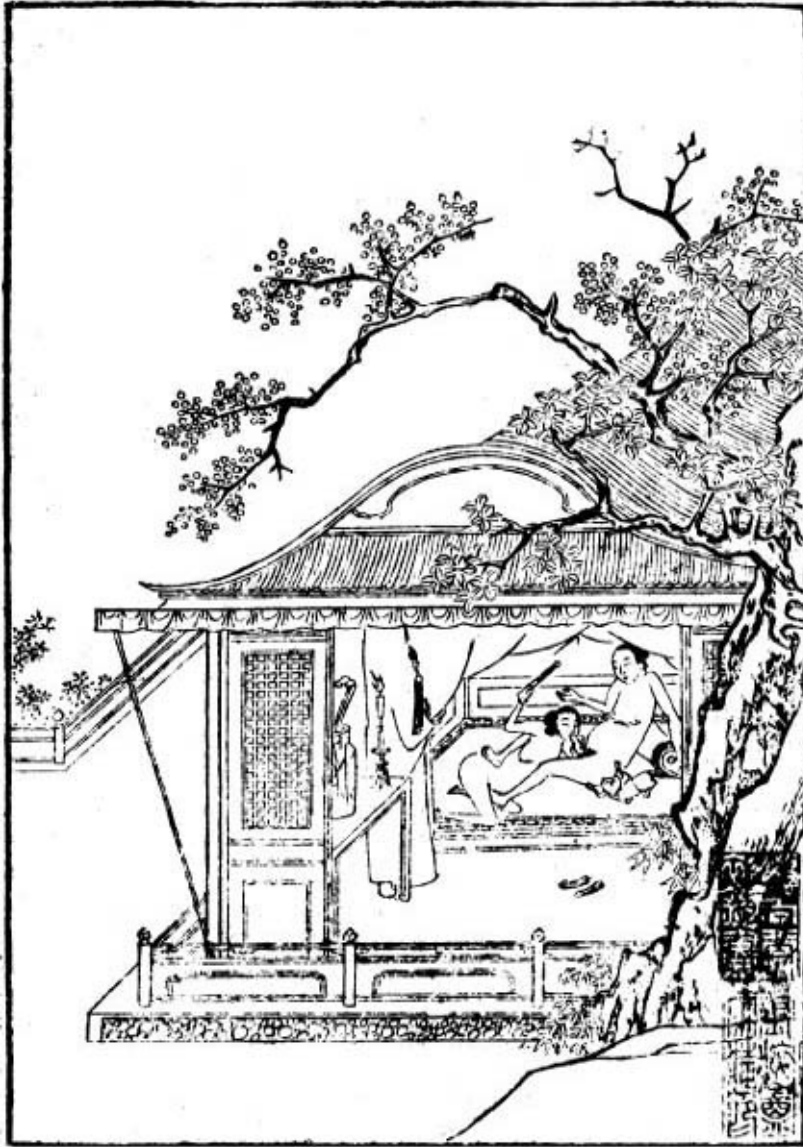
Who could have anticipated that a white long-haired leonine cat²⁴ that was crouching by their side was attracted by the motion, and, not knowing what kind of an object it was, pounced forward and batted at it with her claws. Hsimen Ch'ing, from his superior vantage point, took to playfully teasing it with the gold-flecked black fan in his hand, at which the woman grabbed the fan away from him and hit the cat as hard as she could with the handle of the fan, driving it outside the bed curtains.

Giving Hsi-men Ch'ing an amorous glance, she said, "What a crazy excuse for a lover you are! On top of the fact that she's sticking her paws in where they don't belong in such an obnoxious²⁵ way, you would humor her into:

Assuming privileges above her station.

If she should happen to scratch my face, what would you do then? I might as well call this business to a halt here and now. How would that be?"

"You crazy little whore!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'll do me in yet with all your objections."



Chin-lien Hits the Cat while Sucking Off Hsi-men Ch'ing

"Why don't you get Li P'ing-erh to suck it off for you then?" said the woman. "It's always my room you come to when you want someone to submit to your pestering. I don't know what it is that you've imbibed, but I've been sucking you off all day to no avail."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon took the little silver box out of his handkerchief, picked out some of the pink ointment it contained with a toothpick, and daubed it in the mouth of his urethra. After which, adopting a prone position, he had the woman sit astride his body.

"Let me stretch it open," the woman said, "so you can get inside more easily."

His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before the knob of his glans was completely submerged. The woman in her superior position rubbed her body back and forth against his, while seeming to be unable to overcome her distress.

"My own daddy!" she exclaimed. "I feel completely stuffed inside. It's really hard to bear."

While fondling it with her hand, she saw under the lamplight that half of his jade chowrie handle²⁶ had already been engulfed by her vagina, the labia of which were stretched to capacity on either side. No longer moving back and forth, the woman used her saliva to moisten her labia until it felt somewhat smoother, whereupon she resumed her motions, alternately raising and lowering herself, until his organ finally penetrated her to the root.

The woman addressed herself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "That aphrodisiac you usually use, called 'The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties,'²⁷ induces a hot and itchy sensation inside that is hard to stand. How can it be compared to this monk's medication? When it penetrates all the way to the womb, it produces a cool shivery feeling that reaches all the way up to the heart. Right now:

My whole body, from top to bottom,²⁸
is infused with a melting sensation. I foresee that today I may die at your hands, but it's a hard thing to bear."

"Fivey," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got a joke to tell you, which I heard from Brother Ying the Second. A certain man died, and King Yama enveloped his body in a donkey's skin in order to change him into a donkey. Later, however, the Assessor consulted his ledgers and found that he still had thirteen years in the human realm allotted to him, so he was allowed to return to life. His wife noticed that although the rest of his body had reverted to human form, his male organ was still that of a donkey and had not returned to its former dimensions. 'Let me go back to the nether regions and get it changed,' the man said. But this threw his wife into consternation and she replied, 'Brother, if you undertake this journey, I fear that you may not be allowed to return, and what would we do then? Just leave it as it is, and I'll gradually learn to put up with it.'" ²⁹

When the woman heard this, she laughed, gave him a whack with the handle of the fan, and said, "No wonder Beggar Ying's two wives are so inured to that donkey's prick of his. You filthy-mouthed good-for-nothing! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, I'd really let you have it!"

The two of them went at it for a full two hours, but Hsi-men Ch'ing had still not ejaculated. He merely lay underneath her with his eyes closed, and let the woman squat on top of him, thrusting and retracting for all she was worth. These efforts of hers caused his turtle head to make a weird noise, *kua-ta kua-ta*, as it went in and out. After she had been at it for a long time, she stooped forward so that she was looking right at Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing lifted up her haunches with both hands and alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, moving back and forth with abandon. ³⁰ Although Hsi-men Ch'ing's body was in contact with hers, and he was able to observe the action with his eyes, he seemed to remain completely unaffected. After some time, the woman's feelings came to a climax, and, stooping down again, she embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing around the neck with both hands, resting her body on his, and sticking her tongue into his mouth. His organ had penetrated all the way to the interior of her vagina, as he continued kneading away at her.

"My own daddy!" she cried out inarticulately. "That's enough. Your Fivey is dying."

A moment afterwards:

She swooned completely away, ³¹

The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and

She gave way to an orgasm.

Hsi-men Ch'ing became aware of a wave of warmth within her vagina that penetrated all the way to his cinnabar field, while in his heart, he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable. Meanwhile, her vaginal secretions overflowed, and the woman wiped them up with a handkerchief. The two of them continued:

Hugging and embracing each other,

With entwined necks, thigh over thigh,

Audibly sucking each other's tongues,

while his organ remained embedded in her. After napping for an hour, the woman, whose lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, climbed back on top of his body, and the two of them went at it again.

The woman had two orgasms in a row and began to feel somewhat fatigued, but Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Feigning total indifference, ³²

thought to himself, "This medication of the Indian Monk's is truly super-natural."

Before long:

The cock crowed outside the window, and

The eastern horizon began to grow light.

"Dear heart," the woman said. "You still haven't ejaculated. What should we do? This evening, if you come again, I'll be sure, whatever happens, to suck it off for you."

"Even if you suck it, I won't ejaculate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can assure you, there's only one thing that will bring about an ejaculation."

"Tell me," the woman said, "what might that be?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing said:

"The dharma must not be divulged to six ears. ³³

Wait until I come back this evening, and I'll tell you."

That morning he got up, combed his hair, and performed his ablutions, after which Ch'un-mei helped him on with his clothes. Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pen were already outside, waiting for him. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, he burnt some paper money to ensure a safe journey and prepared to send them on their way.

Turning over a pair of letters to them, he said, "One of these is addressed to Wang Po-ju at his inn on the docks at Yang-chou. The other is addressed to Miao Ch'ing. You must go into the city of Yang-chou to find him, discover how his affair has turned out, and send the information back to me post haste. If your funds prove insufficient, I'll send Lai-pao with some more later on."

"Do you also have a letter for His Honor Ts'ai Yün?" asked Ts'ui Pen.

"His Honor Ts'ai Yün's letter hasn't been written yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have Lai-pao bring it with him later on."

The two men then got onto their mounts and set off on their journey. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having donned his official cap and girdle, set out for the yamen, where he met with Judicial Commissioner Hsia and thanked him for his invitation of the day before.

"Today," said Hsia Yen-ling, "in presuming to hope that my colleague will deign to come over for a chat, I have not invited any other guests."

When they had finished disposing of the business at hand, the two of them separated and returned to their homes.

Wu Yüeh-niang had long since prepared a meal in the master suite and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to partake of some congee.

Who should appear at this juncture but a black-liveried lictor, mounted on a swift steed, and carrying a felt dispatch case, who arrived at the front gate with his face bathed in sweat and asked P'ing-an, "Is this the home of the judicial commissioner, His Honor

Hsi-men?"

"Where have you come from?" asked P'ing-an.

The man hastily dismounted from his steed, made a bow, and said, "I have been sent ahead by His Honor An Ch'en, who is engaged in expediting the delivery of imperial lumber, in order to present some gifts to His Honor Hsimen Ch'ing. My master, together with His Honor Huang, who is in charge of the imperial brickyard, are on their way to attend a drinking party in Tungp'ing prefecture at the invitation of His Honor Hu Shih-wen. Taking advantage of the opportunity, they would like to stop off for a visit with His Honor on the way. So I have been sent ahead to find out if His Honor is at home or not."

"Do you have a card or not?" asked P'ing-an.

The man reached into his felt bag and pulled out a card, which he turned over to P'ing-an, along with the presents. P'ing-an took them inside and delivered them to his master.

Hsi-men Ch'ing seeing that the list of gifts read:

Two bolts of Chekiang silk,
Four catties of Hu-chou silk floss,
One girdle with a decorative plaque of aromatic wood, and
One antique mirror,

ordered that five mace of silver be wrapped up and presented to the courier, together with a reply, stating that he would respectfully await the impending visit. The licitor, then, went swiftly on his way.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had wine and food prepared in his home for the event and waited until noon, when the two officials duly arrived, preceded by escorts shouting to clear the way. On this occasion, they were riding in palanquins, protected from the sun by elaborate baldachins. Upon arrival, they sent in their calling cards, one of which read, "Your devoted servant An Ch'en pays his respects," and the other read, "Your devoted servant Huang Pao-kuang³⁴ pays his respects." Both of them wore robes emblazoned with mandarin squares portraying a silver pheasant against a background of azure clouds,³⁵ black silk caps, and black shoes. They deferred politely to each other as they came in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the main gate to welcome them. Upon arriving in the main reception hall, and exchanging the customary amenities, they each expressed:

The sentiments they had felt while apart,³⁶
and then sat down in the positions appropriate for guests and host. Secretary Huang took a place on the left, Secretary An took a place on the right, while Hsi-men Ch'ing assumed the host's position in order to keep them company.

Secretary Huang initiated the proceedings by raising his hand, and saying, "Having long been an admirer of your worthy name, surpassing virtue, and illustrious reputation, I fear I have been tardy in paying my respects."

"You do me too much honor," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear I am guilty, Venerable Sir, of putting you to the trouble of paying me an initial visit. You must allow me to return the favor in the future. May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?"

"My fellow graduate Huang's courtesy name is T'ai-yü, or Vast Vision," said Secretary An. "It is derived from the line, 'He whose vision is vast and serene emits a Heavenly light.'³⁷

"May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?" said Secretary Huang.

"Your pupil's courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan, or Four Springs," replied Hsimen Ch'ing. "It was chosen because my country estate has four wells on it."

"The other day," said Secretary An, "I met with my fellow graduate Ts'ai Yün, who reported that he and Sung Ch'iao-nien had put you to the trouble of entertaining them at your distinguished mansion."

"In consideration of Chai Ch'ien's esteemed request," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and the fact that he is also the superior official in my humble jurisdiction, I could hardly fail to make him welcome. While my paltry servant was in the capital, he learned of your illustrious appointment, but I have not, heretofore, been able to congratulate you in person."

He then went on to ask, "When did you take leave of your native place?"

"After departing from your distinguished mansion last year," said Secretary An, "your pupil returned to his home in order to remarry. After the New Year's celebrations, I came back to the capital in the first month and have been appointed to the position of secretary in the Ministry of Works, where I have been put in charge of expediting the delivery of imperial lumber, a task that requires me to travel to Ching-chou. Since my route takes me by this place, I could hardly fail to pay my respects."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "As for your lavish gifts:

My gratitude knows no bounds."³⁸

When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited his guests to loosen their formal clothing and relax, while ordering his attendants to set up tables for them.

Secretary Huang wished to depart immediately, and Secretary An explained, "To tell the truth, my fellow graduate Huang and I are currently on our way to attend a banquet at the invitation of Prefect Hu Shih-wen in Tungp'ing prefecture. Since our route took us past your distinguished mansion, we could hardly fail to pay our respects. On another day we will come again and impose upon your hospitality."

"If you are proceeding to Hu Shih-wen's place," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you still have some distance to go. Even if you two gentlemen are not hungry yourselves, what about your attendants? Your pupil would not presume to provide a formal libation. I have merely prepared a meal here, with which to regale your subordinates and attendants."

Thereupon, platters of viands were sent out for the chair bearers, and table settings were simultaneously arrayed in the reception hall.

The rare dainties and exotic delicacies,³⁹

Were the finest the season could provide,
consisting of soup, rice, sweetmeats, and delectable fresh seafood. After Hsimen Ch'ing had toasted his visitors with but three small

golden goblets of wine, these table settings were carried out for the refreshment of the personal attendants and docket officers in their entourage.

After a little while, the two officials bade farewell and got up to go, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Tomorrow your pupils will dispatch a paltry missive, presuming to hope, Worthy Sir, that you will deign to pay a visit to the estate of my fellow graduate Huang's colleague, Eunuch Director Liu, for a chat. But we don't know whether you will consent to order out your equipage or not."

"As the recipient of your magnanimous summons," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I could but hasten to comply."

When they had finished speaking, he escorted his visitors to the main gate, where they got into their sedan chairs and departed.

Whom should he encounter at this juncture, but a servant sent by Judicial Commissioner Hsia to remind him of his invitation.

"I'm leaving right away," Hsi-men Ch'ing told him.

Having ordered his horse to be prepared, he went back to the rear compound, changed his clothes, came out again, mounted his horse, and set out for the residence of Judicial Commissioner Hsia, accompanied by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, and preceded by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, holding aloft a black flabellum to shield him from the sun.

After he arrived in the reception hall, and they had greeted each other, he said, "Just now, Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works, who is expediting the delivery of imperial lumber to the capital, and Secretary Huang Paokuang, who is in charge of the imperial brickyard, paid me a visit and stayed for half a day before departing. Otherwise, I would have come over earlier."

When they had run through the customary amenities, he was helped off with his outer clothes, which Tai-an directed an orderly to fold up and put into his felt bag, together with his official girdle. There were two table settings arrayed in the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing was ushered to the position of honor at the one on the left, while the position next to his was occupied by Licentiate Ni, a tutor employed in the household of Hsia Yen-ling.

In the course of the ensuing conversation, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Might I enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name, Venerable Sir?"

"Your pupil is named Ni P'eng, or Familiar Ni," replied the licentiate. "My informal name is Shih-yüan, and my courtesy name is Kuei-yen. At present I occupy a position in the prefectural school and also serve as a tutor in the residence of my venerable patron Hsia Yen-ling, where I am engaged in preparing the young gentleman, his worthy son, for the civil service examinations. I fear I have been remiss in failing to make your acquaintance."

As they were speaking, two boy actors came forward and kowtowed before the company. When they had finished their soup and rice, the chef came out and carved the entrée, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an to reward him with an appropriate gratuity.

"Bring me my informal cap to wear," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Tai-an. "Take my official cap, girdle, and robe home with you, and come back to fetch me this evening."

Tai-an assented, ate the snack that had been provided for him, and went home with the horse. But no more of this.

To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing off that morning, slept until noon before crawling out of bed. And once she was up, she was too lazy to comb her hair. Fearing that this would subject her to criticism by the denizens of the rear compound, when Yüeh-niang invited her to join them for lunch, she refused on the grounds that she was not feeling well. It was late afternoon before she ventured out the door of her quarters and made her way to the rear compound.

Yüeh-niang, taking advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence, planned to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound the Buddhist dharma by performing the *Chin-kang k'o-i*, or *Liturgical Exposition of the Diamond Sutra*. With this end in view, a lectern for the sutra recitation had been set up in the parlor of the master suite, incense had been ignited, Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang sat facing each other, while Nun Hsüeh's two disciples, Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng, stood to either side, ready to chime in by reciting the Buddha's name in unison. Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Li Kuei-chieh, one and all, seated themselves around them, prepared to listen to the performance.

Nun Hsüeh began the recitation as follows:⁴⁰

I have heard tell that:

The flash of lightning is quickly extinguished;
The spark from a flint is difficult to sustain.
Fallen blossoms are not fated to return to the tree;
Flowing water is not destined to return to its source.⁴¹
Though you dwell in painted hall and brocade room,⁴²
When your life is over, they are like the infinite void;
Though you possess supreme rank and lofty office,
When your salary stops, they resemble nothing but dreams.
Yellow gold and white jade,⁴³
Are merely prerequisites for disaster;
Red powder and light furs,
Are but the expenses of mundane labor.
Wives and children cannot ensure a lifetime of happiness;
The darkness of the grave entails a myriad forms of grief.
One fine day, while sleeping on your pillow,
You'll end up underneath the Yellow Springs.⁴⁴
An empty epitaph will proclaim your specious fame;
The yellow earth will entomb your fragile bones.
Your hundred acres of fields and gardens,
Will only create dissension among your sons and daughters;
Your thousand trunks of satin and brocade,⁴⁵

Will not furnish you an inch of thread after your death.⁴⁶
Before the springtime of youth is half over,
White hair will encroach upon your head;
No sooner will your well-wishers be heard,
Than they will come to condole at your wake.⁴⁷
It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
The breath is transformed into a clear breeze, the dust returns to earth;
The wheel of transmigration turns inexorably, it cannot be called back;
The head is altered and the face replaced⁴⁸ an infinite number of times.⁴⁹

Homage to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, that permeate the empty void, and pervade the dharma realm, past, present, and future.⁵⁰

The subtle and mysterious dharma of utmost profundity,
Is difficult to encounter even in myriads of kalpas.
Now that we have heard it, and are able to keep it,
We wish to understand the true meaning of the Tathāgata.⁵¹

Nun Wang said, “In those days of yore, how did Śākyamuni Buddha, the patriarch of all the Buddhas, and founder of the Buddhist faith, come to leave home in order to take up the religious life? We would like to hear you expound it.”

Nun Hsüeh then sang, to the tune “Five Offerings”:

Śākyamuni Buddha,
The Indian prince,
Relinquished his kingdom in order to meditate in the Himalayas.
Severing his flesh to feed the eagles,⁵² magpies nested on his crown.⁵³
He cultivated himself until,
Nine dragons sprayed him with water,⁵⁴ turning his body to gold.
Only then was he revered as the
World-honored Śākyamuni,
Lord of the Greater Vehicle and supreme enlightenment.

Nun Wang continued, “Now that we have heard you expound the story of Śākyamuni Buddha, in those days, how did the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara engage in religious practice until attaining the glorious realization of multi-form transformations and vast numinous powers? We would like to hear you explain it.”

Nun Hsüeh then continued, to the same tune:

The great and glorious,
Princess Miao-shan,⁵⁵
Forsook the imperial palace in order to dwell in Hsiang-shan.
Devas brought her offerings⁵⁶ as she sat in meditation.
She cultivated herself until,
She was able to manifest the fifty-three forms⁵⁷ of her transformation body.
Only then was she revered as Kuan-shih-yin, the bodhisattva who,
Perceives the sounds of the world and saves people from suffering and disaster.

Nun Wang said, “Now that we have heard the dharma of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, in days of yore there were the Six Patriarchs, Buddhas who transmitted the lamp. The first of them, Bodhidharma, since the Western Regions had already been converted, turned to the East, in order to transmit the ineffable teaching that does not rely on written words.⁵⁸ What arduous austerities did he undergo? We would like to hear the details.”

Nun Hsüeh then continued, to the same tune:

Master Bodhidharma, from whom the Dharma passed
To the Sixth Patriarch, whose lay surname was Lu,⁵⁹
Meditated with his face to the wall for nine years,⁶⁰ so arduous were his austerities.
He remained so still reeds grew between his knees,⁶¹ while subduing dragons and tigers.
He cultivated himself until,
With the aid of a single shoe or a plucked reed⁶² he was able to go where he willed.
Only then was he revered as the Buddha Vairocana, who, with supreme compassion,
Swore the great vow to work for the salvation of all sentient beings.

Nun Wang said, “Now that we have heard the details about how the Six Patriarchs transmitted the lamp, I venture to ask for an explanation of how, in days of yore, the layman P’ang Yün disposed of all his worldly wealth by sending it to the bottom of the sea⁶³ and thereby reaped the true fruit?”

Nun Hsüeh then sang, to the same tune:

The layman P’ang Yün,
An enlightened being,
Invested in his future life by coming to the aid of the impoverished and wretched,
After overhearing the complaints against him of donkeys and horses one night.⁶⁴
He cultivated himself until,

Abandoning his wife and children,⁶⁵ he was able to embark upon the dharma boat. Only then was he revered as the guardian of the monastic establishment, The abode of the wonderful vehicle and its wonderful dharma.

Just as Yüeh-niang was fully absorbed in listening to the performance, whom should she see but P'ing-an, who appeared in a state of obvious agitation and said, "The household of His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien has sent two couriers and a gate-boy to deliver some presents."

Yüeh-niang was flustered and said, "Father has gone to have a drink at Judicial Commissioner Hsia's house. Whoever can we send to fetch him?"

As they were in the very midst of perturbation over this problem, who should appear but Tai-an, who had come in to put away his master's felt bag and said, "That's no problem. I'll just take his card and go explain the situation to Father. Simply have Brother-in-law invite the gate-boy in and give him something to eat and drink."

Tai-an then turned over the felt bag, took the card in hand, mounted the horse, and took off for Judicial Commissioner Hsia's house like a cloud scudding before the wind.

Upon arrival, he reported, thus and so, saying, "His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien has had some gifts delivered to you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accompanying card, on which the list of presents read, "One freshly slaughtered pig, two flagons of Chin-hua wine, four hundred sheets of official-quality stationery, and a miniature book," underneath which was written, "Your devoted servant Sung Ch'iao-nien pays his respects."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ordered, "When you get back home, have Shu-t'ung send an acknowledgment in a double-folded accordion-bound album that states my official rank. Reward the gate-boy with three taels of silver and a pair of handkerchiefs, and the bearers with five mace of silver each."

When Tai-an arrived home, he looked everywhere for Shu-t'ung, but he was nowhere to be found. This made him so anxious all he could do was:

Turn round and round like a millstone.

Ch'en Ching-chi was also not at home, so he got Manager Fu to keep the messenger company while he had a drink. Tai-an then fetched the handkerchiefs and silver from the second floor room in the rear compound, but there was no one available to seal them properly, so he had to seal them up on the shop counter himself and get Manager Fu to write the superscriptions on the three large and small gift packages.

He then asked P'ing-an, "Have you no idea where they've gone?"

"Originally, before Brother-in-law had left," said P'ing-an, "he was still here; but, later on, when Brother-in-law went outside the city gate to collect a debt of silver, he disappeared."

"Don't bother to mention it!" exclaimed Tai-an. "No doubt that 'sweetie' of a page boy has gone out on the town in order to:

Careen about rather recklessly,
or even to keep a mistress."

Just as they were all in a stew about it, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi and Shu-t'ung, who arrived back riding tandem on a mule. Tai-an gave Shu-t'ung a piece of his mind, after which he had him write the acknowledgment in the accordion-bound album that indicated Hsi-men Ch'ing's official rank and sent it off with the messenger who had delivered the gifts.

"You lousy 'sweetie' of a page boy!" railed Tai-an. "On the one hand you:

Lie down with spread legs to solicit trade,
while on the other you:

Clamber on top in order to drop your load.⁶⁶

When Father's not at home, rather than looking after the house, you go off with someone else to service your mistress. Father never told you to accompany Brother-in-law in going outside the city gate to collect a debt. What induced you to go off with him for no good reason? Just see if I tell Father about it or not."

"Go ahead and tell him if you want," said Shu-t'ung. "Do you think I'm afraid of you? If you don't tell him, you'll only show me what a good son you are."

"Why you lousy dog-fucked 'sweetie' of a page boy!" exclaimed Tai-an. "You think you can call my bluff, do you?"

Thereupon, he actually stepped forward, tripped Shu-t'ung up with a single kick at his ankles, and the two of them ended up rolling on top of each other on the floor. Only after Tai-an had taken advantage of the upper hand to spit a mouthful of saliva into his mouth did he call it quits.

"I've got to go back after Father," he announced, "but when I get home, I'll settle accounts with the whore."

Having said which, he mounted the horse and set straight off on his errand.

Meanwhile, in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang saw to it that the two nuns were served some tea and refreshments and then continued to listen to them as they sang Buddhist songs and recited gathas. P'an Chin-lien grew restless, first tugging at Meng Yü-lou, and then, having failed to dislodge her, pulling at Li P'ing-erh, all the while afraid that Yüeh-niang would criticize her.

Yüeh-niang finally said, "Sister Li, she's trying to get your attention. You might as well go off with her, so she won't have to remain here, where she doesn't know what to do with herself."

Only then did Li P'ing-erh consent to go outside with her.

As they departed, Yüeh-niang gave Chin-lien a look, saying:

"When you weed out the turnips, there is room for other things."⁶⁷

Now that she's gone, we won't have to put up with her hopping around the place like a rabbit any more. She's just not the sort of person to listen to the Buddhist dharma."

P'an Chin-lien, with Li P'ing-erh in tow, went out through the inner gate, saying, "Elder Sister really goes for that stuff. No one in

your household is dead. So what's the point of having nuns in to recite precious scrolls, for no good reason; not to mention hovering around them like that? We might as well take a walk out to the front courtyard and see what Hsi-men Ta-chieh is up to in her quarters."

Thereupon, they went out through the main reception hall and found that lamps had been lit in the antechamber where they lived, and Hsi-men Tachieh and Ch'en Ching-chi could be heard inside bickering over the loss of a sum of silver.

Chin-lien gave a rap on the latticework of their window and said, "Not having gone back to the rear compound to listen to Buddhist songs, what are the two of you quarreling about here in your room?"

Ch'en Ching-chi came outside to see who was there and, on catching sight of the two of them, said, "It's a good thing I didn't start to swear just now. It turns out to be the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady. Please come in and have a seat."

"You might as well go ahead and swear if you have the nerve," said Chin-lien.

Going inside, and seeing that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was engaged in stitching the sole of a shoe by lamplight, she said, "At this hour of the day, in such hot weather, you're still stitching shoes, are you?"

She then went on to ask, "What were the two of you squabbling about?"

"You ask her," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "Father sent me outside the city gate to collect a debt, and she gave me three mace of silver and asked me to bring back some gold lamé handkerchiefs for her. But who could have anticipated that when I got there and groped in my sleeve for the silver, there was nothing there, so I was unable to bring back the handkerchiefs. Then, when I got home, she maintained that I had been carrying on with a mistress and started to rail at me. She's been abusing me all this while, which got me so agitated that I was reduced to:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths.

Who would have thought that a maidservant, in sweeping the floor, happened to pick up the missing silver, but she has confiscated it and refuses to give it to me, while still demanding that I buy the handkerchiefs for her tomorrow. Let you two ladies be the judge. Who is at fault in this matter?"

"Why you lousy jailbird, shut your mouth!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "If you haven't been carrying on with a woman, why should you have taken Shu-t'ung with you, for no good reason? Just now, Tai-an didn't mince words in giving you a piece of his mind. I imagine the two of you must have been in cahoots to make out with some woman. Otherwise you wouldn't have gotten home so late. And where is that debt of silver you were sent to collect."

"Is the missing silver in your possession or not?" asked Chin-lien.

"I've got the silver," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Just now, a maidservant was sweeping the floor and picked it up. I'm holding on to it."

"It's no problem," said Chin-lien. "If I give you the money, you can also bring me back two gold lamé handkerchiefs tomorrow."

"Brother-in-law," inquired Li P'ing-erh, "if there are gold lamé handkerchiefs for sale outside the city gate, would you bring back a few for me as well?"

"Outside the city gate, on Handkerchief Lane," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "the well-known Wang family shop specializes in:

Every color and variety,

of gold lamé, shot with turquoise, handkerchiefs and kerchiefs. No matter how many you might want, they would have them in stock. If you'll just tell me what color and pattern you want, I can bring them all back to you tomorrow."

"I'd like one gold lamé, shot with turquoise, handkerchief," said Li P'ingerh, "the color of old gold, and decorated with a motif of 'phoenixes traversing the flowers.'"

"Sixth Lady," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "gold lamé work on a ground the color of old gold will not show the gold to advantage."

"Mind your own business," said Li P'ing-erh. "I also want one pink satin handkerchief with a motif of 'waves splashing on the shore,' and decorated with the symbolic representations of the 'eight treasures,' as well as one gold lamé handkerchief with a sesame flower design in shot silk."

"Fifth Lady," Ch'en Ching-chi then asked, "what kind would you like for yourself?"

"I'm short of money," said Chin-lien, "so two handkerchiefs is all I can afford. I'd like one gold lamé handkerchief of jade-colored satin, with a diapered ground."

"You're not an elderly person yet," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "What would you want with something as white as that?"

"What's it to you?" said Chin-lien. "If I can't use it yet, I'll save it for some time in the future when I'm in mourning."

"What color do you want the other one to be?" Ch'en Ching-chi asked.

"As for the other one," said Chin-lien, "I want a gold lamé handkerchief, intermittently shot with turquoise, of delicate, purple grape-colored, Szechwanese satin, with a variegated brocade insert displaying the motif of 'joined hearts' in the form of interlocking lozenges, enclosing a roundel with a pair of magpies face to face, a rebus for the words 'happy reunion,' and with the symbolic representations of the 'eight treasures' worked into the borders on either side in beadwork."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "That's enough of that. You're just like:

The melon seed peddler who opens his box and then sneezes into it:

What a giant hodgepodge of a mess!"

"You crazy short-life!" exclaimed Chin-lien.

"Those who have the means to purchase their hearts' desires,

Ought to feel perfectly free to buy whatever they want.

What's it to you, anyway?"

Li P'ing-erh then reached into her purse and pulled out a piece of silver, which she handed to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "You can include the cost of the Fifth Lady's purchases in this."

Chin-lien shook her head, saying, "Let me take care of it."

"We might as well have Brother-in-law make a single purchase out of it," said Li P'ing-erh. "What need is there to make a separate undertaking?"



Ching-chi Loses at Cards and Consents to Stand a Treat

"Even if I include the cost of the Fifth Lady's items," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "there's more than enough silver here to cover it all." He then put it on the scales, and it turned out to weigh one tael and nine mace.

"Take whatever's left over," said Li P'ing-erh, "and bring back two handkerchiefs for Hsi-men Ta-chieh."

Hsi-men Ta-chieh hastily expressed her gratitude with a bow.

"Since the Sixth Lady is offering to buy handkerchiefs for you," said Chin-lien to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "you'd better produce those three mace of silver you're holding onto, and the two of you can play cards to see who will stand treat with it. If it isn't enough, you can ask the Sixth Lady to supplement it. Tomorrow, when Father's not at home, you can use it to buy a roast duck and some distilled spirits to entertain us with."

"Since the Fifth Lady has spoken," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you'd better come up with it."

Hsi-men Ta-chieh gave it to Chin-lien, who turned it over to Li P'ing-erh to hold while they got out a deck of cards and had Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Ch'en Ching-chi play forfeits against each other. Chin-lien stood at her side and advised Hsi-men Ta-chieh, with the result that, in no time at all, she had defeated Ching-chi in three hands.

Just at this juncture, they heard a knocking at the front gate, indicating that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home. Only then did P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh return to their quarters.

Ch'en Ching-chi went out to welcome Hsi-men Ch'ing and reported on his errand, saying, "As for the debt that Hsü the Fourth owes you, he will send you a preliminary payment of two hundred fifty taels the day after tomorrow, and repay the remainder at the end of the month."

Hsi-men Ch'ing uttered a few imprecations, after which, being:

Half inebriated with wine,⁶⁸
he did not even go back to the rear compound but headed straight for the quarters of P'an Chin-lien. Truly:
Past mistress of the intimate arts, she caters to her lover's whim;
What need is there to fear that tomorrow the flower will refuse to open.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 52

YING PO-CHÜEH INTRUDES ON

A SPRING BEAUTY IN THE GROTTO;

P'AN CHIN-LIEN INSPECTS A MUSHROOM

IN THE FLOWER GARDEN

On the flowering crab apples deep in the courtyard¹
the rain has just let up;
With no breeze sweeping over the mossy paths
the butterflies make free.
The hundred-budded clove blossoms blazon forth
their exquisite beauty;
The thrice dormant weeping willows² manipulate
their supple branches.
The red of the peach blossoms, lustrous as wine,
is of a lighter shade;
The green of the foliage, in the lingering chill,
grows more luxuriant.
Silently making their way through beaded curtains
the swallows return;
The cry of the cuckoo carries with it the sorrow
of the departing spring.³

THE STORY GOES that while Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking at the home of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling that day and received the information that the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had sent a set of gifts to him, he was as delighted as could be. Hsia Yen-ling also treated him with a degree of respect:

Different from that of former days,⁴

blocking the door and urging him to have another drink, so that it was the second watch before he permitted him to go home.

P'an Chin-lien had long since taken off her headdress under the lamplight, revealing her:

Powdered face and glossy hair,

and ordered Ch'un-mei to lay out the quilts and pillows on the bed and wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat, after which she proceeded to:

Light incense and wash her private parts,

in expectation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival. When he came in the door, she observed that he was:

Half inebriated with wine,

and hastened to help him off with his clothes. After drinking the tea that Ch'un-mei served them, they proceeded straight to bed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the woman, who had stripped herself stark naked, was sitting on the edge of the bed, with her head bent low, as she adjusted the foot binding on one of her fresh, white legs, which was resting horizontally over her knee, preparatory to changing into her scarlet flat-soled sleeping shoes, that were:

Barely three inches long,

But half a span in length.

Upon observing this sight, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused,

and his jade chowrie handle became conspicuously erect. He then asked the woman for the bag of sexual implements, and she promptly groped it out from underneath the mattress and handed it to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having fastened both of the clasps in place, pulled the woman onto his lap with one hand and said, "Today your daddy would like to pluck the flower in your rear courtyard. Are you willing to agree to that?"

The woman gave him a look, saying, "What an utterly shameless lover you are! After screwing around with that page boy Shu-t'ung until you're tired of it, you've come to pester me. Just continue carrying on with that slave, why don't you?"

"What a crazy little oily-mouth!" Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed. "That's enough of that. If you'll agree to go along with me, what would I hanker after that page boy for? You may not know it, but what your daddy delights in the most is this very thing. You can be sure that if I just get it inside, I'll ejaculate."

The woman was unable to withstand his pestering and said, "My only fear is that I'll not be able to accommodate that great big thing of yours. If you'll remove the ring from your glans I'll consent to try it out with you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing actually did remove the sulfur-imbued ring and left only one of the silver clasps around the base of his organ. He then ordered the woman to get down on all fours on the surface of the bed, with her bottom raised high, while he used saliva to moisten his turtle head, and then moved back and forth, moistening and reaming, before attempting to plunge it into her orifice. His turtle head

was proud and firm, so that it was some time before he succeeded in immersing the knob of his glans. The woman, in her abject position, knit her brows and silently endured the pain, biting on a handkerchief in her mouth when it became too difficult to bear.

"Daddy!" she cried. "Slow down a bit. This is not like it is in front. You're stretching me so tightly inside that it hurts as though I'm being:

Seared with heat or scorched with fire."

"Dear heart!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Keep on calling me 'Daddy.' It's not a problem. Tomorrow I'll buy a set of patterned silk clothing for you to wear."

"The sort of clothing I want is readily available," said Chin-lien. "Yesterday I noticed that Li Kuei-chieh was dressed in a drawnwork silk skirt of glossy gosling-yellow with silver stripes, and an inset of gold-spangled sheepskin, trimmed with varicolored thread, that really looked nice. She said that it was purchased in the licensed quarter, and that they all possessed them. But I alone don't have a skirt of that kind. I don't have any idea how much they cost, but if you buy one for me to wear, I'll stop complaining."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow I'll buy one for you."

In the meantime, while this conversation was taking place, from his superior vantage point, he began to thrust and retract in earnest, alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts, as if there were no end in sight.

The woman:

Turning her head around with an amorous glance,
called out, "Daddy! It's tight in there. You're really hurting me. How can you insist on carrying on so strenuously? I beg of you, whatever else you do, ejaculate as quickly as possible, and be done with it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention, but lifted her haunches in order to:

Savor the sight as he went in and out,

while, at the same time, crying out, "P'an the Fifth, you little whore, devote yourself to wantonly calling me 'Daddy,' in order to coax out your daddy's spunk."

The woman, in fact, in her abject position:

As her starry eyes grew dim,

Her oriole's voice all a quaver,

Gently wriggled her willowy waist,⁵

Half responding with her fragrant flesh,

while:

The lascivious sounds and complaisant words,
that issued from her mouth:

Were too multifarious to describe in detail.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing, feeling that he was about to ejaculate, grasped her haunches with both hands and proceeded to ram away at her with all his strength, so that, as his body collided with her bottom:

The noise was incessant.

Meanwhile the woman, in her abject position below him, moaned inarticulately:

Unable to control herself.⁶

As he was on the brink of ejaculation, Hsi-men Ch'ing grasped the woman's bottom, inserted his jade chowrie-handle all the way to the root, so that it reached straight into the most deep and marvelous region, producing a pleasurable sensation that could hardly be endured. Thereupon:

Responding to her with abandon,

He ejaculated like a geyser.

The woman, for her part, received his semen, and their two bodies remained glued to each other.

After some time, when the jade chowrie-handle was withdrawn, the stalk was seen to be stained blood-red, and fluid was still oozing from the mouth of the urethra. Only after the woman had wiped it off with her handkerchief did they go to sleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home after going to the yamen in the morning, a messenger came from Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang, in order to deliver an invitation to a banquet, on the twenty-second, at the estate of Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, and to urge him to come as early as possible.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent the messenger on his way and was just coming out of the reception hall after eating some congee in the master suite, when he encountered Little Chou, the barber, who prostrated himself before him, kowtowed, and then stood in waiting to one side.

"You've arrived in the nick of time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was just going to look for you to do my hair."

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing led him into the garden, as far as the small summerhouse, the Kingfisher Pavilion, where he sat down on a cool chair, took off his cap and headband, and let his hair fall loose. Little Chou then laid out his combs and implements on a table behind him and proceeded to comb out his hair, examining his dandruff as he did so, as a way of assessing his prospects.

Kneeling down in expectation of a tip, he said, "Your Honor is sure to receive a major promotion in the course of the coming year. The coloration of your hair is very propitious."⁷

Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly pleased, and, after his hair had been combed, also had him clean the wax from his ears, and give him a massage. He possessed a complete set of implements for this purpose and gave Hsi-men Ch'ing a thorough going over, in addition to which he had him engage in some of the therapeutic gymnastic techniques called *tao-yin*, or "guiding and pulling,"⁸ that gave:

His entire body a feeling of well-being.⁹

He rewarded him with five mace of silver and told him to have something to eat, and then stay in attendance so that he could cut Kuan-

ko's hair. Hsi-men Ch'ing then went into his studio, where he collapsed on the bed, inlaid with Yunnanese marble, and went to sleep.

On that day, Aunt Yang departed, and Nun Wang and Nun Hsüeh also prepared to go home. Wu Yüeh-niang had the gift boxes that they had brought with them filled with steamed-shortcake pastries and saw them off, presenting each of them with five mace of silver, and Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples with a narrow bolt of cotton fabric apiece.

As Yüeh-niang ushered them out the front gate, Nun Hsüeh once more enjoined her, "When the next *jen-tzu* day occurs, if you take that potion, you will be sure to conceive."

"Reverend Hsüeh," said Yüeh-niang, "after you leave today, whatever you do, come for another visit on my birthday in the eighth month. I'll be expecting you."

Nun Hsüeh placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "We have put the lay Bodhisattva to a lot of trouble already. I will be sure to come when that day arrives."

Thereupon, they took their leave of Yüeh-niang, and the rest of the women-folk, who had all come out to the main gate to see them off, and Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu then returned to the rear compound.

However, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Tachieh, along with Li Kuei-chieh, who was wearing a white silver-striped silk blouse that opened down the middle, over a gosling-yellow drawnwork silk skirt, embellished with gold thread, a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a hair ornament displaying a motif of turquoise water and auspicious clouds, gold filigree hairpins, pendant amethyst earrings, and scarlet shoes, and was carrying Kuan-ko in her arms, seized the occasion to take a walk in the garden.

"Kuei-chieh," said Li P'ing-erh, "hand him over. Let me carry him."

"Sixth Lady, it's no problem," responded Li Kuei-chieh. "I'm enjoying the chance to carry the youngster."

"Kuei-chieh," said Meng Yü-lou, "you haven't yet been to the new studio that Father has fixed up for himself. Come take a look at it."

As they entered the garden, Chin-lien noticed that the crape myrtle blossoms were in full flower and picked two of them for Li Kuei-chieh to stick in her hair.

Thereupon, they proceeded along the juniper hedge to the Kingfisher Pavilion, where they observed that the interior of the studio was furnished with a curtained bed and standing screens, and further embellished with calligraphy, painting, zither, and chessboard, all of which were elegantly displayed. The bed was arrayed with chiffon curtains, held in place by silver hooks, cool matting, and a coral pillow. Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying collapsed upon the bed:

In a state of slumbering oblivion.

A skein of burning ambergris incense wafted from a small gilded censer. The green gauze window was half closed, and the plantains outside the casement¹⁰ bent to catch the light.

P'an Chin-lien picked up the incense case on the table and fiddled with it, while Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh sat down on chairs.

All of a sudden, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned over and, observing the womenfolk in the room, said, "What are you doing here?"

"Li Kuei-chieh wanted to see your studio," said Chin-lien, "so we brought her along to take a look at it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was carrying Kuan-ko with her and playfully teased him for a while, when Hua-t'ung suddenly appeared and said, "Master Ying the Second has come."

The crowd of womenfolk hastily got out of the way and headed toward Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

When Ying Po-chüeh got as far as the juniper hedge and saw Li Kuei-chieh carrying Kuan-ko, he said, "Wonderful! So Li Kuei-chieh is here."

He then went on meaningfully to ask her, "How long have you been here?"

Li Kuei-chieh continued on her way, saying, "That's enough, you crazy beggar! It's none of your business. What do you want to know for?"

"What a consummate little whore you are!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "If it's none of my business, that's that. Just give me a kiss and I'll call it quits."

Thereupon, he embraced her and endeavored to give her a kiss, but Kuei-chieh pushed him away with her hand and swore at him, "You lousy, obnoxious, crazy chunk of knife-bait! If I weren't afraid of frightening the baby, I'd give you a rap with the handle of my fan."

Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside at this point and, observing that Ying Pochüeh was holding on to Li Kuei-chieh, said, "You crazy dog! Be careful or you'll scare the baby."

Then he turned to Shu-t'ung and said, "You take the baby and carry him to the Sixth Lady's place."

Shu-t'ung promptly took the baby in his arms. The wet nurse, Ju-i, who was waiting by the corner of the juniper hedge, then took charge of him and bore him away.

Ying Po-chüeh, who remained standing in parley with Kuei-chieh, asked her, "How has that affair of yours turned out?"

"I am much indebted to Father here," said Kuei-chieh, "who has taken pity on me and sent Brother Lai-pao to the Eastern Capital to intervene on my behalf."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "That should take care of it. In that case, you ought to be able to relax a little."

When he had finished speaking, Kuei-chieh started off for the rear compound, but Ying Po-chüeh said, "Come back here, you crazy little whore! I've still got something to say to you."

"I've got to go now, but I'll be back," said Kuei-chieh.

Thereupon she went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to join the others. Only then did Ying Po-chüeh salute Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, and the two of them sat down in the studio together.

"Yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while I was having a drink at Hsia Yenling's place, His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien, the regional investigating censor, sent someone to deliver some gifts, including a freshly slaughtered pig. Fearing that it wouldn't keep, I engaged a cook, this morning, to come and dismember it, season it with pepper, and braise the whole thing, including the head. If you will stay a while, I'll invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to join us, so we can play backgammon and enjoy it together."

He then directed Ch'in-t'ung, "You go, right away, and invite Master Hsieh to join us. Tell him that Brother Ying the Second is also here."

Ch'in-t'ung assented and went straight off on his errand.

Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "With regard to that debt that Hsü the Fourth owes you, have you collected it yet?"

"That lousy unprincipled dog-bone," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "claims he won't be able to come up with the whole amount until tomorrow, but he made me an initial payment of two hundred and fifty taels. You can tell those two to come here the day after tomorrow. If I'm still short, I'll make up the amount out of my household funds, that's all."

"That will be fine," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I expect they'll buy some fresh things in season and come to pay their respects to you later today."

"There's really no need for them to go to so much trouble," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After they had chatted for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Have those two, Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, already set out for the capital, or not?"

"By this time they're on their way," replied Ying Po-chüeh. "After they were apprehended at Li Kuei-chieh's place, they were incarcerated in the lockup at the district yamen overnight. The next day, the three of them were linked together on a single length of iron chain and escorted off to the Eastern Capital. Once they get there, it's not likely that any of them will return home unscathed. You thought you could help yourselves to:

Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,
day after day, just like a bug on the pantry shelf, and now your efforts have earned you a tasty treat. This sort of suffering is only their just deserts. They're on the road in this hot weather, weighed down by iron chains, and without any traveling expenses, but what does it matter."

"You crazy dog!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If they're not up to standing guard duty when condemned to military exile, whoever was it, in the first place, who induced them to hang out and fool around all day with that youngster from the Wang household? It's really a case of their suffering the consequences of trouble they made for themselves."

"Brother, you've got a point there," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all:

Flies don't cluster on eggs unless they're cracked.

Why do you suppose they didn't come after me or Hsieh Hsi-ta, if not because:

The clear is ever clear,

The turbid ever turbid?"¹¹

As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta arrived and, after bowing in greeting, sat down and devoted himself to fanning himself with his fan.

"How have you managed to work up such a faceful of sweat?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Don't even mention it, Brother," replied Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If your servant had shown up so much as a step later, I wouldn't have been at home. I had just come out the front gate when he happened to arrive at the same time. I've had:

A bellyful of anger,
out of the blue today."

"What have you had to be angry about?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"Early this morning," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "Blabbermouth Sun's wife showed up at my place, claiming that I had been responsible for getting him into such a pickle. What reason would I have had to do that? The unreasonable old whore! 'It was your husband who inveigled him into the licensed quarter day after day, scrounging:

Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,
and bringing home silver by the handful for you to expend on your own gratification. Everyone knows that you were getting a kickback for his pains, but since when did you ever share a candareen of it with anyone else?' I had just told her off with a sentence or two, and come outside, when I unexpectedly received a summons from Brother's place over here."

Ying Po-chüeh said, "Didn't I just say to Brother here that:

If newly fermented wine is put in separate containers,

The clear is ever clear,

The turbid ever turbid?

It could hardly avoid turning out just as we predicted. As I said, if they continued to hang out with that youngster from the Wang household, sooner or later they would come a cropper, and now see how they've managed to stumble into this net. They've no one to blame but themselves."

"What sort of great prowess does that youngster from the Wang household possess?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How old is he, after all? His parietal bones are not yet fully formed. He hardly has what it takes to satisfy the sort of women that we rejected in our early days. It's enough to embarrass a ghost."

"What's he ever seen of the great world," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that could stand comparison with your doings in those days? If he even heard tell of them, he'd be scared to death."

When they had finished speaking, a page boy served them with tea, and they proceeded to drink it.

"Why don't the two of you play a game of backgammon?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They're cooking up some noodles in the rear compound. I'll have a page boy bring some out for us to eat."

Before long, Ch'in-t'ung came in to set up a table, and Hua-t'ung brought in four square boxes, that enclosed four diminutive picnic saucers, containing four different delicacies. There was one saucer of squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of an assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of fresh fagara marinated in soy sauce, and one saucer of candied garlic. These were accompanied by three saucers of garlic extract, for dipping purposes, and a large bowl of pork pot roast, along with three pairs of ivory chopsticks, all of which were laid out in proper order. Only after Hsi-men Ch'ing had joined his guests at the table were three bowls of noodles placed before them, each person pouring onto his noodles as much of the pot roast, garlic, and vinegar as he liked.

Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta picked up their chopsticks and disposed of the contents of their bowls in:

Three mouthfuls and two swallows.

In no time at all, the two of them had wolfed down seven bowls apiece.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had not even been able to finish his second bowl, said, "My sons, the two of you certainly know how to put it away."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "which of your womenfolk is responsible for preparing these noodles today? They're both tasty and delicious."

"This pot roast has been braised to perfection," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Were it not for the fact that I had just eaten at home before coming over here, I'd be prepared to suffer another bowl."

The two of them, who had gotten overheated from eating so fast, took off their outer clothes and hung them over their chairs.

On seeing Ch'in-t'ung clearing away the utensils, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Young gentleman, when you get back to the rear compound, bring some water for us to rinse out our mouths with."

"Some warm tea would be good too," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If it's too hot, it will only bring out the smell of the garlic."

In a little while, Hua-t'ung arrived with the tea, and the three of them drank it, after which they came outside and strolled among the flower beds on the other side of the juniper hedge.

Who should appear at this point but P'ing-an, who brought in four boxes of gifts that had just been delivered from the household of Huang the Fourth for Hsi-men Ch'ing to see. One box contained fresh black caltrops, one contained fresh water chestnuts, one contained four large iced shad, and one contained loquats.

When Ying Po-chüeh saw them, he said, "What fine stuff! Who knows where he dug it up to send over here? Let me take a taste."

Snatching up a number of items with one hand, he handed two of them to Hsieh Hsi-ta, saying, "There are those who:

Live to old age and death,

without knowing that such things as this exist."

"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Even before they're offered to Buddha,

You snatch them for your own enjoyment."

"Who accuses me of failing to offer them to Buddha?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"Upon entering my mouth the evidence is destroyed."

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the gifts be taken to the rear compound and put away, adding, "Ask the Third Lady for three candareens of silver to give the messenger."

Ying Po-chüeh inquired, "Was it Li Chin who delivered them, or was it Huang Ning?"

"It was Huang Ning," replied P'ing-an.

"It must be that dog-bone's lucky day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to be rewarded with these three candareens of silver."

Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to look on as the two of them played a game of backgammon. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Li Kuei-chieh, along with her aunt, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, had all eaten in the parlor of the master suite and were sitting in the veranda outside, when they noticed that Little Chou could be seen:

Sticking out his head and craning his neck,
on the other side of the screen-wall.

"Little Chou," said Li P'ing-erh, "you've come at a good time. Come in and cut the little master's hair, which has been allowed to grow too long."

Little Chou hastily came forward and kowtowed to all of them, saying, "Just a while ago, His Honor directed that I should come inside to cut little brother's hair."

"Sister Six," said Yüeh-niang, "take a look at the almanac and see whether this is an auspicious day or an inauspicious day to cut the child's hair."

Chin-lien told Hsiao-yü to fetch an almanac, opened it up and perused it for a while, and then said, "Today is the twenty-first day of the fourth month, a *keng-hsü* day, for which the descriptive character is *ting*, or steady. It is governed by the constellation *lou-chin-kou*, or Aries, and is an auspicious day for making sacrifices, donning official cap and girdle, setting out on a journey, having clothes made, performing ablutions, getting one's hair cut, repairing or constructing, and for breaking ground. The best time to initiate these activities is the period from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. It is an auspicious day."¹²

"Since it's an auspicious day," said Yüeh-niang, "I'll have a maidservant heat water, and you can also shampoo the child's hair."

She then admonished Little Chou to proceed cautiously and coax the child into letting him cut his hair. Hsiao-yü stood to his side in order to catch the hair in a handkerchief. But before the barber had made more than a few cuts with the scissors, Kuan-ko, with the sound of a gurgling cry, started to howl in earnest. Little Chou continued to cut away hastily even as the child cried out, but who could have anticipated that the boy would choke on himself, falling silent, as his face became swollen and red.

Li P'ing-erh, who became panic-stricken at this, hastily exclaimed, "Don't cut any more! Don't cut any more!"

Little Chou, for his part, was thrown into such consternation that he abandoned the tools of his trade and fled outside as fast as his legs would carry him.

"As I've observed before," said Yüeh-niang, "this child is rather a hopeless case, forever anxious to protect his head. We should have cut his hair ourselves instead of calling someone in to do it for no good reason. What sort of a job can he do?"

As providence would have it,

after the child had remained choked up for what seemed like half a day, he let out a cry. Only then did Li P'ing-erh feel as though:

The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.

Taking the child in her arms, she devoted herself to petting him, saying as she did so, "What a fine thing for Little Chou to do! What a nerve, to come in here for no good reason, and insist on cutting your hair. On top of which, he's taken advantage of you by

leaving the job only half-finished. Why don't I drag him back in here and give him a drubbing, in order to vent your spleen?"

Thereupon, she carried him over to Yüeh-niang, who said, "What a hopeless little beggar! The haircut was originally intended for your benefit, but it's only resulted in a crying fit. With no more hair than this left, you're likely to be mistaken for a shaven-headed convict."

After she had playfully teased him for a while, Li P'ing-erh turned him over to the wet nurse, and Yüeh-niang instructed her, "Don't breast-feed him right away, but wait until he's had a nap before feeding him."

The wet nurse then carried him back to the front compound.

Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who came in to collect Little Chou's implements and reported, "Little Chou is at the front gate, so frightened that his face has turned a scorched shade of brown."

"Has he had anything to eat?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"He has eaten," said Lai-an, "and Father has rewarded him with five candareens of silver."

"Take a goblet of wine out and give it to him," said Yüeh-niang. "He's been so frightened that these few candareens must seem hard-earned."

Hsiao-yü promptly poured out a cup of wine, fetched a saucer of cured meat, and told Lai-an to give them to Little Chou and send him on his way.

Wu Yüeh-niang then turned to Chin-lien and said, "Take a look at the almanac and see when the next *jen-tzu* day will be."

Chin-lien examined it and said, "The twenty-third is a *jen-tzu* day. It falls within the solar term *mang-chung*, or 'Grain in Ear,'¹³ which also includes the Fifth Month Festival, or Dragon Boat Festival."

She then went on to ask, "Sister, why do you ask?"

"For no particular reason," said Yüeh-niang. "I just thought I'd ask."

Li Kuei-chieh then picked up the almanac to look at and said, "The twenty-fourth, I regret to say, is my mother's birthday, and I won't be able to be at home for it."

"The tenth day of the last month," said Yüeh-niang, "was your elder sister's birthday and has already been celebrated. And now the twenty-fourth day of the current month just happens to be your mother's birthday. It would seem that you denizens of the quarter suffer from two ailments a day, while celebrating three birthdays as well. During the daylight hours, you suffer from the ailment of yearning for money, while, during the night, you suffer from the ailment of yearning for customers. In the morning it's your mother's birthday, at noon it's your elder sister's birthday, and in the evening it's your own birthday. How do they all come to occur so close together? As long as your patrons have money, you might as well contrive to make every day a birthday."

Li Kuei-chieh merely smiled at this, without making a sound.

Who should appear at this juncture but Hua-t'ung, who had been sent by Hsi-men Ch'ing to invite Li Kuei-chieh to join him. Only then did Kuei-chieh go into Yüeh-niang's room to put on new makeup and redo her face, after which she headed off for the summerhouse in the garden, where an Eight Immortals table had already been set up, the blinds had been lowered both in front and in back, and the table had been spread with a variety of delicacies.

There were two large platters of roast pork, two platters of roast duck, two platters of newly pan-fried fresh shad, four saucers of rose-flavored pastries, two saucers of boiled chicken and bamboo shoots, and two saucers of boiled squab. These were followed by four saucers of chitterlings, blood pudding, pork tripe, fermented sausage, and the like.

As the company proceeded to eat for a while, Kuei-chieh stood by their side, replenishing the wine cups.

"I say this in your father's hearing," Ying Po-chüeh said to her, "and I'm not just giving you a hard time, but that affair of yours has already been taken care of satisfactorily. Your father has also spoken on your behalf to the district yamen, so they're no longer looking for you. And who do you have to thank for this but yours truly? It was only after I had repeatedly begged your father to intervene that he consented to do so. Do you suppose he would ever have taken the initiative in pulling strings on your behalf for no good reason? Choose whatever you like from your repertoire of songs, and sing one for me to enjoy as I drink my wine. It would be a case of making up for my efforts with one of your own."

Kuei-chieh laughed at this and cursed him, saying, "You crazy indecent beggar!

With the bigness of a flea,

How much face have you got,

that Father would believe anything you said?"

"Why you lousy little whore!" retorted Ying Po-chüeh.

"Before the sutra has even been recited,

You start to take the stick to the monk.

If you want something to eat,

You shouldn't offend the cook.

You may think that since:

A monk has no mother-in-law,

Being but a solitary male,

I can't handle the likes of you. You little whore! You'd better not take me for a joke.

Though only half functional,¹⁴

I'd still be up to the job."

At this, Kuei-chieh whacked him twice, as hard as she could, with the handle of the fan in her hand.

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and cursed him, saying, "You dog! In the future:

Your sons will be thieves and your daughters whores,

thanks only to the example you set for them."

They laughed at this for a while before Kuei-chieh finally picked up her *p'ip'a*, held it horizontally across her knees:

Opened her ruby lips,

Exposed her white teeth,
and proceeded to sing a song suite beginning with the tune “Three Terraces Song from I-chou”:

I think of how flagrantly you have betrayed my love,
How you have forgotten our vows of devotion.
On fine occasions such as flowery mornings and moonlit evenings,¹⁵
You have caused me to waste the springtime of my youth.
Depressed as can be, I lean upon the balustrade,
Gazing fixedly into the distance, but there is no news of you at all.
Again and again I think to myself,
It must just be that my lot is meager and my fate fickle.

To the tune “Yellow Oriole”:

Who could have anticipated such a thing?

Ying Po-chüeh interpolated, “Though a boat were to capsize in your open drain, ten years might pass without your knowing it.”

My fragrant flesh has been reduced,
Distress has rendered me emaciated.

Ying Po-chüeh said, “No matter how much you love him, and yearn for him, he’s left you in the gutter.”

My image in the mirror is covered with dust, and I am loath to improve it.
I am sparing of rouge and powder,
And too indolent to stick flowers in my hair.
The mascara on my eyebrows vainly accentuates the resentment of spring peaks.

Ying Po-chüeh said, “You remember the sayings:
Though I’ve taken a thousand comers,
My feelings are concentrated on one.
Silently I face the mirror, giving vent to long sighs.
I am half enamored of you, and half resentful of you.”¹⁶

The two of you got along well enough at the outset, but now you’re anticipating surprise and suffering fear on his account. Enough of that. Give over your resentment.”

“You’re delirious,” protested Kuei-chieh. “How can you talk such nonsense?”

The hardest thing to bear,

“If you can’t bear it,” interjected Ying Po-chüeh, “how could anyone else be expected to?”

Is the bugle on the watchtower,
The dying notes of which are enough to break one’s heart.

“It’s not your heart that’s broken,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “but the strings by which your puppeteer manipulates you. The two of you are no longer able to perform together.”

At this, Kuei-chieh gave him a whack as hard as she could and cursed him, saying, “You lousy dog-fucked beast! You’re delirious today. All you do is try to provoke people.”

To the tune “A Gathering of Worthy Guests”:

All is silent within my secluded window and the moon is bright;
In my resentment, I lean alone against the standing screen.¹⁷
Suddenly I hear a solitary wild goose cry outside my bower,
Which only serves to reawaken the sorrow of separation.
The watches are long and the clepsidra never-ending.¹⁸
Before I know it, the lamp grows dim, the incense burns out,¹⁹ and I am unable to get to sleep,
While, wherever he may be, he is sleeping soundly.

“You silly little whore!” remarked Ying Po-chüeh. “Why shouldn’t he be sleeping soundly? Not having been hustled off anywhere, he’s happily asleep at home, while you’ve had to hide out at someone else’s place, feeling as agitated as a sheepskin drum every day, awaiting the arrival of someone from the Eastern Capital before you can feel that:

The stone on your head has finally fallen to the ground.”

Kuei-chieh was so disturbed by this banter that she exclaimed, “Father, just look at the way Beggar Ying here is carrying on, persisting in pestering me, I don’t know why.”

“It’s about time you got around to acknowledging your father,” said Ying Po-chüeh; but Kuei-chieh ignored him and, plucking her *p’i-p’a*, continued to sing.

To the tune “Alliterations and Rhymes”:

When I think of him,
When I think of him,
How can I help taking it to heart?

“Since he scratches you where you itch,” interjected Ying Po-chüeh, “you can’t help taking it to heart.”

When there is no one around,
When there is no one around,
My teardrops silently cascade.

“There was once a man,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “who habitually wet his bed. One day his mother died, and, as an expression of his filiality, he set up a bunk in front of her spirit tablet. Having gotten to sleep late, who could have anticipated that he would, once again, wet his bed. When someone came in and, noticing that the mattress was wet, asked how it had happened, he was at a loss for words and only replied, ‘You wouldn’t understand, but I consigned my tears to my stomach, and they overflowed.’ Your case is analogous to his. Since you can’t refer to him in the open, all you can do is cry over him in secret.”

“You shameless pip-squeak!” protested Kuei-chieh. “You were an eyewitness, I suppose. You’re delirious.”

I blame him,
I blame him,
More than words can tell.

“As to that,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “I’ve got something else to say. You might just as well blame Heaven. Who knows how much money you’ve made off him already? And today, now that you’re reduced to hiding out at someone else’s place, your business has been disrupted ‘more than words can tell.’ Your affectation is about as incongruous as a left-hand Gate God masquerading with a white face.²⁰ Who do you think you’re going to fool with that rigma-role?”

Who could have known, when he was here, that he would be so elusive?

“You might have known,” commented Ying Po-chüeh, “that though you thought you had him in hand, he might still fly away.”

My only regret is that, to begin with, I ought not to have taken him so seriously.

“You silly little whore!” remarked Ying Po-chüeh. “Nowadays, around here, you couldn’t fool a three-year-old child with that stuff, let alone a habitu   of the world of breeze and moonlight. So you took him seriously, did you? Just you wait a minute, while I sing a song for you, to the tune ‘A Southern Branch’:

As for the realm of breeze and moonlight, let me explain it to you.
Nowadays, there is no distinguishing between true and false.
Each and every denizen of that world is a downright degenerate;
Each and every denizen of that world is a practiced old hand.
Their arts are designed only to bury you alive, making blind scapegoats of you.
The old procuress is only out to make money;
While the young whore has no choice but to stick her neck out and forge ahead.
It is bitter enough to make her jump into the river;
It is sad enough to make her want to seek out a well.
She wonders when her crock of bad karma will ever be full,
So that even if she is reborn as a donkey or horse,
She will not have to continue in this line of work.”

By this time, his raillery had reduced Kuei-chieh to tears, and Hsi-men Ch’ing intervened by giving Ying Po-chüeh a whack on the head with his fan, laughing as he cursed him, saying, “You insensitive dog! You simply insist on plaguing people to death.”

He then turned to Kuei-chieh and said, “Go ahead and sing. Don’t pay any attention to him.”

“Brother Ying,” chimed in Hsieh Hsi-ta, “Don’t be such a killjoy. Today:

Trying first this and then that,
you’ve devoted yourself exclusively to offending this goddaughter of mine. If you say another word, may you develop a huge boil on your mouth.”

After some time had elapsed, Li Kuei-chieh picked up her *p’i-p’a* and continued to sing, to the tune “Mustering the Palace Guard”:

Everyone said that he was trustworthy,

Ying Po-chüeh was about to say something, but Hsieh Hsi-ta put his hand over his mouth and said, “Kuei-chieh, go ahead and sing. Don’t pay any attention to him.”

Li Kuei-chieh then continued to sing:

But he turns out to have been bent only on seduction.
His eyes were wide open,
But his heart and his mouth were not in agreement.²¹

Hsieh Hsi-ta having removed his hand, Ying Po-chüeh resumed his commentary, saying, “If they had been in agreement it would have been a good thing. This affair might never have occurred. Your hearts and mouths may not have been in agreement, but your tiger’s mouths²² were certainly responsive enough. Though not many, at least two or three cones of moxa were burnt there.”²³

“How can you be so:

Barefaced and red-eyed?”

protested Kuei-chieh. “You were an eyewitness, I suppose.”

“I may not have seen it with my own eyes,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “but it took place in the Star of Joy Bordello, did it not?”

The whole company, including Hsi-men Ch’ing, couldn’t help laughing at this.

Swearing to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
He spoke falsehood while alleging truth.²⁴
I nearly made the mistake of contracting a case of lovesickness on his account.

“What a silly creature!” said Ying Po-chüeh.
“People may buy things by mistake,
But nobody sells things by mistake.
You denizens of the quarter are hardly likely to contract any diseases by mistake.”

That unfaithful lover,
Judging from the way he's been carrying on,
What kind of a future will he allow me to have?

“You may not be able to expect much in the way of a future,” remarked Ying Po-chüeh, “but someday he is bound to inherit the rank of Imperial Commissioner.”

To the tune “An Amber Cat Pendant”:

Every day we are estranged we grow further apart.²⁵
How will we ever meet again?
It is in vain that, in my infatuation, I have been content to patiently wait.

“How long must you wait, after all?” asked Ying Po-chüeh. “In the days to come, once this affair in the Eastern Capital is taken care of, it won't be too late to relight the furnace.”

My dreams of clouds and rain on Witch's Mountain²⁶ are unlikely to be fulfilled.
You fickle fellow,
As far as this life is concerned,
The phoenix and its mate are destined to part,²⁷
The phoenix and its mate are destined to part.

CODA:

Lover of mine, you've shown yourself to be altogether too fickle.
You've found it possible to give me up, leaving me all alone.
Our love in a previous incarnation has turned into nothing but a painted pastry.²⁸

When she had finished singing, Hsieh Hsi-ta said, “That's enough. That's enough. Let Hua-t'ung take away her *p'i-p'a*, so I can reward her labors by presenting her with a cup of wine.”

“And I'll offer her a serving of food,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “My talents may not amount to much, but at least it would be a case of making up for her efforts with one of my own.”

“Get out of here, you beggar!” said Li Kuei-chieh. “Why should anyone pay attention to you?

First you beat a person with your big fists,
And then you rub the bruises with your hand.”

At this juncture, Hsieh Hsi-ta proffered Kuei-chieh three cups of wine in a row and then pulled Ying Po-chüeh aside, saying, “We still have those two games of backgammon to complete.”

Thereupon, the two of them resumed playing backgammon, while Hsimen Ch'ing tipped Kuei-chieh a wink and then got up to leave the room.

“Brother,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “if you're going to the rear compound, send some breath-sweetening lozenges out to us, would you. We ate all that garlic a little while ago, and now it's paying us back by eructing in an unpleasant way.”

“Where would I get any breath-sweetening lozenges from?” said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

“Brother, who do you think you're fooling?” said Ying Po-chüeh. “I happen to know that school official named Liu from Hang-chou has sent you a considerable quantity of them. It would hardly be fitting for you to consume them all by yourself.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and proceeded to head for the rear compound. Li Kuei-chieh also disappeared outside, where she stood next to the T'ai-hu rockery and pretended to busy herself picking flowers to wear in her hair. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta played three games of backgammon in a row while waiting for Hsi-men Ch'ing to return, but he did not appear.

When they asked Hua-t'ung, “What is your father doing in the rear compound?” he replied, “Father went back to the rear compound but came right out again.”

“If he came right out again,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “where could he have gone?”

Then, turning to Hsieh Hsi-ta, he said, “You stay sitting here while I go have a look for him.”

Hsieh Hsi-ta then proceeded to play a game of elephant chess with Shut'ung on the surface of the desk.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing, after paying a visit to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, had come outside and was standing under the banksia rose arbor, when he caught sight of Li Kuei-chieh, pulled her into the “snow cave” in the Hidden Spring Grotto, and closed the door; whereupon the two of them sat down on a low couch to chat. The fact is that Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon ducking into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, had taken a dose of the aphrodisiac before coming out again. Taking Kuei-chieh onto his lap and settling her down upon his thighs, he proceeded, without more ado, to expose his organ for her to see, which gave her quite a start.

“How on earth did you make it as big as that?” she asked.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her the whole story about the Indian monk's medication and then started out by having her:

Bend low her powdered neck,
Gently part her scarlet lips,
and suck him off for a while. After that, he lightly lifted her two tiny golden lotuses, that were:
But half a span in length,
Barely three inches long,

With handsome heel lifts,
Vying with lotus buds,
Fit to tread fragrant dust, or
Pirouette upon an emerald disk,²⁹
Beloved of thousands,
Craved by tens of thousands,

and hung them over his arms to either side. She had on scarlet shoes of plain silk with high white satin heels, and figured ankle leggings with gold borders, the ends of which were tied in place with lengths of sand-green cord. He then carried her over to a chair, where the two of them started to go at it.

Who would have thought that Ying Po-chüeh, having looked for Hsi-men Ch'ing in every one of the pavilions in the garden without finding him, passed through the miniature Dripping Emerald Cavern, came down to the banksia rose arbor, went around the grape arbor, and arrived at the Hidden Spring Grotto, deep among the pines and bamboos. Here he faintly overheard the sound of people laughing, though he wasn't sure where it was coming from. Ying Po-chüeh then slowly proceeded with:

Skulking step and lurking gait,³⁰
to lift aside the portiere, exposing the fact that the two leaves of the door were ajar, and, taking his stand immediately outside, devoted himself to eavesdropping on the scene within.



Ying Po-chüeh Intrudes on a Spring Beauty in the Grotto

He overheard Kuei-chieh, calling out in a quavery voice as she responded with her body to the movements of Hsi-men Ch'ing,

"Daddy, finish off as quickly as you can. I'm afraid someone may come along."

At this, Ying Po-chüeh, giving vent to a loud cry, suddenly pushed open the door and burst in. Seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had Kuei-chieh's legs hoisted over his arms as she laid back on the chair, was just in the thick of things, he said, "Quickly, fetch some water to splash on them. The two rutting creatures have gotten themselves stuck together."

"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" protested Li Kuei-chieh. "Breaking in on us that way, you've given me quite a start."

"Finish off as quickly as you can, eh?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's not as easy as all that. You've got to wait until things run their course, after all. You no sooner expressed the fear that someone might catch you in the act, than I turned up. Come over here, and let me have a share of the take."

"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get out of here immediately, and stop pestering me. I fear a page boy may come by and see us."

"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You'd better consent to entreat me nicely, or I'll raise such a hue and cry that even the ladies in the rear compound will hear what's going on. You've already been acknowledged as an adopted daughter by the First Lady, and she's kindly agreed to let you hide out here for a day or two, and here you are carrying on an affair with her husband. If she were to find out, you'd never hear the end of it."

"Get out of here, you crazy beggar!" responded Kuei-chieh.

"I'll go," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but not before snatching a kiss."

Thereupon, holding Kuei-chieh in place, he gave her a kiss before starting outside.

"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Aren't you even going to put the latch on the door?"

Ying Po-chüeh came back to put the latch on the door and said, "My son, the two of you can just fuck away, fuck away to your heart's content. You can knock the bottom out of her for all I care. It's no concern of mine."

He had gotten no further than the pine tree outside, when he came back and said, "As for those breath-sweetening lozenges that you promised me a while ago, where are they?"

"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just wait a little while and I'll see that you get them, that's all. Why continue to pester us?"

Only then did Ying Po-chüeh take his leave, laughing as he went.

"What an obnoxious chunk of knife-bait!" exclaimed Kuei-chieh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh continued to carry on with each other in the "snow cave" for a good two hours until, by eating a red date,³¹ he was finally able to finish off, with the result that:

The rain evaporated and the clouds dispersed.³²

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Among the crab apple boughs, orioles dart quickly to and fro;
In the shade of green bamboos, swallows parley incessantly.
Even if one were to entrust the scene to a skillful painter;
This picture of spring beauty could never be properly depicted.³³

In a little while, the two of them straightened their clothing and ventured outside. Kuei-chieh reached into Hsi-men Ch'ing's sleeve and groped out a quantity of breath-sweetening lozenges, which she proceeded to secrete in her own sleeve. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had so exerted himself that:

His whole body was bathed in fragrant sweat,³⁴

And he couldn't help panting and puffing,

went over under the flowering lantana to urinate, while Kuei-chieh, for her part, groped out a mirror from about her person, put it on the sill of the moon window, in order to:

Arrange her cloudy locks and adjust her tresses,

after which, she went back to the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to wash his hands, and when he came out to rejoin his company, Ying Po-chüeh demanded the breath-sweetening lozenges.

"You crazy beggar!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You must be splenetic! How can you persist in pestering people so?"

He then handed a few lozenges to each of them, at which Ying Po-chüeh complained, "You're only giving me these measly couple of them, are you? Never mind. Never mind. I'll just have to ask that little whore from the Li Family Establishment for some."

As they were speaking, who should they see but Li Ming, who came in and kowtowed to them.

"Li Ming," said Ying Po-chüeh, "where have you come from? You haven't heard anything about how this affair of theirs is going, have you?"

"As for this Kuei-chieh of ours," said Li Ming, "thanks to the intervention of Father here, no one has come pressing us about her for the last couple of days. They are just waiting for word from the capital of the final disposition of the case."

"Has that young woman from the Ch'i Family Establishment come out of hiding yet?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"Ch'i Hsiang-erh is still hiding out in the home of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family," said Li Ming. "It's a good thing that Kueichieh is here at Father's place. Who would dare to come looking for her here?"

"Were that not the case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "she'd be in a pretty pickle. She has only to thank myself and Master Hsieh here, who repeatedly pointed out to your patron that if he didn't consent to intervene on her behalf, where was she to go for succor?"

"If Father here had refused to intervene," said Li Ming, "there would have been no end to the matter. This Auntie Li the Third of ours conducts her business in such a haphazard way, there's no telling what the outcome might have been."

"I recollect," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that her birthday is coming up any day now. We'll get together with your patron here, and help to celebrate her birthday."

"There's no need for you gentlemen to do that," said Li Ming. "Once this affair is concluded, you can be sure that Auntie Li the Third and Kuei-chieh will ask you gentlemen over for a visit."

"When the time comes, then," said Ying Po-chüeh, "we can celebrate her birthday after the fact."

He then summoned Li Ming to come forward and said to him, “You drink this cup of wine for me. I’ve been drinking all day and can’t handle any more.”

Li Ming accepted the silver goblet with handles that was proffered to him, knelt down, and:

Drained it in one gulp.

Hsieh Hsi-ta also told Ch’in-t’ung to pour out a goblet of wine and offer it to him.

“You probably haven’t had anything to eat yet,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “There’s still a plate of pastries left over on the table there.”

Hsieh Hsi-ta also picked up two platters of braised pig’s head and roast duck and handed them to him.

Li Ming accepted them with both hands and was in the process of retiring to eat them, when Ying Po-chüeh detached a half-section of shad with his chopsticks and offered it to him, saying, “It seems to me that you are unlikely to have eaten anything like this so far this year. Have a taste of something new.”

“You crazy dog!” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “You might as well let him have the whole thing to eat. What do you want to keep it around for?”

“In a little while,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “if the wine should run out, I might be hungry and wouldn’t be satisfied to eat rice. This fish of yours from Chiang-nan is only in season once a year. If it gets stuck in the cracks between your teeth, when you manage to extricate it, it is still fragrant. It’s not easy to come by. To tell the truth, I doubt if it is available even at court. Where else are you likely to find it except at Brother’s place here?”

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Hua-t’ung, who came in carrying four saucers of fresh things in season, one saucer of black caltrops, one saucer of water chestnuts, one saucer of snowy lotus root, and one saucer of loquats. Before Hsi-men Ch’ing even had a chance to put any of these in his mouth, Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to snatch away whole saucers full and dump them into his sleeve.

“You’d better leave a couple of them for me,” protested Hsieh Hsi-ta, taking advantage of the opportunity to appropriate the saucer of black caltrops, leaving only the lotus root on the table.

Hsi-men Ch’ing managed to pick up a single piece and put it in his mouth, leaving the remainder for Li Ming to eat.

He then directed Hua-t’ung, “Bring another two loquats back from the rear compound and give them to Li Ming.”

Li Ming put these in his sleeve, saying, “When I get home I’ll share them with Auntie Li the Third.”

Only after Li Ming had finished eating the fare provided for him did he rejoin the company, take up his psaltery, and prepare to sing.

“Sing us that song suite that begins with the tune” The Herbaceous Peony Enclosure,” said Ying Po-chüeh.

After tuning the strings of his psaltery, Li Ming, doing his best to show off the quality of his voice, sang:

By the pond with its new verdure,
I suddenly strike the balustrade;
With whom can I discuss what’s in my heart?
The flowers have nothing to say,
The butterflies have nothing to say;
The frustration of separation fills my breast,³⁵ entangling my feelings.
I resent the Lord of the East’s unwillingness to retain the parting guest.
I sigh at the dancing red blossoms and drifting catkins,
Lightly sprinkled with the powder of butterfly wings.
The scene remains the same,
Things remain the same,
But, sadly, I no longer see my lover’s face.

To the tune “Autumn Geese on the Frontier”:

When we parted from each other it was early spring.
The flowering crab apples had just begun to bloom,
Their buds barely open and intermittently visible.
Imperceptibly, the pomegranate blossoms burst,
The red lotus flowers were in bloom,
Iced fruits were submerged,
And silk fans were waved to avoid the heat.
In no time at all, the chrysanthemums were yellow,
The metallic autumn wind began to blow,
The dead leaves were scattered,
And the foliage of the phoenix tree changed color.
Before long, the wintersweet was in bloom,
Frozen flakes were falling,
And people were mulling wine within heated chambers.
The scenes presented by the four seasons are multifarious,
Even to think of them is to be enraptured.
But I don’t know where that handsome lover of mine,
Out in the cold,
All by himself,
Deeply depressed,
Is enduring his lonely resentment.

To the tune “Redoubled Joy in the Golden Palace”:

I sigh with resentment.
It has always been true that romance leads young people astray.
How can I bear that it is late spring again?
I dread the twilight hours,
Grieve at the twilight hours;
All by myself, I am too depressed to enjoy anything.
Though I were to fumigate my bedding with rare incense, with whom would I share it?
I sigh that the night is long, my pillow is cold, and my coverlet is chill.³⁶
You sleep alone,

I sleep alone,
Only in dreams can we meet.

To the tune “The Peddler”:

One day, should our lifelong desires ever be fulfilled,
We will be united as husband and wife;
Heaven be thanked.
That would make a happy marriage affinity in this incarnation,
Rather than being out in the cold, suffering from loneliness,
Or being sunk deep in depression, enduring misfortune.

To the tune “Exhilarated by Peace” (Coda):³⁷

Solely on account of that impassioned karmic encumbrance of mine,
I am today troubled with resentment and entangled in emotion.³⁸
I think how, beneath the stars, we first swore oaths of fidelity by the hills and seas,
Which only served as an impediment during the romantic years of my youth.
If, one day, we should ever be united in wedlock like the morning clouds and evening rain,³⁹
Enjoy the singing and dancing in decorated halls⁴⁰ during a joyous wedding feast,
Celebrate a perpetual reunion within silk screens and brocaded curtains,
Where our enamored branches may intertwine amidst the painted candles of the nuptial chamber,⁴¹
We must never forget the abundance of misfortunes that we have had to endure.⁴²

That day the three of them continued to drink until the lamps were lighted and, even then, waited until some congee made with polished rice, flavored with mung beans, had been brought out from the rear compound for them to eat before preparing to depart.

“Brother,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “are you busy tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “I'm going to pay a visit to the estate of Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard. Yesterday, Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang invited me there for a banquet, and I have to get an early start.”

“With regard to that matter concerning Li the Third and Huang the Fourth,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “I'll arrange with them to come the day after tomorrow then.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded his head and instructed him to have them come on the afternoon of that day, and not to show up any earlier. His two guests then made their departure, without waiting to be seen off. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Shu-t'ung to clear away the utensils and then went back to the rear compound, where he spent the night in Meng Yü-lou's quarters. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.⁴³

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early and did not go to the yamen. Having eaten some congee, he donned his official cap and girdle, mounted his horse, holding a gold-flecked fan in his hand, and, followed by a retinue of servants, made his way to Eunuch Director Liu's estate thirty li outside the South Gate to attend the banquet. On this occasion, both Shu-t'ung and Tai-an accompanied him. But no more of this.

P'an Chin-lien, taking advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence from the house, made plans with Li P'ing-erh to take the three mace of silver that Ch'en Ching-chi had forfeited, together with the seven mace that Li P'ing-erh had agreed to add, and get Lai-hsing to buy one roast duck, two chickens, a mace of silver's worth of other dishes to go with the rice, a jug of Chin-hua wine, a bottle of distilled spirits, and a mace of silver's worth of square, stuffed glutinous rice cakes, to be served cold. These foodstuffs were all properly prepared by Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu.

Chin-lien said to Yüeh-niang, “The other day Hsi-men Ta-chieh won three mace of silver from our son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, at a game of cards, and our sister Li P'ing-erh has augmented this with an additional seven mace of silver. Today we would like to play host, and invite our sister to enjoy a repast with us in the garden.”

Wu Yüeh-niang, accordingly, along with Meng Yü-lou, Li Chiao-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Li Kuei-chieh, joined P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh and started out by feasting for a while in the summerhouse. Afterward, taking what was left of the food and wine with them, they made their way up the artificial hill to the highest point in the garden, the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where they proceeded to amuse themselves by playing board games and “pitch-pot.”

Meng Yü-lou, along with Li Chiao-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Sun Hsüeh-o, then ascended the Flower-Viewing Tower, where they leaned over the balustrade, from which they could see extending below them, in front of the artificial hill:

The tree peony grove,
The garden peony bed,
The crab apple bower,
The seven sisters trellis,
The banksia rose arbor,
And the rosa rugosa shrubs.

Truly:

All four seasons produce their never-fading flowers;
All eight festivals appear one everlasting spring.

After they had enjoyed the scene for a while, they came back down to the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where Hsiao-yü and Ying-ch'un were waiting on Yüeh-niang, pouring the wine and serving the food.

Yüeh-niang suddenly remarked, “Today I forgot to invite Master Ch'en.”

“Today,” said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, “Father has once again sent him to Hsü the Fourth's shop outside the city gate, to dun him for the silver he owes him. He should be back any time now.”

It was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi presented himself:

His body clad in a gown of jet velour,
His feet shod in sandals and white socks,
His head adorned with a tasseled "tile-ridge" hat,
Held in place with a gold hairpin.

After making his bow of greeting to Yüeh-niang and the rest, he pulled Hsimen Ta-chieh aside and sat down with her.

Addressing himself to Yüeh-niang, he said, "I've brought the final payment of silver from Hsü the Fourth's place back with me. It's in five sealed packages, two hundred fifty taels in all. I delivered it to the master suite, and Yü-hsiao has put it away."

Thereupon:

With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,
Several rounds of wine were consumed, and
Their faces all took on the glint of spring.⁴⁴

Yüeh-niang went back to playing board games with Li Chiao-erh and Li Kueichieh, while Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Ch'en Ching-chi sauntered about enjoying the flowers and verdant foliage.

Chin-lien wandered off by herself, behind the artificial hill, among a thick grove of plantains, where she amused herself by batting at the butterflies with the round white-silk fan in her hand.

Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had surreptitiously crept up behind her, abruptly addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, you don't know how to go about batting a butterfly. Let me show you how it's done. These butterflies are just like you, they've got:

The mind of a ball,
Bobbing up, bobbing down,

elusive creatures that they are."

Chin-lien swiveled her powdered neck, gave him a sidelong glance, and berated him with a laugh, saying, "You dead duck of a lousy short-life! Who needs you to bat butterflies for them? If anyone should overhear you, you'd be done for: though I suppose you're too far gone to care. Having knocked back several goblets of wine, you've come here to pester me, have you?"

She then went on to ask, "What about those handkerchiefs you undertook to buy for me?"

Ch'en Ching-chi, with an ingratiating smile, reached into his sleeve, pulled them out, and handed them to her, saying, "I've got the Sixth Lady's here too."

"Now that I've delivered the handkerchiefs," he went on to say, "what are you prepared to give me in return?"

Thereupon, he put his face up to hers; to which Chin-lien responded by giving him a shove.

Though neither of them realized it, Li P'ing-erh, carrying Kuan-ko in her arms, and accompanied by the wet nurse, happened to come along from the other side of the juniper hedge and caught sight of Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi flirting together and batting butterflies.

When she saw that no one was looking, she stepped nimbly into the grotto in the artificial hill, from which she suddenly emerged, crying out, "Why don't the two of you bat a butterfly for Kuan-ko's amusement?"

This threw P'an Chin-lien into such consternation, fearing that Li P'ing-erh might have caught them out, that she calculatedly inquired, "Has Son-in-law Ch'en given you the handkerchiefs you requested from him, or not?"

"No, he hasn't given them to me yet," Li P'ing-erh replied.

"He had them in his sleeve," said Chin-lien, "but didn't feel comfortable giving them to us in front of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, so he slipped them to me unobtrusively, just now."

The two of them then sat down together on the stone border of the flower bed, opened the package, and divided the handkerchiefs between them.

Chin-lien, having noticed that Kuan-ko had a white drawnwork handkerchief fastened around his neck, while he sucked on a plum that he was holding in his hand, asked, "Is that one of your handkerchiefs?"

Li P'ing-erh said, "It's one that his senior mother put around his neck, just now, when she saw that he was sucking on a plum, the juice of which was dripping onto him."

The two of them continued to sit together beneath the grove of plantains.

"This place is really quite shady and cool," said Li P'ing-erh. "Let's sit here and enjoy it for a while."

She then directed Ju-i, "You go and get Ying-ch'un to fetch the child's little pillow from my quarters, and also bring the cool bamboo bed mat, so we can put him down here for a nap. Also tell her to bring a set of dominoes, so I can play a game of dominoes with the Fifth Lady here. You can stay there and look after the place."

Ju-i went off on this errand, and, before long, Ying-ch'un showed up with the pillow and mat, as well as the set of dominoes. Li P'ing-erh arranged the mat and laid Kuan-ko down on his little pillow, where he was left to amuse himself while she played dominoes with Chin-lien. After they had been playing for a while, she told Ying-ch'un to go back to her quarters and boil a pot of fine tea for them.

Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou, from her vantage point at the balustrade of the Cloud Repose Pavilion, caught sight of them and waved to Li P'ing-erh with her hand, saying, "Elder Sister has something to say to you. She'll be right there."

Li P'ing-erh, abandoning her child, whom she entrusted to Chin-lien's care, responded, "I'll be right there."

Chin-lien, however, who was preoccupied by the fact that Ch'en Ching-chi was still lurking in the grotto, was scarcely concerned about the welfare of the child, but seized the opportunity to step nimbly through the door of the grotto, locate Ch'en Ching-chi, and say to him, "There's no one else around. You can come out now."

Ch'en Ching-chi then called to the woman to come inside and see the mushroom, saying, "Some mushrooms with enormous heads have sprung up in here."⁴⁵

Having thus inveigled the woman into the grotto, he bent his knees, knelt down before her, and proposed that they indulge in the play of clouds and rain together. The two of them then embraced and began to kiss each other.

It so happens that:

As providence would have it, when Li P'ing-erh arrived at the Cloud Repose Pavilion, Wu Yüeh-niang said to her, "Sister Meng the Third has just lost a game of pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ta-chieh. Why don't you come and try your hand at a couple of pitches on her behalf?"

"There's no one down below to look after the child," said Li P'ing-erh.

"After all, Sister Six is there," said Meng Yü-lou. "What is there to be afraid of?"

"Sister Meng the Third," said Yüeh-niang, "why don't you go look after the child for her?"

"Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "might I also trouble you to bring the baby back with you?"

She then turned to Hsiao-yü and said, "You go along with her, and bring the mat and his little pillow back with you."

When Hsiao-yü and Meng Yü-lou arrived beneath the grove of plantains, they found the baby lying on his back on the mat:

Gesticulating with both hands and feet, and screaming at the top of his voice, while Chin-lien was nowhere to be found. What should they see beside him but a large black cat, which, on seeing them arrive, disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Where has the Fifth Lady gone?" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "Ai-ya! Ai-ya! She's left the child here all alone, and he's been terrified by a cat."

Chin-lien then emerged from the grotto to one side, saying, "I've just been in here relieving myself. Who's gone off anywhere? And how could any cat have terrified him? How can you be so:

Barefaced and red-eyed?"

Meng Yü-lou did not go into the grotto for a look but merely took Kuan-ko in her arms and devoted herself to petting him, as she made her way back up to the Cloud Repose Pavilion, while Hsiao-yü followed her with the pillow and mat. Chin-lien, who was afraid she might tell tales about her, stuck right to her tail.



P'an Chin-lien Inspects a Mushroom in the Flower Garden

"Why is the child crying?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"When I got there," said Meng Yü-lou, "there was a large black cat, from who knows where, crouched right beside the child's head."

"It must clearly have terrified the child," said Yüeh-niang.

"The Fifth Lady was looking after him," said Li P'ing-erh.

"Sister Six had gone into the grotto to relieve herself," said Meng Yü-lou.

Chin-lien stepped up at this point and said, "Yü-lou, how can you be so:

Barefaced and red-eyed?

Where would I have gotten a cat from? I imagine he must have been hungry and was crying to be breast-fed. You're just trying to lay the blame on me."

Li P'ing-erh saw that Ying-ch'un had come back with the tea and said to her, "Go summon the wet nurse so she can breast-feed the child."

Meanwhile, Ch'en Ching-chi, on seeing that the coast was clear, sneaked out of the grotto, made his way along the juniper hedge, rounded the corner of the summerhouse, and headed straight out the postern gate into the front compound. Truly:

With both hands he tore open the road between life and death;

Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.

Yüeh-niang, on seeing that the baby would not allow himself to be breastfed but continued to cry, said to Li P'ing-erh, "You carry him back to your quarters, and do what you can to get him to go to sleep."

Thereupon, the wine drinking came to an end, and the party broke up.

It so happens that Ch'en Ching-chi had failed in his attempt to make out with P'an Chin-lien.

Though they may have wished to emulate the billing swallows and cooing orioles;

The bee's antennae had no more than grazed the corolla of the flower.

His endeavor had not turned out propitiously, and when he returned to his anteroom in the front compound, he couldn't help muttering unhappily to himself. Truly:

Unable to help themselves,⁴⁶ the blossoms fall;

Conveying a sense of déjà vu,⁴⁷ the swallows return.⁴⁸

There is a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" that testifies to this:

I saw her rakishly sporting a spray of blossoms;
Smiling as she toyed with her spray of blossoms.
On her ruby lips she wore no rouge;
But looked as though she did wear rouge.
When we met the other day,
And then met again today;
She seemed to have feelings for me,
But displayed no feelings for me.
Though she wished to consent,
She never gave her consent.
It looked as though she refused me;
But she really never did refuse me.
When can we make another assignation;
When will we ever see each other again?
If we don't meet,
She may long for me;
When we do meet,
I still long for her.⁴⁹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 53 ¹

WU YÜEH-NIANG ENGAGES IN COITION

IN QUEST OF MALE PROGENY;

LI P'ING-ERH FULFILLS A VOW

IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD HER SON

In this life, to have a son is the consummation
of a myriad desires;²
After death, to leave behind no male heir is to
have lived in vain.
If one should produce a dragon steed, one must
endeavor to protect it;
If one hopes to bear a unicorn, one must enact
good deeds in secret.
Praying to the gods, she is anxious to fulfill
the promise of her vow;
By imbibing a potion, she hopes to be able to
make her womb receptive.
Parents would do well to carry out their human
obligations to the full;
But the good or bad luck that may result must
be left to Azure Heaven.

THE STORY GOES that Wu Yüeh-niang, having spent some time amusing herself along with Li Chiao-erh, Li Kuei-chieh, Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, began to feel somewhat fatigued, retired to her room, and took a nap.

When she awoke, around the first watch, she sent Hsiao-yü to say to Li P'ing-erh, "Has Kuan-ko stopped that unnatural crying of his? Have the wet nurse wrap him up carefully and coax him to sleep. Don't let anything disturb him into crying again."

The wet nurse, who was eating her supper on the k'ang, did not get down from her position but kept the child there beside her.

Li P'ing-erh said, "Thank the First Lady for me, and tell her that when we came back to my quarters, he kept on crying out loud and suffering from the cold shivers continuously, and he has only now stopped crying, cuddled up against the wet nurse's body, and fallen asleep. His forehead feels rather feverish, and the wet nurse is unwilling to move for fear of disturbing him. In a little while, I'm going to wake him, so he can have his evening feeding and relieve himself."

Hsiao-yü returned to the master suite and reported this information to Yüeh-niang.

"They're not taking things as seriously as they should," said Yüeh-niang. "How could she have left a little baby like that under the plantains, and just gone off somewhere else, so that he was scared to death by a cat? Only now are they:

Lamenting before the gods and weeping to ghosts.

At this rate, they're likely to do him some real harm before they come to their senses."

At that time, after expressing these few words of criticism, she washed her face and went to sleep for the night.

The next morning, when she got up:

Having nothing else to say,

she sent Hsiao-yü to ask if Kuan-ko had been able to get any sleep during the remainder of the night, or not?

She also reported, "As soon as the First Lady has eaten her congee, she is planning to drop by and see how Kuan-ko is doing."

Li P'ing-erh said to Ying-ch'un, "The First Lady is about to come over here. Quickly, fetch me some water, so I can wash my face."

Ying-ch'un flew off on this errand and returned with the water for her to wash her face. Li P'ing-erh hastily combed her hair and ordered Ying-ch'un to heat some water for tea as quickly as possible, and to light some benzoin incense in the room.

Before they knew it, Hsiao-yü came in and announced, "The First Lady has entered your quarters."

This had the effect of causing Li P'ing-erh to jump up in consternation to greet Yüeh-niang and lead her to the wet nurse's bed, where she caressed Kuan-ko, saying as she did so, "What a hopeless little oily mouth! You're constantly taking your own mother and:

Dunking her in a water crock,
for no good reason."

At this, Kuan-ko, with the sound of a gurgling cry, started to howl in earnest. Yüeh-niang made haste to playfully tease him for a while before he finally stopped.

Yüeh-niang then turned to Ju-i and said, "Since I haven't been able to have a child myself, this little bit of a boy is the only issue of our family. You can't afford to underestimate his importance. To get right down to it, you've simply got to look after him conscientiously."

The wet nurse Ju-i replied, "As to that, there is no need for the First Lady to instruct me any further."

Yüeh-niang was about to take her leave, when Li P'ing-erh said, "Now that the First Lady is here, I have had a cup of tea prepared. Won't you visit a while before leaving?"

Yüeh-niang then sat down and asked, "Sixth Lady, how is it that your hair is so mussed?"

Li P'ing-erh said, "It's all on account of the way this heartless enemy of mine has been:

Acting up and making trouble,

that I haven't even had a chance to comb my hair. Then, when I heard that you were coming, I hastily twisted it into a knot and fitted the fret over it, without realizing what sort of laughable shape it was in."

"Just look at you!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "How unprincipled can you get? He's your own flesh and blood, to whom you've given birth, and yet you refer to him as your heartless enemy. While, as for me, though I long for such a heartless enemy all day long, I haven't been able to have one."

"It's just a manner of speaking," said Li P'ing-erh. "If only he weren't beset by all these spectral visitations, everything would be all right. But nowadays, I hardly get two or three days of peace without the occurrence of such an outbreak. The other day, when we visited the family graveyard, he was frightened by the gongs and drums. Not long after that, he started to cry like anything when he had his hair cut. And now he's been frightened once again by a cat. Other people's babies seem easy enough to raise, but this creature of mine turns out, contrarily, to be as fragile as a rush."

After they had chatted for a while, Yüeh-niang walked out of the room, and Li P'ing-erh followed behind her to see her off.

"Don't bother to see me off," said Yüeh-niang. "Go back inside and look after Kuan-ko."

Li P'ing-erh, accordingly, returned inside, while Yüeh-niang made her way back to the master suite.

As she did so, she overheard someone talking, as furtively as a thief trying to destroy evidence, on the other side of the screen-wall.

Yüeh-niang stopped to listen and, on peeking through a crack between the boards, saw that one of them was P'an Chin-lien, who was leaning on the balustrade, together with Meng Yü-lou, while she chattered away,³ in a subdued voice, saying, "Our elder sister really has no sense of decorum. Having no child of her own, when someone else bears a son, she insists to the point of befuddlement on claiming a specious intimacy, and sucking up to her in the most egregious way.⁴ It seems to me that:

Even the indigent should maintain their indigent spirit,

Just as the eminent should display their eminent spirit.

What's the point of playing up to her that way? When the child grows up, he will only acknowledge his natural mother, why should he acknowledge you?"

Who should pass by at this point but Ying-ch'un, which caused the two of them to slip off toward the rear compound, pretending to be looking for the cat in order to feed it.

Nothing might have happened if Yüeh-niang had not overheard this conversation, but having overheard these words:

Anger arose in her heart, and

Resentment stiffened her jaw.

At the time, she would have liked to interrupt the conversation and call them to account, but since it was not something that could be solved by making a fuss, and would, instead, only have the effect of detracting from her own dignity, she chose to restrain herself. She went directly into her room and lay down on the bed, but she did not feel free to cry over the situation, lest the maidservants overhear her. All she could do was:

Complain silently to herself,⁵

giving vent to:

Long sighs as well as short.

Truly:

Even in her own home she dared not risk crying out too loudly,

Fearing lest the gibbons on hearing her should break their hearts.⁶

At that time, it was just high noon, and she had not yet gotten up.

Hsiao-yü stood beside her bed and said, "First Lady, won't you get up and have something to eat?"

"I'm not feeling well," said Yüeh-niang, "and don't want to eat anything, but you can close the door of the room, and prepare some tea for me."

Only after Hsiao-yü had brought in the tea did Yüeh-niang get up and sit disconsolately in her room, saying to herself, "Simply because I don't have a son of my own, I have to put up with all this annoyance at other people's hands. I have:

Besought Heaven and worshipped Earth,

in the hope of obtaining one, so that I can shame those lousy whores to their fucking faces."

Thereupon, she went to the comb box on the dressing table in her inner room and got out the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that Nun Wang had provided, as well as the medication that Nun Hsüeh had procured for her, and saw that the sealed container in which they were enclosed was engraved with four characters that read:

An efficacious elixir for conceiving sons.

There was also an eight-line poem, which read:

Like Ch'ang-o who mischievously fled to the moon with the elixir of immortality;

This potion has obligingly appropriated the horn on the striped dragon's crown.

It has been sanctioned by the Peach Blossom Mandate of an emperor of the Han dynasty;⁷

And has also been ordained by the Bamboo Leaf Edict of a ruler of the Liang dynasty.⁸

In no time at all, once the medication starts to act, it will produce enviable results;

Even the elderly and decrepit will be rejuvenated, such are its praiseworthy effects.

Do not take it as something to enhance the joys of snow and flowers, breeze and moon;

Even the smallest amount will enable you to conceive a handsomely black-bearded son.

After this there was an encomium, which read:

Its flaming red color sparkles,
Exactly like coral that has been ground to powder;
Its fragrant redolence is dense,
Resembling that of newly ignited sandalwood or musk.
If you hold it in your mouth,
A sweet exudation will rise up about the base of your teeth;
If you place it in your palm,
A warm sensation will suffuse the area beneath your navel.
It will enable you to retain your essence and replenish your fluid;⁹
What need is there to seek the Magic Frost Pounded with a Jade Pestle?¹⁰
It will allow you to change a female embryo into a male embryo;¹¹
What need is there to look elsewhere for the Divine Bower Powder?¹²
Do not waste it on the chickens and dogs by your alchemical furnace;¹³
It is meant to enhance the joys of mandarin ducks beneath the quilt.
If you ingest it when the spirit moves you,
It will produce the dream of an azure dragon;¹⁴
If you act upon it when the time is ripe,
It will engender the omen of a flying swallow.¹⁵
Those who seek to bear a son may accomplish their objective with a single try;
Those who wish to achieve transcendence can become immortals in a hundred days.

After this there were some further directions, which read:

Anything damaging to the brain, or harmful to the blood stream,
Should be strictly avoided.
Radishes as well as spring onions should also be avoided.
If you engage in intercourse on an odd day you will conceive a son;
If you engage in intercourse on an even day you will conceive a daughter;
You may do as your heart desires.
If you take this medication for a year,
You may achieve everlasting life.

When Yüeh-niang had finished reading this material, she felt a sense of pleasure gradually arise in her heart. Observing that the container was tightly sealed:

With slender tapering fingers,
She delicately prized it open.

When she unfolded the packet within and took a look, she found that it consisted of three or four layers of “black gold paper,”¹⁶ wrapped around a single bolus of medication, the exterior of which was attractively decorated with gold-flecked vermillion. Yüeh-niang placed it in the palm of her hand and, sure enough, she felt a warm sensation arise below her navel. She then held it next to her nose and, sure enough, becoming moist:

Her mouth was filled with sweet spittle.

With a smile, Yüeh-niang said to herself, “This Nun Hsüeh must really be a person of exemplary conduct. Who knows where she must have gone to locate such a:

Marvelous medicine and efficacious elixir?

It must be that I am fated to conceive, since I have come upon such a fine medication, but who knows?”

After toying with the medication for a while, fearing lest it might lose its efficacy, she hastily fetched some paste and sealed it up tightly as before, went back into her inner room, and locked it up inside her comb box.

Strolling out onto the veranda, she gazed up to Heaven and gave a long sigh, saying, “Should this woman, née Wu, tomorrow, which is a *jen-tzu* day, take this medication of Nun Hsüeh's and succeed in conceiving a son to perpetuate the ancestral rites of the Hsi-men house, so that she does not end up as a ghost with no one to sacrifice to it, my gratitude to August Heaven will know no bounds.”

By that time, the day was drawing to a close, and Yüeh-niang finally had something to eat, but there is nothing more to say about this.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at Eunuch Director Liu's estate that day, he sent in his card, and the servants informed Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en, who came out together to meet him. They were both formally attired in their official caps and girdles.

When they had exchanged the customary greetings and sat down, Secretary Huang Pao-kuang opened the proceedings by saying, “The other day, motivated by admiration of your great fame, we presumed to visit you unceremoniously but did not expect to put you to such great expense.”

“I fear I was guilty of treating you remissly,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

“On that occasion,” said Secretary An Ch'en, “we were on our way to respond to an invitation from our fellow graduate, Prefect Hu Shih-wen, and were therefore compelled to take our leave rather precipitously. But:

The profound sentiments of our host,¹⁷

still resonate in our hearts. Today it is only appropriate that we should enjoy ourselves fully until break of day.”

“I am deeply affected by your lavish hospitality,” responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After a “gate boy” had announced in a low voice that the feast was fully prepared, Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to repair to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their official caps and girdles and proceeded to take their seats. Hsi-men Ch'ing was ushered to the seat of honor where, after a pro forma demurrer, he consented to sit down.

A singing boy then came forward and sang a song to the tune “Embroidered Oranges and Plums”:

The fragrant redness of her face is suffused with the glow of sunset clouds;
The glossy blackness of her raven locks is heaped in piles about her temples.
I expect that she,
Must be a denizen of the quarter,
Dressed up as she is, a fit subject for an artist's brush.
Quiveringly, she is wearing a turquoise ornament in her hair;
Ostentatiously, she is clad in garments of the thinnest silk.
The stylishness she exhibits is enough to slay the beholder.
Ch'a!
Whose establishment does she hail from,
That she should secretly look me over so unceasingly with her eyes?¹⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing praised this performance, and Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang presented him with cups of wine. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned the compliment, the singing boy once again:

Accompanying himself with a sandalwood clapper,
sang a song to the tune “Vanquishing the Yellow Dragon, Quick Tempo”:

Since there is no convenient way to correspond,
I am too lazy to inscribe my brocade notepaper.
The gold bracelet about my wrist is loose;
The jade of my flesh has become emaciated;
My silken garments droop completely slack.
Tears have encroached upon,
The makeup on my two cheeks.
I am too sorrowful to look into my precious mirror,
And ashamed to wear my halcyon-feathered ornaments.

To the same tune:

I have pointlessly squandered,
The good days and fine nights.¹⁹
In my jade incense burner,
On the silver candlestick,
The incense has dissipated and the candle gone out.²⁰
The phoenix bed curtains have been forsaken,²¹
The mandarin duck quilt is supplied in vain.
I incessantly fidget with my jade fingers,
And repeatedly stamp my embroidered shoes.²²

On this occasion, they continued drinking until after 6:00 o'clock:

With the raising of glasses and passing of cups;
but we have already said enough about this.

To resume our story, back at home, P'an Chin-lien, having failed on the previous day in her attempt in the “snow cave” to make out with Ch'en Ching-chi, took advantage of the opportunity presented by the fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing was away at Eunuch Director Liu's estate, drinking with Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en, and that Wu Yüeh-niang was staying in her room, to:

Run in and run out,
of her quarters, just like:

An ant on a hot plate.²³

As for Ch'en Ching-chi, after escaping from the “snow cave,” he had gone to sleep in the shop, where his organ remained stiff all night long. On this occasion, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, he and P'an Chin-lien uninhibitedly:

Exchanged looks with eyes and eyebrows,
This went on until after dusk, when the lamps were about to be lighted in the various quarters. At this point Chin-lien proceeded with:

Skulking step and lurking gait,
to tiptoe out behind the summerhouse, where Ch'en Ching-chi just happened to come by. When he perceived by the dim light that it was Chin-lien, he proceeded without more ado to embrace her tightly and put his face next to hers, whereupon the two of them exchanged some ten or more kisses.

“My darling,” said Ch'en Ching-chi, “yesterday when that pain in the neck, Meng the Third, interrupted us, I had such a stiff erection that it stayed up all night. And today, when I saw how:

Seductively and bewitchingly,²⁴
you swayed as you strolled by, my whole body was infused with a melting sensation.”

“You dead duck of a lousy short-life!” said Chin-lien. “You must be utterly devoid of principles to grab hold of your own mother-in-law and kiss her. Aren't you afraid that someone might come along and hear what you're up to?”

“If I spot a lantern light coming in this direction,” said Ch'en Ching-chi, “I'll have time to get out of the way.”

Ch'en Ching-chi kept on uttering the word “darling” with his mouth, while beneath the single thickness of his gown, his organ, like a bar of red-hot iron, surged forward beneath the fabric. Chin-lien, for her part, couldn't help thrusting her body forward to meet the overheated organ beneath his gown. Unable to restrain herself, Chin-lien lifted Ch'en Ching-chi's gown aside with her hand and firmly gripped his male organ. Ch'en Ching-chi was so flustered that in trying to pull down Chin-lien's waistband, he only succeeded, with a rending sound, in ripping out one of the pleats in her skirt.

"You lousy slave!" expostulated Chin-lien with a laugh. "How clumsy can you get? You're still so unused to snitching your food, and so timorous in going about it, that all you've done, in your flusteration, is to rip out one of the pleats in my skirt."

So saying, she pulled down her own waistband, exposing the mouth of her vagina, lifted one of her legs onto the balustrade, and proceeded to stuff Ch'en Ching-chi's male organ into the orifice. It so happens that, because Chin-lien had been fooling around for some time, her vagina was already sopping wet, so that when Ch'en Ching-chi gave a single forceful thrust, he succeeded immediately in effecting penetration.

"My darling," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "standing up like this, it's hard to get in all the way. What should we do?"

"If you just keep on retracting and thrusting so impetuously," said Chin-lien, "we'll come up with something."

Ch'en Ching-chi was about to resume retracting and thrusting, when they suddenly heard the dogs outside start to bark noisily, and realized that Hsimen Ch'ing must have arrived home from his drinking party. This threw the two of them into such consternation that they disappeared in a puff of smoke.

It turned out to be Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, carrying Hsi-men Ch'ing's official cap and girdle, and his gold-flecked fan, who came into the compound, creating quite a stir as they exclaimed, "We've really been put through our paces today!"

Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü out to investigate, and she observed that the two page boys were both befuddled with drink.

"Why has Father not returned?" Hsiao-yü asked.

"Just now," explained Tai-an, "because we were afraid we wouldn't be able to keep up with his horse on foot, we got Father's permission to start back ahead of him. His horse is fast, so he should be right behind us."

Hsiao-yü went back to the rear compound to report this, and before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the gate and dismounted.

He had originally intended to spend the night in Chin-lien's quarters, but who could have anticipated that he was so drunk that he went into Yüeh-niang's room by mistake.

Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "Tomorrow is the twenty-third, which is a *jen-tzu* day. If I keep him here tonight, it might spoil my opportunity with regard to that important matter tomorrow. Moreover, my period is coming to an end today, so tomorrow it would be more sanitary."

"You're too groggy with drink tonight," she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't want you fooling around here. My period is not quite over yet. It would be better if you slept in someone else's quarters, and came back here tomorrow night."

As she spoke, she pushed Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was smiling bemusedly, out of her room, and he headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters.

Pinching Chin-lien's cheeks, he said to her, "This is the little whore I've been looking for. Just now, I was intending to come over here, but who would have thought that, because I've had a few cups of wine, without knowing what I was doing, I went into the First Lady's room instead."

"What an inveterate oily-mouthed creature you are!" said Chin-lien. "No doubt you'll tell me some story about having originally intended to sleep in Elder Sister's room tomorrow. What a filthy braggart!"



A Tryst between Chin-lien and Ching-chi Is Interrupted

You wouldn't hesitate to tell a bold-faced lie to a Perfected Being. And you expect me to believe you!"

"You crazy oily mouth!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is give people a hard time. That's the way it really is. What reason would I have to lie about it?"

"Just tell me, then," said Chin-lien, "why didn't Elder Sister keep you there tonight?"

"I don't know," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She kept claiming that I was drunk and pushed me out of her room, saying, 'Come back tomorrow night.' So I came over here as fast as I could."

Chin-lien was about to wash her private parts, when Hsi-men Ch'ing reached over to feel her there.

Covering herself with both hands, Chin-lien upbraided him, saying, "You short-life! Cut it out. I've had enough of your tricks around here."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, embracing her with one hand, stuck his other hand into her crotch, where, after feeling it, he said, "You crazy good-for-nothing! How does it happen that, night after night, it's perfectly dry, whereas tonight, it's sopping wet inside? No doubt you've been hankering after a man, so that your vaginal secretions have started to flow."

It so happens that Chin-lien had, in fact, been so preoccupied with Ch'en Ching-chi that she had neglected to wash her private parts. And now that Hsi-men Ch'ing had unintentionally hit upon what was on her mind, her face turned bright red in an instant, and she was reduced to covering up as best she could, half smiling and half objecting, as she bathed her private parts and washed her face before the two of them retired for the night. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Wu Yüeh-niang got up the next morning, it being a *jen-tzu* day, she thought to herself, "As Nun Hsüeh

was about to take her leave, she enjoined me repeatedly, in no uncertain terms, that if I took this potion of hers on a *jen-tzu* day, I would be sure to conceive. Today is a *jen-tzu* day, so I really ought to take her medication. Moreover, it's fortunate that last night:

By a providential coincidence,²⁵ Hsi-men Ch'ing came home drunk and made his way into my room, so I was able to arrange for him to return tonight."

For this reason, Yüeh-niang secretly rejoiced in her heart. Upon arising, early in the morning, after performing her ablutions and completing her toilet, she proceeded to pay obeisance to Buddha and recited the *Sutra of the White-Robed Kuan-yin*.²⁶ It is essential that those who wish to conceive sons should recite this sutra, and that is why Yüeh-niang recited it. Moreover, Nun Wang had also urged her to recite it. The day in question was also a *jen-tzu* day, a day of critical importance. That is why, early in the morning, she closed the door to her room;



Wu Yüeh-niang Recites a Sutra in Quest of Male Progeny

Ignited incense and lit candles,²⁷ and recited this text, before going back to her inner room to fetch the medication.

Instructing Hsiao-yü to heat some wine, she did not take any congee but prepared herself by eating some cakes, biscuits, and the like. First, after having held the nostrum up reverently with both hands, and:

Uttered a prayer to Heaven,²⁸ she dissolved Nun Hsüeh's bolus of medication in the wine, producing a potion, of which:
The exotic fragrance assailed the nostrils,

and finished it off in two or three mouthfuls. When she then turned her attention to the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that Nun Wang had provided, although it had been rendered into powdered form, it nevertheless made her feel somewhat skittish. It exuded a perceptible odor of incineration and was not something easy to swallow.

"If I don't take it," Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "it won't have the desired effect. While, if I do take it, I can't overcome my misgivings. But enough of this:

Once things have come to a head,

They are out of one's control.²⁹

I'll simply have to force myself to swallow it, that's all."

First taking a handful of the talismanic potion and forcing it into her mouth, she urgently swallowed half a bowl of wine and almost regurgitated it, her eyes turning red as she did so. Hastily washing this down with more wine, she still felt as though something were sticking in her throat and followed up with another few mouthfuls of wine. After which she called for some warm tea with which to rinse out her mouth and then lay down on her bed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to come by her room just then and, noticing that the door was closed, called for Hsiao-yü to open it, asking, "How come everything is so quiet, and the door to the room is closed? Could it be that the First Lady is somewhat annoyed³⁰ with me for having left her alone last night?"

"How would I know?" responded Hsiao-yü.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the room and called to her several times, but Yüeh-niang, who had had wine to drink that morning, was fast asleep facing the interior of the bed and did not answer him.

"You lousy slave!" Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Hsiao-yü. "Just now I called to the First Lady and she refused to answer. Why should she do that unless she were annoyed with me?"

Not knowing what to do with himself, he walked out of the room, only to encounter Shu-t'ung coming in, who reported, "Master Ying the Second is outside."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Brother, when you went to Eunuch Director Liu's estate the other day to attend the party hosted by Messrs. An Ch'en and Huang Pao-kuang, were you able to enjoy yourself fully? How late did you continue to drink before the party broke up?"

"I am grateful for the lavish affection the two gentlemen have shown me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When they condescended to visit me on that former occasion, because they were on their way to a party hosted by Prefect Hu Shih-wen, they didn't stay long. But when I arrived at their place, I found that:

Our feelings were genial, our thoughts in accord.³¹

They kept me there for some time and insisted upon my having quite a few cups of wine, right up until the time the night watches began. It was a long way home, and I was so drunk I hardly knew what I was doing."

"For people from other places," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "they are gentlemen of real feeling. You ought to send them something in the way of gifts for the road."

"You've got a point there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

There and then, he summoned Shu-t'ung and told him to fill out a pair of red gift cards, and to direct the people in the rear compound to prepare two equally sumptuous sets of gifts, consisting of litchis, longans, peaches, dates, geese, ducks, legs of lamb, fresh fish, and two jugs of southern wine. He also had him write messages on two of his own calling cards, expressing his gratitude for their hospitality. When these tasks were completed, he called for Shu-t'ung once again and directed him to deliver the gifts himself. Shu-t'ung duly assented and went off on his errand.

At this point, Ying Po-chüeh moved closer to Hsi-men Ch'ing, sat down beside him, and asked, "Do you remember what you said to me the day before yesterday?"

"What is there to remember?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I guess you've been so busy you've forgotten all about it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's what I said to you just before we left when Hsieh Hsi-ta and I were having a drink with you here the day before yesterday."

Hsi-men Ch'ing stared vacantly into space and thought for a while before saying, "It must have been something to do with that affair of Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, wasn't it?"

Ying Po-chüeh responded, with a laugh, "Just as they say:

When the rainwater from the eaves drips down from above:

Every drop hits the mark."

Hsi-men Ch'ing knit his brows and said, "Where would you have me come up with the necessary silver? You saw how it was the other day when I was arranging to take delivery of that salt and was so strapped for cash that I had to borrow five hundred taels of silver from my kinsman Ch'iao Hung in order to complete the transaction. Where would I come up with all this additional silver to invest?"

"In any event," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it's an investment that is bound to be profitable. Why don't you see if you can dig out something from the corner of one of your trunks, or somewhere, to give to them? Brother, you said that yesterday you got an initial payment of two hundred fifty taels from Hsü the Fourth's place outside the city gate, so the remaining half of what they need should be easy enough to get together."

"That's as may be," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but where am I to scrape it up from? You'd better tell them to wait until I've received the entire sum that Hsü the Fourth owes me, and I'll turn it over to them then in a lump sum."

Ying Po-chüeh adopted a serious expression and said, "Brother:

A single word from a gentleman, is like

A single whip stroke to a fleet steed.³²

If a man is untrustworthy,

How can that be tolerated?³³

It would have been better if you had not made that promise to me the day before yesterday. I've already told them that it's:

As certain as certain can be,

they'll get the money today, so what am I to say to them? They have complete faith in your reputation for magnanimity. Over such a trivial matter, would you have these businessmen bad-mouthing you behind your back?"

"If Master Ying the Second says so," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I might as well give it to them, and be done with it."

He then went back to the rear compound, where he got together two hundred thirty taels of silver, and asked Yü-hsiao for the two hundred fifty taels that had been received from Hsü the Fourth's place the day before, which weighed out to a total of exactly four hundred eighty taels.

Coming outside again, he said to Ying Po-chüeh, "I have only been able to scrape together four hundred eighty taels, so I am still twenty taels short. But I can supply some satin piece goods to make up the difference. Will that do?"

"That would make things difficult," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They require ready cash in order to fulfill their part of this contract for the purveying of incense. You don't have any of the best grade of satin piece goods in stock right now, and those pieces of pink satin you do have aren't good enough to fill the bill. You might as well scrape up the ready money, and save me a lot of legwork."

"That's enough! That's enough!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

So saying, he went back inside, weighed out twenty taels of good-quality silver, and told Tai-an to take the whole amount out with him.

Li the Third and Huang the Fourth had been sitting in a neighbor's house for a long time, just waiting for a signal from Ying Po-chüeh before putting in an appearance, and Hsieh Hsi-ta happened to come in at the same time.

Having first greeted Hsieh Hsi-ta, Li the Third and Huang the Fourth saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "On a former occasion we were the recipients of your great kindness, and it is only because the silver that is due us has not yet been disbursed that we have been so dilatory in paying you back. And now, in Tung-p'ing prefecture, there is another contract being let for the purveying of twenty thousand taels worth of incense, and we have once again made bold to ask you for the loan of another five hundred taels of silver, in order to temporarily relieve this:

Eyebrow singeing exigency.³⁴

When we receive the payment for our current contract, we will bring it over to you, without touching so much as a candareen of it, and repay you in full, including the interest due."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Tai-an and sent him to fetch the steelyard from the shop, and invite his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, to join them. After which, he weighed out, first, the twenty-five packets of ten taels each that he had collected from Hsü the Fourth's place, and then, the two hundred fifty taels that he had provided himself, and turned them over to Huang the Fourth and Li the Third. The two of them, after seemingly never ending expressions of gratitude, finally took their leave.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to keep Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta for a further parley, but the two of them had no stomach for an extended visit, wishing, instead, to leave forthwith in order to divvy up the brokerage fee they expected to receive from Li the Third and Huang the Fourth. Claiming falsely to have other engagements, they hastily took their leave, but on their way out, Ying Po-chüeh was pestered by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, who demanded something for themselves with which to buy sweetmeats.

Ying Po-chüeh waved them off with his hand, saying, "I've got nothing for you! I've got nothing for you! This is something I undertook on my own initiative. I didn't bring anything for the likes of you. Dogs of a whore's spawn that you are!" And he and his companion took themselves off.

Who should appear at this juncture but Shu-t'ung, who came in to deliver thank-you notes from Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en and reported, "The two gentlemen protested that they really ought not to accept such gifts from you, but agreed to receive them for fear of offending you. They asked me to convey their gratitude to you, and each of them gave me a tip in a sealed envelope."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to keep these gratuities for himself and also weighed out some silver for the carriers who had been hired to deliver the gifts, and sent them on their way. It being lamp-lighting time already, Hsimen Ch'ing then went into Yüeh-niang's room and sat down.

Yüeh-niang said, "Hsiao-yü tells me that you came into my room earlier today and called to me, but I was asleep at the time and didn't know that you were calling me."

"There you go again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I knew all along that you were not too pleased with me."

"Who says that I'm not pleased with you?" protested Yüeh-niang, and then she ordered Hsiao-yü to prepare some tea and fetch some supper for them to eat.

After downing several cups of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose body was affected by several successive days of heavy drinking, would have been happy enough simply to go to sleep. But since it had been some time since he spent the night in Yüeh-niang's room, he was anxious to please her, and had used some of the Indian monk's ointment, so that his male organ was swollen into the shape of an iron pestle.

When Yüeh-niang saw it, she said out loud, "That Indian monk was so unprincipled that he would spring this kind of frightening trick on someone, would he?"

But:

In her heart she thought to herself,³⁵

"He may have the Indian monk's techniques on his side, but I've got the Nun's transcendent elixir on mine. Something good is bound to come out of this."

Consequently, they both got into bed and spent a pleasurable night together, and it was nearly noon before they got up the next day.

This fact did not fail to attract the attention of P'an Chin-lien, who:

Exercised her lips and wagged her tongue,

to Meng Yü-lou, saying, "The other day, Elder Sister asked me to look up when the next *jen-tzu* day would occur, and that must be

why she was so anxious to sleep with our husband last night. It could hardly be a mere coincidence.”

“Whoever heard of such a thing?” laughed Meng Yü-lou.

As they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing came by, at which Chin-lien grabbed hold of him with one hand and said, “Whoever heard of anyone going to bed so early and getting up so late? The sun is already well on its way toward setting. So where are you off to now?”

Hsi-men Ch'ing was subjected to her bantering for some time, which only had the effect of causing his organ to grow stiff again, so they simply abandoned Meng Yü-lou, leaving her to return to her quarters by herself.

Once Hsi-men Ch'ing had thrust Chin-lien through the portal of her bed, the two of them proceeded to dally with each other in earnest. Ch'un-mei fetched them something to eat, and they ate it together. But no more of this.

To resume our story, ever since Yüeh-niang had overheard Chin-lien criticizing her behind her back for being overprotective of Kuan-ko, she had refrained from visiting him in his room for two days.

Who should appear at this juncture but Li P'ing-erh, who came into her room and told her, “The child keeps on crying, day and night, and suffering from the cold shivers continuously. What are we to do?”

“Do whatever should occur to you,” said Yüeh-niang, “and if his condition improves, it will be all right. You might try making vows to burn incense on his behalf, or even a vow to sacrifice to the gods. Such steps ought to alleviate his condition.”

“The other day,” said Li P'ing-erh, “he was running a fever, and I vowed to make propitiatory offerings to the God of Walls and Moats and the local Tutelary God, and those vows are now due to be fulfilled.”

“That sounds all right,” said Yüeh-niang. “After all, they're your vows to make. But you ought also to invite Dame Liu over for a consultation, and see what she has to suggest.”

Just as Li P'ing-erh was about to take her leave, Yüeh-niang said to her, “Why do you suppose it was that all day yesterday I failed to come over to your place to see the child? It was all because the day before yesterday, after coming to see the child, as I passed by the screen-wall in front of the summer-house, I overheard P'an Chin-lien saying to Meng the Third that since I had no child of my own, I was reduced to playing up to someone else who did. It's no big deal that she should talk such rot, but I was so upset by it for half a day that I was unable to eat anything.”

“What can you expect from that crazy good-for-nothing of a splay-legged whore!” said Li P'ing-erh. “How unprincipled can you get? She's been the frequent recipient of your good intentions. What have you ever done to her that she should be up to such nasty tricks as that?”

“You keep it to yourself,” said Yüeh-niang. “In order to protect yourself from her, you'd better not say a word about it.”

“So that's what happened,” said Li P'ing-erh. “Day before yesterday Yingch'un said that when she went outside she saw her standing there talking to Meng the Third, and that when they saw her, they slipped off pretending to look for the cat.”

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying-ch'un, who came running in, panting for breath, and said, “Mother, you'd better come at once. For no evident reason, Kuan-ko's two eyes have started to turn up incessantly, and there is some white foam dribbling from his mouth.”

Li P'ing-erh was thrown into such consternation that:

Her mouth clamped shut without a word,³⁶ and

She knitted her brows on the verge of tears.

On the one hand, she sent Hsiao-yü to inform Hsi-men Ch'ing, and on the other, she hastily returned to her quarters. When she arrived there, she found that the wet nurse Ju-i and the others had all turned pale.

She had barely had time to assess the situation when Hsi-men Ch'ing also came into the room and, being startled to find that Kuan-ko seemed to be:

Hovering between life and death,

exclaimed, “It looks bad! It looks bad! What are we to do? You women have not been adequately protective of him, allowing him to get to such a state before informing me about it. Now, what is to be done?”

Pointing his finger at Ju-i, he said, “Wet nurse, you've not been taking proper care of him, until, today, it's come to this. If, by any chance, something untoward should occur:

It would not be deemed outlandish,
if you were to be pounded into mincemeat.”

Ju-i was thrown into such consternation by this outburst that she dared not open her mouth, while:

The tears flowed from both her eyes,

and Li P'ing-erh could only gaze at the child while crying to herself.

“Crying won't do any good,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “We might as well invite Shih Cho-kuei, or Plastrancer Shih, to prognosticate on his behalf by applying heat to the plastron of a tortoise shell. Once we've determined what the prognosis for good or ill may be, we can decide what to do next.”

He then asked Shu-t'ung to take out one of his calling cards and fly on his way to request the attendance of Shih Cho-kuei.

When the latter had sat down, Ch'en Ching-chi kept him company for a serving of tea, while Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an:

Lit candles and ignited incense,³⁷

provided some purified water, and set up a table. Hsi-men Ch'ing then came out to greet him and, taking the plastron in his hands:

Uttered a prayer to Heaven,

saluted him, and ushered him into the reception hall, where he placed the plastron on the table. Shih Cho-kuei then took it up in both hands, applied some medication to certain spots on its surface, and applied fire to them, after which they had another cup of tea.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting there, they heard a sharp sound of crepitation as the plastron cracked. Shih Cho-kuei proceeded to examine it and then paused for a while, without saying anything.

“What does it portend for good or ill?” asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

“What sort of problem is it that you are concerned about?” asked Shih Cho-kuei.

"My young son is ill," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How does the general configuration look? Are there sufficient indications for a prognosis or not?"

"The general configuration does not show anything much to worry about at the present time," said Shih Cho-kuei, "but there is reason to fear that later on the malady may recur and linger on, so that there will be no possibility of a complete cure. When parents divine about their children or grandchildren, the lines for their children or grandchildren should not be unfavorable. Moreover, you see that the line for the Red Bird has been markedly disturbed, which indicates that sacrifices should be offered to the Red-Robed Guardian, the God of Walls and Moats, etc. You should slaughter a pig and a sheep to sacrifice to them. In addition you should take offerings of three bowls of soup and rice, together with effigies of one prematurely deceased male and two prematurely deceased females, and dispatch them to escort the malevolent influences responsible for the malady off to the south in a straw boat."

Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him for his services with a mace of silver, at which Shih Cho-kuei, who was a past master in the arts of flattery and ingratiation, bent his body into the shape of a shrimp and departed with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and said, "Just now, the plastrancer said the general configuration indicates that the malady may be protracted, and that we should be on our guard for recurrences, but that in the present exigency we should sacrifice to the Lady of the God of Walls and Moats."

"I made a vow to that effect the other day," said Li P'ing-erh, "but I haven't fulfilled it yet, because the child has been such a source of trouble."

"Can such things be?"

exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he immediately ordered Tai-an to go summon Ch'ien T'an-huo, or Phlegm-fire Ch'ien, a Taoist healer, experienced at burning petitions to the gods.

Tai-an promptly went out the gate on this errand.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then joined Li P'ing-erh, who embraced Kuan-ko and said, "My child, I'm going to sacrifice to the gods on your behalf, and if you get any better, I can only:

Thank Heaven and thank Earth."³⁸

No sooner had she said this, than:

Strange to relate,

the pupils of the child's eyes fell back into their normal position, as he cuddled up against his mother's body and fell asleep.

"How very strange!" said Li P'ing-erh to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No sooner did I promise to sacrifice to the gods on his behalf, than he got significantly better."

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing feel in his heart that:

The stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground.

When Yüeh-niang heard about it, she also was:

Unable to contain her pleasure,

and sent Ch'in-t'ung off to summon Dame Liu.

Dame Liu lost no time in bustling on her way, with:

One step high, and

One step low.

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not have any faith in such female practitioners but, out of his love for Kuan-ko, felt that he was compelled to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Dame Liu headed straight for the kitchen, where she proceeded to rub the door of the stove.

"This old crone must be delirious," Ying-ch'un laughed at her. "Rather than attending to Kuan-ko, what do you think you're doing heading into the kitchen instead, and rubbing the door of the stove?"

"Little slave," responded Dame Liu, "what do you know about it? That's enough of your lip. Old-timer that I am:

I've got three hundred sixty days for every year that I'm older than you.

As I came along the road, I fear I may have come in contact with some noxious influences, which I have sought to counteract by approaching the door of the stove."

Ying-ch'un made a face at her but, on hearing that Li P'ing-erh was calling for her, accompanied Dame Liu to her quarters.

When Dame Liu had kowtowed, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who needed to order Tai-an to weigh out the silver with which to purchase the necessary items for the offerings to the gods, and slaughter the pig and sheep for this purpose, strode out of the room.

"Is Kuan-ko any better?" asked Dame Liu.

"On the contrary, his condition is critical," said Li P'ing-erh. "That's why I have invited you over for a consultation."

"As I recommended on a former day," said Dame Liu, "once you made an offering to the General of the Five Ways, he was all right. On the present occasion, judging by his coloration, if you offer propitiatory rites to the Tutelary Gods of the Three Worlds, he should recover."

"Just now," said Li P'ing-erh, "Shih Cho-kuei suggested that we ought to make an offering to the Lady of the God of Walls and Moats."

"He is consistently off the mark," said Dame Liu. "What does he know about it? This is a case of convulsions brought on by a fright. The best thing to do would be for me to exorcise the fright."

"How would you exorcise the fright?" asked Li P'ing-erh.

"Sister Ying-ch'un," said Dame Liu, "if you go fetch some rice and dip out a bowl of water for me, I'll show you how it's done."

Ying-ch'un duly went to fetch the rice and water for her.

Dame Liu proceeded to take a high-stemmed earthenware goblet and fill it to capacity with grains of rice. She then groped an old green chiffon handkerchief out of her sleeve, wrapped the rice from the goblet up in it, and kneaded it with her hands, after which she proceeded to shake it in the air as she moved it back and forth over the length of Kuan-ko's body, from his face and head to his hands

and feet.

Kuan-ko was asleep at the time, and the wet nurse said, "Be careful not to wake him up."

Dame Liu gave a negative wave of her hand and said in a low voice, "I know. I know."

After moving the rice-filled handkerchief back and forth for a while, she began to mutter something incomprehensible under her breath, but one or two passages were a little more audible than the rest.

Li P'ing-erh managed to catch the words, "Affrighted by Heaven, affrighted by Earth, affrighted by humans, affrighted by ghosts, affrighted by cats, affrighted by dogs," at which point she said, "It all started when the child was frightened by a cat."

When Dame Liu had finished her incantation, she shook open the handkerchief, placed the goblet on the table, and contemplated the results for a while. Then, selecting two grains of rice from the heap created by shaking it out of the handkerchief, she dropped them into the bowl of water, by doing which she was able to prognosticate that the malady would be cured by the end of the month. She likewise recommended that the effigies of one prematurely deceased male and two prematurely deceased females should be dispatched to escort the malevolent influences responsible for the malady off in a southeasterly direction. But she argued that, rather than sacrificing to the God of Walls and Moats, she should make a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God.

Li P'ing-erh was perplexed by this, but finally said, "I'll just make an additional propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God. That won't be a problem."

She then told Ying-ch'un to go outside and tell Hsi-men Ch'ing that Dame Liu, after "prognosticating with a bowl of water," had said that they ought to make an offering to the local Tutelary God; and that, since it was too late to go to the temple of the God of Walls and Moats tonight anyway, they should lay in all the proper offerings, and be prepared to hold a devout ceremony in the morning.

Hsi-men Ch'ing consequently instructed Tai-an to take care of procuring all the necessary paraphernalia for the sacrifice, as well as the pig and sheep, and be prepared to go take care of it in the morning; and that, in addition, he should purchase what was needed for an offering to the local Tutelary God, including fried rice and cocoon-shaped pastries, earthenware writing brushes and ink cakes, as well as live sparrows, loaches, eels, and the like, to be released in honor of the occasion.

No item was left unsupplied;

Each object was of the best.

Dame Liu then took leave of Li P'ing-erh's place and headed inside to Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, where Yüeh-niang kept her for supper.

To resume our story, when Ch'ien T'an-huo arrived, he sat down in the small reception hall, and Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an hastily prepared to assist him in the ceremony of making a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God. As soon as Ch'ien T'an-huo had finished his tea, he asked for the purport of the petition he was to present, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had Shu-t'ung write it out for him.

Ch'ien T'an-huo then donned his collapsible thunder cap, put on his customary vestments:

Brandished his sword with philter in hand,
started to pace the dipper, and began to recite the altar-cleansing invocation. The invocation read:

From the mysterious void of the grotto heavens,
To the refulgent realm of the great primordial,
May the prepotent gods of the eight directions,
Assure my consonance with the forces of nature.
These Numinous Treasure talismans,
Are addressed to the Nine Heavens.
The celestial net extends its awe-inspiring sway,
Over the mysterious realms of grottoes and stars,
Decapitating demons and shackling monsters,³⁹
Killing devils by the myriads and thousands.
This sanctified invocation of the polestar,
This jade writ of the primordial beginning,
When duly incanted but a single time,
Dispels disease and lengthens years;
When dispatched to the Five Sacred Peaks,
And made known throughout the Eight Seas,
The demon-kings will be compelled,
To stand as bodyguards at my side;
Misfortune and pestilence will be dispelled,
And the force of the Tao remain ever present,⁴⁰

etc., etc.

He then asked the ordainer of the ceremony to burn incense. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly washed his hands, rinsed out his mouth, donned his official cap and girdle, and put on his kneepads. Sun Hsüeh-o, Meng Yü-lou, Li Chiaoerh, and Li Kuei-chieh all helped him on with his clothes, clucking with approbation as they did so. When Hsi-men Ch'ing emerged and proceeded to burn incense and pay obeisance to Buddha, a page boy followed at his heels to straighten his garments. It was all done with conspicuous formality.

On seeing that his patron had come outside, Ch'ien T'an-huo started to declaim his texts twice as loudly as before, while the womenfolk, concealing themselves behind a standing screen, peeked at Hsi-men Ch'ing, pointed at Ch'ien T'an-huo, and fell into a heap with laughter. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the sound of their raucous laughter, kneeling as he was before the effigy of the god, he was not in a position to say anything about it but could only survey the scene with his eyes. Only after Shu-t'ung became aware of the situation and made a gesture with his mouth did the womenfolk quiet down a bit.

Meanwhile, Chin-lien, who was coming out from the rear compound by herself, upon turning a corner, suddenly ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who fell to kissing her and feeling her breasts.

Groping a handful of sweetmeats out of her sleeve, and giving them to him, she went on to ask, "Would you like to have a drink of distilled spirits?"

"I wouldn't mind having a little," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

Consequently, he allowed Chin-lien to take advantage of this interval during which the others were busy, by pulling him into her quarters, and telling Ch'un-mei to shut the door.

After sharing a couple of cups with him, she said, "You'd better get going. I'm afraid someone might turn up, which would be the death of me."

Ch'en Ching-chi wanted to kiss her again, but Chin-lien said, "You indecent short-life! Aren't you afraid that the maidservants will catch on?"

Then she facetiously gave him a resounding whack, upon which Ch'en Ching-chi prepared to make his escape. Chin-lien told Ch'un-mei to precede him outside, and she saw him safely out of the way. Truly:

With two hands he tore open the road between life and death;

Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.

Chin-lien also went outside at the same time to see if the coast was clear. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in paying his respects to the local Tutelary God, had been kneeling for what seemed like half a day, before he was able to get to his feet again. Thus far, the ceremony had only progressed as far as the initial invocation, and Ch'ien T'an-huo was about to proceed to the ritual of penance.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went behind the standing screen and admonished the womenfolk there, saying, "You've got to stop giggling like that. It's so contagious that several times I've barely been able to prevent myself from following suit."

"That Ch'ien T'an-huo," said the womenfolk, "is no more than a paper-burning ghoul. He's not a proper Taoist priest. When he dons his collapsible cap and puts on his vestments, he's being both bold-faced and shameless. In the course of his babbling, who knows how many buckets of stinking spittle he's managed to expectorate."

Hsi-men Ch'ing said:

"Sacrifice to the gods as if the gods are present.⁴¹

You really oughtn't to bad-mouth or ridicule him so cruelly."

Ch'ien T'an-huo then requested his presence for the ritual of penance, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the carpeted altar space. Ch'ien T'an-huo, having started off with the introit, proceeded to recite the text of the ritual of penance, beginning with the statement of his sincere intentions in seeking an audience. As he did so, the spittle around the edges of his mouth:

Curled in and curled out,
while his head:

Bobbed up and bobbed down,

like that of the kowtowing bug, or click beetle, which caused the eavesdropping women to fall into a heap with laughter. Hsi-men Ch'ing was quite unable to keep up with the pace of his kowtowing. Ch'ien T'an-huo addressed himself to a different Divine Lord with each kowtow, but by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing had performed one kowtow, he had already kowtowed to several additional Divine Lords. Thereupon, being unable to keep track of things, he simply fell to kowtowing at random, which caused the eavesdropping women to laugh even harder.

Just at this juncture, Hsiao-yü came out to invite Li Kuei-chieh to the rear compound for dinner, saying, "The First Lady is sitting all by herself back there, engaged in idle chatter with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Dame Liu, while out here the rest of you are having a merry time of it."

Li Chiao-erh and Li Kuei-chieh promptly went back inside, and the rest of them all wished to follow suit, with the exception of P'an Chin-lien, who wanted to continue eavesdropping, until, in the end, when she saw that they had all gone inside, she felt compelled to come inside as well.

Wu Yüeh-niang remarked to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "If you have a mind to sacrifice to the gods, you ought to be appropriately devout about it. What's the point of having all these crazy womenfolk crowding around out there? It's not as though there were any real spectacle to be seen, such as live lions devouring each other, or anything like that."

She had hardly finished speaking when Li Kuei-chieh came in to join Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ta-chieh for dinner. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had kowtowed until his entire body was bathed with sweat, when he came inside, took off his robe and cap, boots and girdle, went in to Kuan-ko's bedside, and caressed him, saying, "My son, I've made a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God on your behalf."

He then turned to Li P'ing-erh and said, "It's amazing. Come and feel his forehead. It's a lot cooler than before. Heaven be thanked! Heaven be thanked!"

Li P'ing-erh laughed, saying:

"Strange as it may seem,

ever since I promised to make a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God, he's been getting better. Right now, his fever has receded, his eyes are no longer turning up, and his cold shivers have subsided somewhat. How can you say that Dame Liu is without merit?"

"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well follow up by completing the sacrifice at the temple of the God of Walls and Moats."

"The only problem is that his father has been wearing himself out," said Li P'ing-erh. "You'd better dry yourself off, and have some dinner before you go."

"If I stay here, I'm afraid I'll disturb the child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. I'll go somewhere else to eat."

Upon making his way to Chin-lien's place, he sat down in a chair and said, "The area around my kidneys hurts as though they were about to drop out."

Chin-lien laughed, saying, "Why should anyone with such a filial heart have to feel pain? Right now, you might as well get someone to do the kowtowing in your place."

"That makes sense. That makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then told Ch'un-mei to summon Ch'in-t'ung and instruct him, "Go invite Son-in-law Ch'en to do the kowtowing, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on Father's behalf."

Who would have thought that Ch'en Ching-chi, after having downed several cups of distilled spirits in Chin-lien's quarters, was afraid that his face was red enough for the page boys to spot, so he endeavored to account for it by buying some weak wine, and drinking several cups of it in the shop. His capacity, however, was inadequate, so that he soon became drunk and fell asleep where he was, snoring stertorously.

Ch'in-t'ung found it impossible to rouse him and flew back like an arrow to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "He's fast asleep there, and I was unable to rouse him."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was annoyed by this and exclaimed, "How unprincipled can you get? Quite aside from his neglect of the family business, what sort of a spectacle does it present to our neighbors for him to fall asleep so early in the day?"

He then told Ch'un-mei to go to the First Lady's room and say to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "Father has developed a sore back from all the kowtowing and asked our son-in-law to continue the kowtowing, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on his behalf. He wants to know why it is that he refuses to come, but insists on remaining there asleep?"

"What a hopeless case he is!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and she started out of the room.

Yüeh-niang, however, sent Hsiao-yü to go to the shop and wake up Ch'en Ching-chi.

Still rubbing his eyes, Ch'en Ching-chi came back to the rear compound, where he saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "What's the big rush in calling for me, as though my life depended on it?"

"You've been asked to participate in the propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on Father's behalf," explained Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Just now, when Ch'in-t'ung went to summon you, you failed to respond, and now you're trying to give me a hard time about it. This time it was Mother who sent Hsiao-yü to summon you. In any case, you'd better start kowtowing, hadn't you?"

Thereupon:

Half pushing him and half supporting him, she hustled Ch'en Ching-chi out to the reception hall, after which she returned to her room. Hsiao-yü first reported this development back to Yüeh-niang, and then to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to continue waiting upon Ch'ien T'an-huo until the ceremony was completed, and then went to sleep on Chin-lien's bed. But no more of this.

To resume our story, it was only when Ch'en Ching-chi arrived in the reception hall and saw that it was:

Blazing with lamps and candles,⁴²

that he finally sobered up. Opening his eyes wide, he observed that Ch'ien T'an-huo was waiting to receive his "flower-scattering fee" for officiating over the ceremony. After they had exchanged the customary greetings, Ch'ien T'an-huo took the offering of soup and rice and, telling Ch'in-t'ung to light the way, proceeded to the door of Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where Ying-ch'un took it inside, along with some incense, and gave it to Ju-i, who blew on it on Kuan-ko's behalf, before handing it back out again. Ch'ien T'an-huo:

Alternately impersonating gods and ghosts,

recited a spell over it, after which he came back to the reception hall to preside over the ceremony of seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits. After Ch'en Ching-chi had kowtowed for a while, Ch'ien T'an-huo duly finished seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits and dispatched the proclamation, along with a talismanic transcription of the hexagram *ch'ien*.⁴³

Having done so, he said, "Once the proclamation has been delivered to the Gate of Heaven, his condition should improve within a day or two. Even if the malady should recur, it won't amount to anything."

By the time Ch'ien T'an-huo had finished the rituals of releasing the living creatures provided for the occasion, seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits, offering a libation, and dismissing the gods:

His mouth was dry, his stomach was empty,

and he was ready to have something to eat. Tai-an cleared away the utensils, and Ch'in-t'ung set up a table so that Ch'en Ching-chi could keep him company in consuming a share of the foodstuffs that remained from the preceding ceremony. Ch'ien T'an-huo was profuse in his thanks, and, after he had departed, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to his quarters. Li P'ing-erh also sent Ying-ch'un to deliver some of the leftover fruits and other sacrificial offerings to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room, for which she expressed her gratitude. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Dame Liu, who was being entertained in Yüeh-niang's quarters, thanked her for her hospitality and took her leave. She had just emerged from the main gate when whom should she encounter but Ch'ien T'an-huo, who staggered up behind her, holding a lantern, and reeking of alcohol.

"Master Ch'ien," said Dame Liu, "you really ought to share that 'flower-scattering fee' with me, shouldn't you?"

"What's that got to do with you?" demanded Ch'ien T'an-huo.

"It was my 'prognosticating with a bowl of water' that set up this job for you, old man," said Dame Liu. "Are you totally:

Unconscious of right and wrong?

The next time the opportunity comes my way, I won't recommend you."

Ch'ien T'an-huo adamantly refused, saying, "What an inveterate oily mouth you are, you old whore! You're shooting your mouth off without foundation. Since when did you ever recommend me? He's a longstanding client of mine. Whoever heard of sharing a 'flower-scattering fee'?"

Dame Liu pointed her finger at him and cursed, saying, "May you starve to death, you lousy paper-burning ghou! before you ever expect another favor from me!"

The two of them mixed it up together, continuing their verbal dual for some time before finally separating. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing got up the next morning, he ordered a page boy to follow him and set out for the temple

of the God of Walls and Moats. The carriers of the pig and sheep carried the pig and sheep, while the bearer of his official cap and girdle bore his official cap and girdle. He went straight into the temple, throwing the Taoist priests there into a flurry as they put down a carpet and proceeded to intone the memorial. Hsi-men Ch'ing donned his official cap and girdle and, when he had finished paying obeisance to the god, proceeded to divine about Kuan-ko's condition by means of selecting a prognosticatory bamboo stick, which he then asked a Taoist priest to interpret.⁴⁴ The priest took the bamboo stick and, after tea had been served, went on to interpret it.

The inscription on the stick in question indicated medium good luck, and the priest interpreted it by saying, "The party who is ill should recover, but, in order to guard against a recurrence, it is appropriate that you should take additional precautions."

After distributing the "incense money" for the ceremony, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home. When he dismounted and came inside, he found Ying Po-chüeh sitting in the summerhouse.

"Have a seat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go inside and come right out."

He then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and told her about how he had consulted the bamboo sticks on behalf of Kuan-ko:

Thus and thus, and

So and so.

After doing which, he went straight back to the summerhouse and said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Was the brokerage fee you received for that transaction the other day adequate? You really ought to treat me to something or other."

Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "Hsieh Hsi-ta also made a little something out of it. Why should I alone be expected to treat you? But that's all right. I'll buy some things for Brother to eat, that's all."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Who wants to eat anything of yours? I was only testing you."

"That being the case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "inasmuch as you went to the temple today with a pig and a sheep, there must be quite a lot in the way of sacrificial offerings left over. Since your younger brother is here, why don't you share some of the bounty with me?"

"You've got a point there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then summoned Ch'in-t'ung to go invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to come over so they could enjoy it together and, at the same time, sent directions to the kitchen to prepare the foodstuffs in question and bring them out so he could share them with Brother Ying the Second over a cup of wine.

Ying Po-chüeh seated himself to wait for the arrival of Hsieh Hsi-ta, but he failed to show up, so he finally said, "Why don't we go ahead and settle down to it? Who has the patience to wait for such a slippery operator?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to enjoy a drink together.

When Ch'in-t'ung returned, he reported, "Master Hsieh is not at home."

"What took you so long?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I went looking all over for him," said Ch'in-t'ung.

Ying Po-chüeh then initiated a game of forfeits, the import of which was the wish for Kuan-ko's recovery, which pleased Hsi-men Ch'ing so much he was:

Unable to contain his delight.

"I am so constantly imposing on your hospitality," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that I really:

Feel uneasy at heart.

Tomorrow or the next day, I would like to play a paltry role as host in inviting the members of our brotherhood to share a cup of wine with you. How would that be?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "So, having scrounged a little something in the way of a brokerage fee, you're ready to squander your silver. But there's no need for you to lay out anything. I've got this pig and sheep left over, which I'll donate to you in order to supply the necessary ingredients."

Ying Po-chüeh thanked him, saying, "I feel that you're doing more than friendship requires."

"As for the singing girls and the boy actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll leave those arrangements to you."

"That goes without saying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The only thing is, there'll be no one to wait on us. What are we to do?"

"We are all brothers, after all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The servants of any one of us will do as well as another. We might as well make use of Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an from my place."

"That will take care of everything," said Ying Po-chüeh.

After drinking a while longer, he said farewell and departed. Truly:

Even if you were to drink all day for a hundred years,

It would only amount to thirty-six thousand occasions.⁴⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 54

YING PO-CHÜEH CONVENES HIS FRIENDS

IN A SUBURBAN GARDEN;

JEN HOU-CH'I DIAGNOSES AN ILLNESS

FOR A POWERFUL FAMILY

Whether the morrow will be overcast or clear
is not possible to predict;¹
As the saying goes, "The pinnacle of delight
begets sorrow and distress."
While the gallivanting youth is captivated by
the red thoroughfares;
The neglected damsel vents her resentment by
her green gauze window.
Having just visited Apricot Blossom Village²
to procure vintage wine;
One must now resort to the Orange Tree Well³
to seek a rare prescription.
How many are the occasions for sorrow and joy
in the life of man;
Yet routinely the spring breeze gives way to
a spell of frost.

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing got out of bed in Chin-lien's room the next morning, he told Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to deliver the pig's feet and mutton to Ying Po-chüeh's home. When the two page boys arrived on this errand, Ying Po-chüeh was just coming home from inviting the other guests and, upon seeing them, went into the house, where he wrote a reply, couched in terms that were:

Half demanding and half inviting,
and read:

Yesterday, I imposed egregiously on your hospitality, and now I am once again the recipient of your lavish magnanimity. Thank you. Thank you. At this moment, I pray that my elder brother will deign to visit my humble abode, so that we may proceed together upon a pleasure excursion to the suburbs.

When he had finished writing it, he came outside and was about to hand it to Tai-an, when Tai-an said, "There's no need for you to write a note in reply. Father sent the two of us to wait on you here, so we're not going back."

Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "It's hardly right for me to put you two familiar oily mouths to so much trouble. You'll be the death of me yet." Upon saying which, he put the note back into his sleeve.

"Master Two," said Tai-an, "where are you going to be holding your drinking party today? Shouldn't we start setting the tables out? They're covered with dust."

"A fine one you are!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I was just going to wipe them off. We'll begin by setting things up for an ordinary repast here at my place, after which, we'll repair to a suburban garden somewhere and enjoy ourselves there."

"It makes a lot of sense to eat at home first," said Ch'in-t'ung. It will save you the trouble of having to eat again once you get there. The only things we'll have to take with us, then, are the partitioned picnic boxes, the wine, and the saucers."

"The two of you are real smart asses, aren't you," remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "What you say just happens to coincide with my own crude ideas. I imagine:

You've been bored into so often, both day and night,
That the holes in your smart asses have been reamed out."⁴

"There's no need to bandy idle words," said Tai-an. "We'll help you get things ready."

To this Ying Po-chüeh responded, "That is what could be said to describe:

Three shrines to the goddess Kuan-yin lined up in a row:

Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!"⁵

Just as the two page boys had completed 70 or 80 percent of their preparations, who should come swaggering through the gate but Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai.

After saluting Ying Po-chüeh with clasped hands, he caught sight of Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an and exclaimed, "These two little darlings are certainly playing up to their Master Two."

"Don't you be jealous now," responded Ying Po-chüeh, at which everyone had a good laugh.

"Who all have you invited today, Brother?" asked Scrounger Pai.

"Only the members of our brotherhood are getting together," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It will be just like a meeting of the club. No one else has been invited."

"That's great," said Scrounger Pai. "What I am most put off by is having to drink with people I don't know. If we have a little gathering of the members of our brotherhood today, it will be a perfect occasion for drinking wine and having fun together. But the party will not be complete without the company of singing girls, along with Li Ming and Wu Hui, to play and sing for us, and help us down with our wine."

"There's no need for you to instruct me on that head," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You're talking to someone who knows the score, after all. Surely you don't mean to suggest that I would arrange for us to merely share a melancholy drink together, and then call it a day. When have you ever known me to do anything like that?"

"That's fine. That's fine," said Scrounger Pai. "Leave it to you, old hand that you are. The only thing is, in a little while, if the occasion should arise, don't make me drink too many forfeits of wine. The other night I had a little too much of some fiery spirits, and my throat is still as sore as can be. I'd better confine myself to tea, and rice, and vermicelli soup."

Ying Po-chüeh said:

"The best cure for a hangover is a dose of wine.

You might as well have a little. What harm can it do? The other day I also had a rather sore throat, and, after downing a few cups of wine, it felt much better. You'd better take this prescription of mine. It's absolutely marvelous."

"Brother," said Scrounger Pai, "so far, you've only proposed a cure for my sore throat. You don't happen to have a cure for my stomach, do you?"

"I imagine," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that you haven't had any breakfast."

"That's not far off the mark," said Scrounger Pai.

"What am I to do?" said Ying Po-chüeh, and he ran inside and came out with a saucer of cakes, a saucer of sandalwood-flavored biscuits, and a pot of tea for Scrounger Pai's consumption.

Scrounger Pai polished off the sandalwood-flavored biscuits:

One per mouthful,

and praised them, saying, "These biscuits are great."

"The cakes are not bad either," said Ying Po-chüeh.

Scrounger Pai, audibly smacking his lips as he did so, went on to finish them off as well. It became apparent at this juncture that Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an had finished the task of getting the utensils together, cleaning the windows, and wiping off the tables.

"Everything is in proper order," said Scrounger Pai. "The only thing is that our brothers have not all shown up yet. The earlier we forgo the more fun we can have. Why should they insist on skulking at home this way? What are they up to?"

Just as Ying Po-chüeh was gazing outside, whom should he see but Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, who made his way into the room and was met by Ch'in-t'ung, coming out with a serving of tea.

After Cadger Ch'ang had saluted the company with clasped hands, he looked at Ch'in-t'ung and said, "So you're here, are you?"

Ch'in-t'ung:

Smiled but did not respond.⁶

After finishing their tea, the three of them had just stood up to stretch their legs when Scrounger Pai noticed that there was a go board on the cabinet and said to Cadger Ch'ang, "I'll play a game of go with you."

"I'm still overheated from walking over here just now," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I was about to loosen my clothing and fan myself, and now you want me to play a game of go. Well all right, I'll play a casual game with you if you like."

Having said which, they took down the go board and began to play a game of go.

"Is the loser going to treat the rest of us?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"We're putting our elder brother to enough trouble today," said Scrounger Pai. "Winner takes all would be a better way to do it. It's more convenient and would save us the need to pretend to be hungry when there's more than we can eat. Winner takes all is better all the way round."

"I'm the host," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so I won't participate. The two of you can surely come up with something to treat each other with, can't you?"

Everyone laughed at this.

"Now that we're agreed," said Cadger Ch'ang, "shall we play for objects, or for silver?"

"I didn't happen to bring any silver with me," said Scrounger Pai. "All I have here is a fan, which I pawned for two or three mace of silver and have only recently been able to redeem."

"I've got an embroidered velour handkerchief here that I won from somebody else," said Cadger Ch'ang. "It's worth a good deal, but I guess I'd be willing to hazard it."

The two of them together handed over their stakes to Ying Po-chüeh, who, upon examining them, saw that one of them was a gold-flecked folding fan, with plain bamboo slats, decorated with a painting and an accompanying poem, though the state of the slats indicated its age; while the other was a brand new embroidered handkerchief.

"They'll do," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Go ahead and play."

Ying Po-chüeh held onto the stakes while the two of them faced off against each other and began their game. Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an, seeing that their master was not present, went back and forth incessantly behind their chairs to look on as they played.

"Little oily mouths," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've a mind to ask if you wouldn't brew another cup of tea for me?"

Ch'in-t'ung surreptitiously made a face at Tai-an but duly headed to the back of the house to heat the tea.

To resume our story, Scrounger Pai and Cadger Ch'ang were fairly evenly matched at go, but Cadger Ch'ang had a slight edge. Scrounger Pai was an inveterate reneger. As they were playing, lo and behold, a block of Scrounger Pai's stones was on the verge of being taken, and Cadger Ch'ang anticipated that he might renege.

Sure enough, Scrounger Pai wanted to retract several of his moves, so he knocked the last few stones Cadger Ch'ang had played

aside with one hand, saying, "That won't do. That won't do. I didn't mean to make that move."

"Brother, come here. This conduct is unacceptable," exclaimed Cadger Ch'ang.

Ying Po-chüeh came running out, saying, "What happened? What's the row all about?"

"The last three or four stones he played were ill-considered moves," said Cadger Ch'ang, "and now he wants to retract them. That isn't fair. Brother, you be the judge. How can one be so nonchalant about such things?"

Scrounger Pai's face turned crimson, the blue veins on his temples became distended, and saliva spurted all over his face, as he shouted, "I hadn't yet made my move when he suddenly played his stone. I was just trying to get a good view of the configuration when he began moving his hand back and forth over the board, which confused me so much that:

My eyes were playing tricks on me.²

I was just in the process of making a move, and my hand had not even let go of the stone, when he claimed that I was reneging. You decide. How can he claim that I was doing anything wrong?"

"As for the move in question," said Ying Po-chüeh, "we might as well compromise by letting you play it where you like, without calling it a case of reneging. But you'd better not do that kind of thing again."

"All right," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I'll let you renege on that move. But I won't let you grab any stones of mine with impunity in the future."

"You're a perennial loser yourself," said Scrounger Pai, "yet you have the nerve to criticize me."

As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh, also showed up, and Ch'in-t'ung brought him some tea.

When he had drunk it, he said, "You two go ahead and finish your game. I'll look on while you play."

As he was observing the game, Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu, also came into the house and, after the conventional amenities about the weather had been exchanged, asked, "What have they staked on this game?"

Ying Po-chüeh brought out the two objects in question and showed them to the assembled company, at which, they all said, "In that case, they must see the game to its conclusion."

"Brother Nine," said Scrounger Pai, "the game is as good as over. What are you pondering over?"

Cadger Ch'ang was still engaged in scrutinizing the situation, while Heartless Wu and Tagalong Hsieh made a bet with each other on the side.

Tagalong Hsieh said, "Brother Nine has won."

"He's already lost," said Heartless Wu. "How can you claim he's won? Let's bet a cup of wine on it."

"Just you watch while yours truly wraps up the victory," said Cadger Ch'ang.

Scrounger Pai's face turned crimson, and he said, "You don't mean to say that I've already ceded this fan to you, do you?"

"That's about it," responded Cadger Ch'ang.

Thereupon, the end game having been completed, they proceeded to count up the stones. Scrounger Pai had taken possession of five areas on the board, while Cadger Ch'ang had taken only two.

Scrounger Pai, however, had forfeited three stones to Cadger Ch'ang and muttered to himself, "It was those three moves that cost me the game."

When he hurriedly counted up the stones in his possession, he found that he had lost by five stones.

"Just what I predicted," said Tagalong Hsieh, and, pointing at Heartless Wu, he continued, "You owe me the consumption of a cup of wine. In a little while you'll have to pay me off by drinking it."

Heartless Wu:

Smiled but did not respond.

Ying Po-chüeh took the fan, along with the handkerchief that he had originally pledged, and turned them over to Cadger Ch'ang, who tucked the handkerchief back into his sleeve and then made a show of opening the fan and critically evaluating the poem and the painting on it. Everyone had a laugh at this.

Tai-an then came running in from outside to report some new arrivals, who turned out to be Wu Yin-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan. The two of them:

Tugging each other by the hand,

came in laughing merrily and saluted each member of the gathering with a deep bow. Scrounger Pai expressed the wish to play another game of go but only elicited the laughter of the company.

"That's enough of that," said Ying Po-chüeh. "As soon as our elder brother arrives, and we've had something to eat, we'll head for a garden in the suburbs. How long do you intend to play? Don't start another game."

Thereupon, Ch'in-t'ung cleared away the stones, and they all had a cup of tea.

"Our elder brother ought to be here by now," said Ying Po-chüeh. "We oughtn't to delay our departure too long, or we won't have time to really enjoy ourselves."

He had hardly finished speaking when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, dressed to befit the occasion, and accompanied by four page boys. The members of the company all got up from their places to welcome him and, after exchanging the customary amenities, offered him a seat, while the two singing girls kowtowed to him, and Li Ming and Wu Hui also showed up and came in to kowtow.

Ying Po-chüeh then urged Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to bring in eight diminutive picnic saucers. There was one saucer of squash julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of an assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of fagara marinated in soy sauce, one saucer of corydalis sprinkled with strong vinegar, one saucer of candied garlic, one saucer of bamboo shoots preserved in fermented mash, one saucer of Chinese cabbage seasoned with red pepper, one saucer of Ta-t'ung ginger in a preservative sauce, and a saucer of fragrant mushrooms. Once these appetizers had been properly laid out, the two page boys, observing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had joined the company, were more careful than ever, feeling the need, more than before, to be as attentive as a groom at the horse's head.

When Ying Po-chüeh noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was observing the way they went about setting out the utensils, he said, "I am indebted to the two of them for taking care of a host of matters, and thereby saving me a lot of trouble."

"I fear they may not be up to the task of waiting upon you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They're extremely adept at it," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"As the saying goes," remarked Tagalong Hsieh:

"Under an effective commander there are no incompetent troops."⁸

Once they've undergone the proper training, it's only natural that they should perform satisfactorily."

The two page boys, having laid out the appetizers, brought out a large flagon of wine, after which, in uninterrupted succession, they served up twenty bowls of delicacies to go with it, including diced roast rump of pork, seasoned with garlic and designed to resemble litchi nuts; braised mutton, seasoned with spring onions, pepper, and cinnamon; roast fish; roast chicken; glazed duck; pork tripe; and the like. Altogether, there were too many culinary specialties to enumerate in detail.

It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh, in the course of his sponging at other people's tables, had picked up some pointers about the art of cooking, with the result that:

Every single dish was done to perfection;

There was not one that was not marvelous.

The members of the company all picked up their chopsticks and proceeded to gorge themselves, making a gobbling sound as they did so. After several large cups of wine had been consumed, the rice was served. Han Chin-ch'uan was on a vegetarian diet that did not permit her to eat anything with meat in it, so she only picked at the appetizers.

"Today is neither the first nor the fifteenth of the month," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so what are you being so fastidious about? Once upon a time, there was a person who had been a vegetarian all his life. When he died and went before King Yama in the nether world, he said, 'I've been a vegetarian all my life, and expect to be reborn as a human being of good status.' 'How is one to know whether you confined yourself to vegetarian fare or not?' said King Yama. 'We'll have to cut open your belly to find out.' When he was cut open, all they found was a bellyful of saliva. It turns out that every time he had seen anyone else eating meat, he had started to salivate."

Everyone doubled over with laughter at this.

"Where do you come up with these annoying turns of yours?" said Han Chin-ch'uan. "Aren't you afraid of having your tongue plucked out in Hell?"⁹

"Only little whores like you have their tongues plucked out in Hell," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The charge being that when they kiss their tongues are overly active."

Everyone had a laugh at this.

"Let's set out on our excursion to the suburbs, shall we?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"That would be really great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Everyone else agreed that it would be great.

Ying Po-chüeh then asked Tai-an and the other servants to take charge of the two picnic boxes and a jug of wine, and carry them down to the riverside, where a small boat was hired, and they were loaded aboard. He also hired another empty boat to carry the company, and, once they were all aboard, they were sculled more than thirty li outside the south gate, where they passed right in front of the estate of Eunuch Director Liu.

Ying Po-chüeh ordered the boatmen to moor the boats and then climbed ashore, after which he helped Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh to disembark.

"Whose garden do you think would be best to visit?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"We might as well avail ourselves of Eunuch Director Liu's garden," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"All right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "His place ought to do."

The group of them accordingly headed there. After entering a reception hall, they turned into a:

Secluded walk along a zigzag gallery,
leading through:

Luxuriant forests and lofty bamboos.¹⁰

Words are inadequate to describe the beauty of the scene. Behold:

The emerald cypresses are dense,

The lofty bamboo groves whisper.

The fragrant verdure evenly spreads its mat of green brocade;

The weeping willows delicately wave their green silk braids.

Along zigzag paving and multiple balustrades,

A myriad varieties of famous flowers exhibit a profusion of hues;

Beyond secluded windows and hidden casements,

The varied notes of frolicsome birds resound like reed instruments.

Truly it resembles the fabled Gardens of Paradise,

Nothing less than the Pure Metropolis of the gods.

Leisured gentlemen of lofty status,

Daily frequent it in search of entertainment;

Wandering ladies on vagrant outings,

Ever enjoy it enough to forget their fatigue.

Surely it belongs to the category of rare sights,

This is not an instance of inflated commendation.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, leading Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh by the hand, set out to explore the various sights, in order to enjoy them to the full. Upon arriving under a banksia rose arbor, they found a spot that was both well-shaded and cool, to either side of which there were arrayed extensive:

Stone benches and zither stands,

making it ideally suited for a casual conclave. The entire company, accordingly, sat down. Ying Po-chüeh then went back and directed

Ch'in-t'ung and the two boatmen to bring the wine, picnic boxes, comestibles, portable stove, and utensils up from the boat and put them down under the green shade.

During an initial round of tea, a casual conversation started up about the predicament of Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, which led Cadger Ch'ang to remark, "Were it not for that, they would both be here today. What can one say about it?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It's only another illustration of the fact that:

One must suffer the consequences of one's own acts."¹¹

"Let's all take our seats," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"That's a good idea," chimed in Scrounger Pai.

Thereupon, they proceeded to arrange themselves in appropriate order and sit down, with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the place of honor, flanked on either side by the two singing girls, while Li Ming and Wu Hui, standing beside a T'aihu rockery:

Lightly plucking their *p'i-p'a*,¹² and

Idly raising their sandalwood clappers,
sang a song to the tune "The Water Nymphs":

My old mother's temperament being what it is,

She was only waiting for the flames from the fire in the Zoroastrian Temple to flare up:¹³

kua-kua tsa-tsa;¹⁴

Forcing the mandarin ducks floating on the water to disentangle their necks:

t'e-leng-leng-t'eng;¹⁵

For the surcingle on the embossed saddle to come loose:

Shu-la-la-sha;

For the lovers' tryst to be interrupted by the night watchman, shouting the hour and ringing his bell:¹⁶

Ssu-lang-lang-t'ang;

For the string on the green jade psaltery to break, never to be mended: *chih-leng-leng-cheng*;

For the caltrop-patterned mirror to be smashed to pieces on the glazed bricks: *chi-ting-ting-tang*;

And for the silver vase to drop to the bottom of the well:¹⁷

p'u-t'ung-t'ung-tung.¹⁸

When the two musicians had finished singing, the company moved their party to the edge of a pond, where they put down felt carpets and sat down together, after which:

With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,
they fell to:

Playing at guess-fingers and gambling with dice.

Just as the party was at its height, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Why isn't that little whore, Tung Chiao-erh, here?"

"Yesterday I went to invite her in person," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She said that she was committed to escorting a patron on his way out the city gate today and consequently would not be able to show up until just before noon. I imagine that by this time, knowing that we're here enjoying ourselves, she must surely be on her way to join us."

"It's all our second brother's fault," said Scrounger Pai. "Why didn't you make absolutely certain that she'd be here?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Scrounger Pai and whispered into his ear, saying, "Let's make a bet with this beggar. Just say that if Tung Chiao-erh hasn't shown up by noon, each of us will make our host pay a forfeit by drinking three large cups of wine."

When Scrounger Pai communicated this proposal to Ying Po-chüeh, he said, "That's all right. But if she should turn up before noon, each one of you will have to pay a forfeit by drinking three large cups of wine."

Once this bet had been made, nothing was to be seen of Tung Chiao-erh, and Ying Po-chüeh was thrown into such consternation that all he could do was to smile apprehensively. Scrounger Pai, along with Tagalong Hsieh, Hsimen Ch'ing, and the two singing girls, colluded on a plan, so and so. Hsimen Ch'ing pretended to get up in order to relieve himself and instructed Tai-an to come in and falsely proclaim that Tung Chiao-erh had arrived and was waiting outside, thus and thus.

Tai-an got the idea, and, a little while later, just as Ying Po-chüeh was beginning to get perturbed, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came rushing into their midst, saying, "Sister Tung is here. She hasn't known where to look for us."

"That thrills me to death, old matron that I am!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "I told you that she'd be here soon. Quickly, fetch the wine. I must invite each of you to down three cups."

"If we had won the bet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and demanded that you drink your forfeit, would you have consented to do so?"

"If I were to lose, and refuse to pay my forfeit," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I would not be a human being."

"That's as may be," they all said. "But you'd better go out and call her in before we'll undertake to drink our forfeits."

"All right," said Ying Po-chüeh.

"A man is as good as his word."

Having gone outside, he proceeded to scan the scene, east, west, south, and north, until his eyes grew dim, without catching so much as a glimpse of Tung Chiao-erh's soul.

Gazing into space, he cursed, saying, "You lousy whore! You've made your Master Two lose face, pulling the stepladder out from under him, while assuming the right to do as you please."

When he went back inside, his companions laughed uproariously at his discomfiture and crowded around him, saying, "It's already past noon now. You'll have to pay off each one of us by drinking three cups of wine."

"Thanks to the trickery of that little oily mouth," complained Ying Po-chüeh, "the lot of you have made sure that I'll be stuck with the wine. How am I to handle it?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Without permitting any further explanation,
filled a large cup of wine to the brim and proffered it to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "Just now you said that if you refused to drink your forfeit you would not be a human being."

Ying Po-chüeh took the cup in his hand, while Tagalong Hsieh poured another cup for him. Before he was able to finish this, Heartless Wu followed up by pouring out another large cup of wine.

This threw Ying Po-chüeh into such consternation that he called out, "It's no good. It's making me retch. You'd better get me some appetizers to help me get it down."

Scrounger Pai responded by bringing him some sweetmeats, at which Ying Po-chüeh blurted out, "You lousy short-life! Instead of bringing me something sour, you're deliberately making trouble for me by bringing me something sweet."

"You'll get something sour with the next cup of wine," said Scrounger Pai. "One way or another, you'll have a chance to savor the salty, the sour, the bitter, and the peppery before you're through. There's no need to get flustered about it."

"What an inveterate oily mouth you are," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "as good a filthy braggart as ever!"

Next it was the turn of Cadger Ch'ang to proffer him a cup of wine, and Ying Po-chüeh tried to run out in the hope of gaining a temporary respite, but Hsi-men Ch'ing and the two singing girls surrounded him so that he was unable to get away.

"Tung Chiao-erh, you lousy short-life, you little whore!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You've really done your old man in this time!"

This outburst only had the effect of causing the rest of the company to fall all of a heap with laughter.

Scrounger Pai once again directed Tai-an to fetch the wine flagon and fill another bumper to the brim. Tai-an accordingly stuck the spout of the flagon an inch or more inside the cup and poured away with a gurgling sound, showing no sign of restraint.

When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, he said:

"Only a demented guest would attempt to ply his host with wine.¹⁹

That's enough of that. The lousy little whore, confirmed bugger that he is, is sticking his spout right into the mouth of the cup. You just wait and see. Even in a thousand years, your Master Two will never urge your owner to find you a wife."

Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh then each poured out a cup of wine and proffered it to Ying Po-chüeh.

"I'll get down on my knees to you, like a chicken on the chopping block," pleaded Ying Po-chüeh.

"You can skip the obeisance as long as you drink the wine," said Han Chin-ch'uan.

"Why didn't you abase yourself like a chicken on the chopping block to Sister Tung, and beg her to come?" asked Wu Yin-erh.

"Don't jest with me," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got enough to contend with as it is."

The two of them held their cups of wine right up to his mouth. Ying Po-chüeh found this difficult to handle, so, on the one hand, he took one cup in each hand and gulped them down, and then hastily ate some appetizers.

In no time at all, his face turned crimson, and he called out, "I've been had by the lot of you. Wine is better consumed slowly. Why should you want to get me hopelessly befuddled?"

His companions were about to pour out more wine for him, when Ying Po-chüeh knelt down in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Elder Brother, I beg you to put in a word on my behalf and thereby save my poor life. After all, you'll need to preserve me in a fit state to entertain my guests. If I should become so drunk that I:

Don't know whether it's a fine day or an overcast one,
what fun can we have together?"

"That's all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We can postpone the payment of the additional two cups per person that you still owe until another time, and not demand that you make good on them now."

Ying Po-chüeh then got up and thanked him, saying, "If you were to exempt me from my remaining obligations altogether, it would be a manifestation of your great kindness."

"All right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we'll forgive you. The only thing is that, just now, you said that anyone who refused to pay his forfeit would not be a human being. So that, right now, it would seem that your humanity is gradually ebbing away."

"I'm the one who's ended up inebriated," said Ying Po-chüeh, "while I don't know where that whore is up to her usual tricks."

Wu Yin-erh had a laugh at Ying Po-chüeh's expense, saying, "Hey, how is it that even when His Honor is here playing the role of master of the revels, Sister Tung Chiao-erh is unwilling to put in an appearance?"

Ying Po-chüeh responded meretriciously, "As a celebrated courtesan, who is fit to appear in the best company, she's not that easy to engage."

"She's merely off pursuing her own interests somewhere," said Han Chin-ch'uan. "What kind of a creature is she to be entitled to be called a celebrated courtesan?"

"I understand," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I imagine you must be feeling a bit jealous about some event in the past."

Hsi-men Ch'ing recognized that this must refer to the night when the young gentleman Ts'ai Yün had preferred Tung Chiao-erh's company to her own, and he gave Han Chin-ch'uan a meaningful look. But no more of this.

By this time Ying Po-chüeh was already stinking drunk. The two singing girls, for their part, were not the sort to put up with the doldrums and fell to:

Moving their lips and waggling their tongues,²⁰
exchanging quips at each other's expense.

When the drinking began to taper off, Scrounger Pai said to Han Chin-ch'uan, "Would the two of you consent to favor us with a song?"

"That we could," said Wu Yin-erh. "Let Han Chin-ch'uan go first."

"That fan that I won off Younger Brother Pai," said Cadger Ch'ang, "has sturdy slats that would make it a good thing to keep time with."

"Lend it to me to keep time with then," said Han Chin-ch'uan.

Having taken it and looked it over, she said, "I don't happen to possess this kind of a fan to keep time with. Why don't you pretend that it was I who won that game of go, and give it to me?"

"That's a good idea," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Cadger Ch'ang was unable to resist the pressure of his peers and felt constrained to give it to her.

"Wu Yin-erh is here too," said Han Chin-ch'uan. "It wouldn't be right for me to simply appropriate it myself. Let's cast a die for it,

and whoever comes up with the higher number can have it.”

“That makes sense,” said Cadger Ch'ang, and when they had each cast a die, Wu Yin-erh was the winner, and Han Chin-ch'uan handed it over to her.

“That's hardly fair,” said Cadger Ch'ang, with a false air of gentility. “I still have that handkerchief of mine, and I'll give it to Han Chin-ch'uan to make up for the loss of the fan.”

He then proceeded to hand it over to her, and Han Chin-ch'uan accepted it, saying, “This is really extravagant of you.”

“It's a pity I didn't bring one of my fine Szechwan fans with me,” said Hsimen Ch'ing, “so I could also make a display of my munificence.”

“I realize that's a hit at me,” said Cadger Ch'ang.

Tagalong Hsieh suddenly cried out, saying, “I almost forgot about it until this mention of the fan came up.”

After directing Tai-an to pour out a large cup of wine and give it to Heartless Wu, he said, “Be so kind as to pay me off for our side bet on the game of go by drinking this cup of wine.”

“Well all right,” said Heartless Wu, “but it sure took you a long time to remember it. Since the other two have forfeited their goods, what should I care about a cup of wine.”

Unable to resist the pressure of Tagalong Hsieh, he had no alternative but to swallow it down.

At that point, Han Chin-ch'uan proceeded to entertain them with a song to the tune “Rose-leaved Raspberry Fragrance”:

I remember how, when we first started going together,

More or less by chance, we achieved a casual consummation.²¹

Expecting, in our bliss, to remain inseparable.

Together we feasted and enjoyed the flowery mornings and moonlit nights,²²

Feeling that fine festivals deserve to be celebrated;

But today, it has all come to an abrupt end.

As the saying goes: Heaven is niggardly with its blessings.²³

Our happy marriage affinity has been damnably obstructed;

The male and female phoenix mates have been forcibly separated.

To the same tune:

I long for him as I sit and yearn for him as I walk,²⁴

My breast disturbed by thoughts of our old feelings.

He has betrayed all of those heartfelt vows beneath the stars, under the moon.²⁵

If he has not violated his oaths,

Or suppressed his sorrow at our parting,

Heaven and the gods may still protect him.

But if we should encounter each other unexpectedly someday,

And speak of our separation,

He is sure to see that I am wasting away.²⁶

When she had finished singing, Wu Yin-erh took over from her by singing a song to the tune “The Green Apricot”:

The wind and rain feel sorry for the flowers,²⁷

Once the wind and rain are over, the flowers will also be finished.

I urge you, do not scruple to get drunk amid the flowers.²⁸

The flowers may fade today, or

The flowers may fade tomorrow;²⁹

It is enough to turn one's hair white.³⁰

Whenever the spirit moves you, indulge yourself in two or three cups.

Select lovely spots amid the streams and hills for pleasure excursions.

As long as you have an adequate supply of wine, and nothing else to do;

If there are flowers, that is fine;³¹

If there are no flowers, that is fine;

Who cares whether it be spring or autumn?³²

When she had finished singing, Li Ming and Wu Hui were standing there next in line, and Tagalong Hsieh said, “There still remain these talents that have not yet been displayed.”

Lo and behold:

Strumming their strings, and

Playing their woodwinds,

they proceeded to accompany themselves:

With *p'i-p'a* and flute,

as they sang a song to the tune “Shorter Liang-chou”:

The red dust outside the gates of the city³³ flies in ever-rolling clouds,

But it does not fly as far as the clear streams, where fish and birds reside.

In the green shade of the tall willows, one listens to the golden oriole.

The significance of this perching in seclusion,

Is not something that ordinary people understand.

The mountains and forests are the places to which one must finally retire,

That one may serve when required, and seclude oneself when not wanted.³⁴

Grieving for posterity and emulating one's forebears,

On the fifth day of the fifth lunar month,

One sings the *Songs of Ch'u* and commiserates over the tragedy on the River Hsiang.³⁵

By the time they finished singing, the company's enthusiasm for drinking had begun to wane. Scrounger Pai discovered that there was a small, two-sided, barbarian drum on a stand in the garden reception hall and took it behind the T'ai-hu rockery, where he also picked a sprig of blossoms, so they could play the game of:

Passing the Flower to the Beat of the Drum.³⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing told Li Ming and Wu Hui to beat the drum and tipped them a wink, which they understood to mean that they should peek through a hole in the rockery, and stop drumming when the flower passed into the hands of whomever he thought ought to have a drink.

Scrounger Pai objected to this, saying, "You can be sure those lousy oily mouths will be up to their usual tricks. I'll go beat the drum myself."

As a result, he was able to rig it so that Hsi-men Ch'ing had to drink several cups of wine.

Just as the drinking was at its merriest, whom should they see but Shut'ung, who came rushing in unceremoniously, approached Hsi-men Ch'ing, and proceeded to:

Whisper into his ear in a low voice, saying, "The Sixth Lady has fallen quite ill and requests that you return home as quickly as possible. I've brought a horse with me, which is waiting for you outside the gate."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he immediately got up and prepared to take his leave. By this time, the entire company was inebriated.

Everyone stood up together, and Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, I haven't had a chance to toast you yet today. How can you simply take off? This sort of whispered communication is no good."

He was all set to detain him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing told him the truth of the situation, thanked him, and departed on horseback.

Ying Po-chüeh, who tried to prevent the party from breaking up, saw that Han Chin-ch'uan had taken advantage of the distraction to disappear and set out to look for her with:

Skulking step and lurking gait.

Lo and behold, he found her squatting under the T'ai-hu rockery, in the process of taking a piss:

Revealing a single strand of red thread,

That emitted a myriad glistening pearls.

From his vantage point on the other side of the fence, Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to stick a blade of grass through a hole, with which he tickled the mouth of her vagina. Han Chin-ch'uan was not even able to finish what she was about but jumped up in surprise, getting the waist of her drawers all wet in the process.

"You indecent short-life!" cursed Han Chin-ch'uan. "How diabolically un-principled can you get?"

Her face turned completely crimson as:

Half smiling and half cursing,

she rejoined the company. Ying Po-chüeh told everyone what had happened, and they all had another laugh over it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had left Ch'in-t'ung to help Ying Po-chüeh take care of the impedimenta, and, once he had loaded the portable stove and picnic gear into the boat, they all returned to the city, where they thanked Ying Po-chüeh and went their separate ways. Ying Po-chüeh paid off the two boatmen, while Ch'in-tung carried the picnic things into his house, after which he invited Ch'in-t'ung to have a drink. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, he hastened:

Covering two steps with every one,

to make his way straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

"Mother is as sick as can be," reported Ying-ch'un. "You had better go see her right away."

Having arrived at her bedside, he found that Li P'ing-erh was groaning aloud with pain, and that the pain was in the area of her stomach.



Ying Po-chüeh Ticks Han Chin-ch'uan in an Indecorous Way

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard her calling out in distress, he promptly said, "We've got to send for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i immediately to come and examine you."

He then turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Summon Shu-t'ung and have him write out a card and go with it to invite the attendance of Dr. Jen."

Ying-ch'un went outside and did as she was told, whereupon Shu-t'ung wrote out a formal calling card and went off to invite the attendance of Dr. Jen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced Li P'ing-erh and sat down on the bed beside her, whereupon Li P'ing-erh complained, "You're reeking of alcohol."

"It's only because your stomach's empty," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you object so to the smell of wine."

He then turned to Ying-ch'un and asked, "Has she had any congee or soup to eat?"

"From this morning until now," replied Ying-ch'un, "she hasn't eaten so much as a grain of rice. All she's had is two or three cups of soup. The areas around her heart, her stomach, and her two kidneys have all been hurting to an unusual extent."

Hsi-men Ch'ing knitted his brows, screwed up his eyes, and sighed several times, after which he asked Ju-i, "Has Kuan-ko recovered?"

"Last night," said Ju-i, "he still had a feverish sensation in the head and cried a lot."

"What bad luck," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Both mother and son are sick. What can we do to restore the mother's spirits, so she will be better able to look after the child?"

Li P'ing-erh started to groan aloud with pain again, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Try to bear it as best you can. The doctor will be here

soon. After he's examined your pulse, and you've had a couple of cups of medicine, you should be all right."

Ying-ch'un swept the room, dusted off the tables and chairs, lit some incense, prepared tea, and helped the wet nurse to coax Kuan-ko to sleep. By this time, the night watches had begun, and the dog outside began to bark incessantly, which turned out to be occasioned by Ch'in-t'ung's return from Ying Po-ch'ueh's house.

Before long, Shu-t'ung also came back, escorting Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and holding a lantern to light him on his way. The doctor, who was wearing a four-cornered square-cut scholar's cap and a wide-sleeved gown, arrived on horseback, entered the gate, and sat down under the portico.

Shu-t'ung came inside and reported, "I succeeded in inviting him, and he's sitting under the portico."

"That's good," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Quickly, take some tea out for him."

Tai-an promptly picked up the tea and accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing outside to welcome Dr. Jen.

"I don't know," the doctor said, "which resident of your distinguished mansion it is whose pulse I am to examine. I have been remiss in calling upon you, for which I am truly much at fault."

"It makes me very uncomfortable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to put you to so much trouble late at night. I very much hope that you will deign to forgive me."

The doctor bowed to the ground, saying, "I would not be so presumptuous."

After drinking a cup of tea steeped with cured beans, the doctor asked, "Whose honorable indisposition is it that I am to diagnose?"

"That of my sixth insignificant concubine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After the first cup of tea had been replaced with another, flavored with salted cherries, and the exchange of a few more sentences of small talk, Tai-an started to clear away the cups, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Have things inside been straightened up? You go in to give them the word, and bring a lantern out to light us on our way."

Tai-an went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to give them the word and then came back out to report, with lantern in hand.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then stood up with a bow and invited the doctor to accompany him to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. The doctor followed him there, making a half bow at every gateway, the head of every flight of stairs, and every turning point, while:

His whole body expressed the utmost deference, and

His mouth was full of conventional platitudes.

When he entered Li P'ing-erh's quarters, what should he see but:

A nimbus of incense encompassing a golden tripod,

Orchidaceous flames smoldering in a silver vessel;

Brocaded curtains surrounding the bed,

With jade hooks symmetrically suspended.

Truly, a secluded realm of splendor and luxury;

It turned out to be yet another grotto heaven.

Hsi-men Ch'ing offered the doctor a chair, to which the doctor responded, "There's no need of that," as he offered his host a chair in return.

When they had both taken their seats, Ying-ch'un propped up Li P'ing-erh's hand on an embroidered cushion, wrapped her jade arm in a brocade handkerchief, and enclosed her slender fingers in her own sleeve, before exposing a segment of her powder-white arm from underneath the bed curtains, so that the doctor could examine her pulse.

The doctor, after:

Cleansing his mind and stabilizing his vital energy,

began to evaluate her pulse, finding that her stomach was depleted and her vital energy weak, that her blood was deficient while her liver conduit was hyperactive, that her heart was not clear, that an inflammation had affected her *tricalorium*, or triple burner,³⁷ and that it was necessary to reduce the inflammation and fortify the blood. He then proceeded:

Citing the appropriate texts and relevant principles,
to propound his diagnosis to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Doctor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it is just as though you had been observing the course of her ailment with your own eyes. You have described her symptoms exactly. This insignificant concubine of mine is possessed of an exceedingly long-suffering disposition."

"That is precisely the source of the problem," said the doctor. "That is why her liver conduit is hyperactive. People do not understand what goes on inside her. The element wood in her liver has overcome the element earth in her stomach, so that the vital energy of her stomach has been weakened. As a result, there is no way for her vital energy to be replenished, or for her blood to be regenerated. The element water in her kidneys cannot sustain the element fire in her heart, so that the fire has ascended into her upper body, and the area of her chest beneath the diaphragm feels congested and painful. She also suffers from periodic pains in the stomach. Because her blood is depleted, her two kidneys and the joints throughout her body all ache, and she has lost her appetite for food and drink. Does that describe her situation?"

"Her symptoms are just as you have described them," said Ying-ch'un.

"You may truly be described as Immortal Jen," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Where the four diagnostic methods of your noble profession are concerned, namely:

Inspection, auscultation, interrogation, and palpation,³⁸

the fact that you understand the principles of pulse taking so thoroughly that you are able to describe the patient's symptoms without prior interrogation, is my insignificant concubine's good fortune."

The doctor responded with a deep bow and said, "What does your pupil know about anything? It was mostly guesswork on my part."

"You are altogether too modest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then went on to ask, "At the present time, what medications should my insignificant concubine take?"

"It is a matter of reducing the inflammation and fortifying the blood," said the doctor. "Once the inflammation has been reduced,

the area of her chest beneath the diaphragm will naturally be more comfortable, and when her blood has been regenerated, the pains in her waist and the area of her ribs should cease. Do not assume that this is an ailment of exogenous origin. It is not that at all. The symptoms are all those of deficiency."

He then went on to ask, "Have her menses been regular or not?"

"They have not been dependable," said Ying-ch'un.

"How often do they occur?" asked the doctor.

"Ever since she gave birth to Kuan-ko," said Ying-ch'un, "they have not been what they should be."

"Her original store of vital energy was weak," said the doctor, "and her postpartum conditions have not been stabilized, with the result that her blood has become depleted. It is not a case of blockage that would require purgative medications. Only if she is treated gradually with a regimen of pills can she be induced to come round and make a recovery. Otherwise, her condition will only become worse."



Jen Hou-ch'i Diagnoses an Illness for a Powerful Family

"You have certainly made a perspicacious assessment of the situation," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Right now, I hope that you can first provide a decoction that will alleviate her present pain, after which we can ask for whatever pills you may prescribe."

"That is only appropriate," said the doctor. "After your pupil has returned to his humble abode, he will deliver them immediately. It is not a serious case. It is only necessary to know that these are the symptoms of a deficiency. The pain in her chest beneath the diaphragm is caused by an inflammation and is not of exogenous origin. The unusual pains afflicting her waist and the area of her ribs are due to a depletion of her blood, and not to stagnation of the blood. Once she has taken the prescribed medications, these conditions

should naturally be alleviated, one by one. There is no cause for alarm.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Expressed his gratitude without ceasing,
and had just gotten up to leave the room, when Kuan-ko woke up and started to cry again.

“This young gentleman has a healthy voice,” said the doctor.

“That may be so,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “but he is too prone to become ill, which is most unfortunate, and poses a hardship for my insignificant concubine, who is:

Unable to rest comfortably on her pillow,
both day and night.”

He then proceeded to escort the doctor on his way out.

To resume our story, Shu-t'ung said to Ch'in-t'ung, “When I went to request his attendance just now, he had already gone to bed. I had to knock on the gate for what seemed like half a day before anyone came out to let me in. That oldster was still rubbing his eyes as he came outside, and when he mounted his horse, he kept dozing off so frequently that I was afraid he would fall off the saddle.”

“You had a rough job of it,” said Ch'in-t'ung, “while I had as good a time as could be today. On top of which, I got to drink a bellyful of wine.”

As they were engaged in this idle chat, Tai-an appeared, holding a lantern to light the way for Hsi-men Ch'ing as he escorted the doctor on his way out.

When they got as far as the portico, the doctor wanted to continue on his way, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, “Please relax and sit down long enough for me to offer you another cup of tea. I can also provide something in the way of ordinary fare or a snack.”

The doctor shook his head and said, “Many thanks for your lavish hospitality, but I cannot presume to accept any more of it,” as he headed straight outside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him onto his horse and deputed Shu-t'ung to hold a lantern and light him on his way home. As soon as he had taken leave of the doctor, he flew inside and directed Tai-an to take a tael of silver and catch up with them, in order to take receipt of the prescribed medications.

They proceeded straight to Dr. Jen's house, where the doctor dismounted and said to the two of them, “Uncles, take a seat and have a cup of tea while I go inside to prepare the medications.”

Tai-an took out the gift box and handed it to the doctor, saying, “Please accept this payment for the medications.”

“We are friends,” said the doctor. “I would not presume to accept any remuneration from your master.”

“I beseech you to accept it before we can feel comfortable about taking possession of the medications,” said Shu-t'ung. “Otherwise, we can hardly agree to accept them. I fear that if we go home with them, we will certainly only be required to deliver them back to you, which will mean an extra trip for nothing. It would be better all the way round if you were to make no bones about accepting the payment, so we can wait for the medications and take them home with us.”

“A fortune told for nothing, is worth nothing,”³⁹
said Tai-an. “I beseech you to accept it.”

The doctor felt compelled to assent, and, seeing that the payment was lavish, he went inside and hastily got together the ingredients for a decoction and poured out a little less than half the pills in a bottle. By the time the two page boys had finished their tea, a reply was sent out from inside for Tai-an and Shu-t'ung to deliver, after which the gate was closed behind them.

When the two page boys arrived home, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that the pouch containing the medicine was bulky and said, “Why should there be so much?”

When he tore it open and took a look, he found that the pills were also inside and laughed, saying:

“If you have the money you can make a ghost turn the millstone for you.”⁴⁰
Just now, he said that he would first send the ingredients for a decoction, but now he has sent everything at once. That's fine. That's fine.”

Looking at the pouch containing the ingredients for the decoction, he saw that the inscription on the label read:

Decoction for reducing inflammation and fortifying the blood

Boil in two cups of water, without adding ginger, until reduced to eight parts. Take on an empty stomach. The dregs may be used a second time. Avoid eating bran or wheat flour, or anything greasy, roasted, or fried.

Affixed to the label there was also the imprint of a seal that read:

Dispensary of the hereditary physician, Dr. Jen

The crimson label on the other container read:

Pills of foxglove root to enhance appetite

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned the medications over to Ying-ch'un and directed her to start out by decocting one packet of the powdered medicine. Li P'ing-erh drank some hot water, while Ying-ch'un boiled the medicine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing personally oversaw its preparation.

After straining the dregs out of it, he carried it to Li P'ing-erh's bedside and said, “Sixth Lady, your medicine is here.”

Li P'ing-erh turned over:

Unable to overcome a beguiling tremor,
while Hsi-men Ch'ing, holding the decoction in one hand, supported her head and neck with the other. Li P'ing-erh complained that it tasted bitter, and Ying-ch'un promptly fetched some hot water, with which she rinsed out her mouth. Hsi-men Ch'ing ate some congee

and washed his feet, after which he lay down to sleep with Li P'ing-erh. Ying-ch'un heated some more water and put something over the kettle to keep it hot, after which she lay down to sleep in her clothes.

Strange to relate,
after Li P'ing-erh had taken this medication, she was able to sleep. Hsi-men Ch'ing also fell fast asleep, but Kuan-ko persisted in wanting to cry. Ju-i was afraid that he would wake Li P'ing-erh, so she gave him her breast to suck, and, before long, they were all sleeping quietly.

The next morning, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to get up, he asked Li P'ing-erh, "Are you feeling any better since last night?"

"Strange as it may seem,"

said Li P'ing-erh, "no sooner did I take that medicine than, somehow or other, I fell fast asleep. This morning, I no longer feel any particular pain in my innards. If the condition I was in late last evening had continued unabated, the pain would have been the death of me."

"Heaven be thanked! Heaven be thanked!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, with a smile. "Right now, if we boil another two cups of water, so you can take a second dose of that decoction, you'll be all well."

Ying-ch'un, accordingly, boiled some more water for her, and she took it as directed. As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, only then did:

His affrighted soul fly off to Java.

How is one to describe such a situation? There is a poem that testifies to this:

Hsi-shih, from time to time, may be wont to knit her turquoise brows;⁴¹
But, luckily, she possesses a transcendent elixir of divine efficacy.
Verily, medicine cures only those diseases which are not fatal;
Beyond a doubt, the Buddha saves only those destined to be saved.⁴²

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 55

HSI-MEN CH'ING OBSERVES A BIRTHDAY IN THE EASTERN CAPITAL; SQUIRE MIAO FROM YANG-CHOU SENDS A PRESENT OF SINGING BOYS

Myriad-year peaches of immortality are brought,
while still bedecked with dew;
Brought to the chambers of the grand counselor,
to wish him a hundred years of life.
It is a day for the Eight Immortals to descend,
in order to proffer their toasts;
A time for presentation of brocades, featuring
seven phoenixes in flowered roundels.
From the six directions and the five waterways¹
come congratulatory scrolls;
From the four barbarian tribes and three isles²
are presented exotic rarities.
Hsi-ho should not send the two orbs too swiftly
along their appointed paths;³
To allow time to celebrate the birthday of the
emperor's grand preceptor.

THE STORY GOES that after Doctor Jen had palpated Li P'ing-erh's pulse, he returned to the reception hall and sat down.⁴

Hsi-men Ch'ing then initiated the consultation by saying, "I do not know what your interpretation of her symptoms might be. Is it nothing to be worried about?"

"This illness of your wife's," said Doctor Jen, "is the result of inadequate care in the treatment of her postpartum conditions. That is the etiology of her ailment. At present, she is suffering from lochiorrhea, her complexion is sallow, she has an indifferent appetite, and she is easily fatigued. In your pupil's ignorant opinion, she needs to be treated with diligent care. Generally speaking, the hardest things to treat from a medical standpoint are the postpartum ailments of women and the complications of children who have contracted smallpox. If the slightest mistake is made in these circumstances, the roots of further pathology may be planted. Right now, the pulses on your wife's two wrists are feeble rather than replete. When palpated, they are both scattered and large, as well as flaccid, and unable to recuperate themselves. These symptoms are all indications of inflammation, resulting from the fact that in the liver the element earth is deficient and the element wood is in the ascendant, causing an abnormal circulation of the depleted blood. If these conditions are not treated at once, they will only grow worse in the future."

When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Under the present circumstances, what medications are called for?"

"The situation requires medications that will reduce the inflammation and arrest the lochiorrhea," said Dr. Jen. "The principal drugs should be Amur cork-tree bark and anemarrhena, which may be supplemented with foxglove root, skullcap, and the like. If the doses of these ingredients are increased or decreased as observation directs, she should recover."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he told Shu-t'ung to seal up a tael of silver and give it to Dr. Jen as a down payment for the prescribed medications. After expressing his gratitude, Dr. Jen took his leave, and, before long, the prescribed medications were duly delivered, decocted, and administered to Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after seeing Dr. Jen off, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside and sat down for a chat with Ying Po-chüeh. It suddenly occurred to him that the time for the celebration of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's birthday in the Eastern Capital was fast approaching. In anticipation of this event, he had already sent Tai-an to Hang-chou to procure the dragon robes, brocades, floral ornaments of gold, and other precious objects appropriate to offer as birthday gifts, and they had all been duly assembled, so that he could proceed forthwith to the Eastern Capital in order to offer his congratulations in person. Upon calculating that the day in question was drawing near, and that it would take a good half a month's journey to get from Shantung to the Eastern Capital, he realized that he could just make it if he got his baggage together that night and set off the next morning, and that there was no room for further delay. Consequently, he went back to the master suite and explained the situation to Yüeh-niang, thus and so.

"All this time," said Yüeh-niang, "you've neglected to bring the subject up. And now you seem to be all in a rush about it. Just when do you plan to start out?"

"I'll have to start out tomorrow in order to get there in time, and leave myself a few days leeway," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, he went outside and directed Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung,⁵ Shu-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung to start getting their clothes and baggage ready, so they could accompany him to the Eastern Capital the next day. Each of the four page boys proceeded to prepare his baggage without delay.

Yüeh-niang then instructed Hsiao-yü, "Go ask your various mistresses to come and help pack your father's bags."

At this juncture, only Li P'ing-erh, because she had to look after her child, on the one hand, and because she was taking medicine, on the other, was unable to leave her quarters. Among the other ladies of the household, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, showed up and set about the task of packing the python robes, dragon robes, bolts of silk, and other birthday presents into leather trunks and rattan boxes, making more than twenty carrier loads in all. They also completed the task of getting together the official caps and girdles and other articles of clothing that would be needed in the course of the trip.

That evening, the three ladies provided a feast of wine and delicacies in order to see Hsi-men Ch'ing off. During the feast, Hsi-men Ch'ing communicated several words of instruction to each of the ladies, after which he went into Yüeh-niang's room and retired for the night.

The next day, the twenty carrier loads of baggage were sent ahead, together with a waybill authorizing the shipment and an official tally entitling the bearer to the provision of carriers and horses at the relay stations along the way. Only after all the necessary arrangements had been made did Hsi-men Ch'ing go into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where he looked in on Kuan-ko and then said a few words to Li P'ing-erh.

"Be diligent in treating your illness," he said. "I'll return home to see you before long."

Li P'ing-erh, with tears in her eyes, said, "Be careful and look after yourself on the road."

Then she escorted him out to the reception hall, where she joined Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien in seeing him off at the front gate.

There Hsi-men Ch'ing got into an open sedan chair, accompanied by the four page boys on horseback, and proceeded to set off for the Eastern Capital. By the time they had wended their way for about a hundred li, evening was approaching, and Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that they should stop for the night. The station master of the relay station received him and provided for their needs.

After spending the night there, early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing urged the carriers and horses to take up their loads and proceed on their way as expeditiously as possible. Along the way they enjoyed gazing at the:

Lucent hills and limpid streams.⁶

At noon they stopped to prepare a midday meal and then continued on their journey. Those they encountered along the road consisted entirely of regional officials, both civil and military, who were on their way to the capital to congratulate the grand preceptor on his birthday. Those among them who presided over birthday gift convoys for this purpose were without number.

After traveling for another ten days or so, they calculated that there was not much farther to go, and that if they continued their current pace they should be able to arrive at their destination precisely on time. They spent the night on the road and, after another two days of travel, arrived in the Eastern Capital, which they entered through the Myriad Years Gate.

By the time they arrived:

The light was beginning to wane,⁷

and they proceeded directly to Majordomo Chai Ch'ien's quarters in Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's residence beneath the commemorative arch on Dragon's Virtue Street, where they expected to be put up for the night.

When Majordomo Chai Ch'ien learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he hastened out to welcome him. After they had exchanged the customary amenities about the weather and had a cup of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Taian to take care of the luggage and see that each and every load was carried into Chai Ch'ien's quarters, where Chai Ch'ien directed a member of the household staff to take charge of them. Chai Ch'ien then laid on a feast in order to refresh Hsi-men Ch'ing after the hardships of the road.

Before long, a carved lacquer table of the kind manufactured for official use made an appearance, laden with several tens of culinary specialties, as well as several tens of side dishes. All of them were:

Delicacies of the most delectable variety,⁸

such as swallow's nest and shark's fin, dishes of the very finest kind. The only items lacking were:

Dragon's liver and phoenix marrow.⁹

Everything displayed:

The utmost discrimination and opulence.

Even the fare provided for the enjoyment of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching himself:

Did not surpass this.¹⁰

The attendants on duty provided goblets made of "Heaven penetrating rhinoceros horn,"¹¹ which they filled with Ma-ku wine.¹² They handed one of them to Chai Ch'ien, who first poured a libation to Heaven and then refilled it and offered a toast to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who responded in kind. After the two of them had resumed their seats, a profusion of candied fruits and hot dishes to go with the wine were served to them, one after another:

Like a stream of flowing water.

After:

Two rounds of wine had been consumed,

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Chai Ch'ien, "This visit on your pupil's part is motivated solely by the desire to offer his birthday congratulations to the venerable grand preceptor. I have seen fit to provide a few insignificant gifts to show my filial feelings for the grand preceptor, which I anticipate that he will not refuse. But it has been your pupil's wish for some time to become even more closely attached to him. If my kinsman would be so kind as to broach the matter with him in advance, so that I might become a protégé of the grand preceptor's, and be acknowledged by him as an adopted son, I would feel that:

The entire span of my natural life,¹³

will not have been lived in vain. I don't know whether you might be willing to propose this matter to him in order to accommodate your pupil, or not."

"Where's the difficulty in that?" replied Chai Ch'ien. "This patron of ours, although he may be a high official at court, is extremely susceptible to flattery. Upon seeing the lavish gifts that you have provided today, he is certain to augment your office and rank, let alone acknowledge you as an adopted son. He is sure to agree to it."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:

His delight could not be contained.¹⁴

After they had been drinking for some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing suggested, "Let's not drink any more."

"Have another cup," urged Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "Why should we stop?"

"Tomorrow there is serious business to attend to," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I don't dare have too much to drink."

Only after repeated urging did he consent to have one more cup.

Majordomo Chai Ch'ien saw to it that Hsi-men Ch'ing's attendants were provided with food and wine, and he ordered that the horses should be led back to the stables in the rear. At this point the utensils were cleared away, and he invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to his studio in the back of the mansion where he was to rest for the night. There he found prepared for him an ornate gilt lacquer canopy bed with mermaid silk curtains, held open with silver hooks, revealing a fine embroidered quilt within, that was redolent of incense. After his band of page boys had helped Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his clothes and stockings, he got into bed to:

Sleep by himself in solitary slumber.¹⁵

This was something that Hsi-men Ch'ing had never been used to, and he found it difficult to get through the night. Waiting it out until dawn, he was prepared to get up, but since in Chai Ch'ien's quarters:

The gates and doors were all closed,

where was he to get any water with which to wash his face? It was not until 10:00 AM that someone with a key came through to unlock the doors. After this, one page boy came in with a towel, while another came into the studio with a wash basin and filled it with perfumed water. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished washing up and combing his hair, he donned his "loyal and tranquil hat," put on his formal outer garments, and sat down all by himself in the studio.

Who should appear at this juncture but Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, who came in, greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing, and sat down. An attendant then brought in a crimson box containing some thirty delectable delicacies, and a silver flagon, from which he poured out wine to go with their breakfast.

"Please go ahead and enjoy your breakfast," said Chai Ch'ien. "Your pupil is going to go into the residence beforehand, and say a word to the master, after which it will be appropriate for you to bring in your gifts."

"You are putting yourself to a lot of trouble on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After:

Several cups of wine had been consumed, breakfast was served and eaten, and the utensils were cleared away.

"If you will just sit here for the time being," said Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, "I will go ahead into the residence and be back in no time at all."

After Majordomo Chai Ch'ien had gone on this errand, it was not long before he hurried back to his own quarters and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor is still in his studio, washing up and combing his hair, while outside, the officials, both civil and military, from the entire court, are waiting in vain for the chance to congratulate him on his birthday. Your pupil has already spoken to His Honor about it. Right now, you can proceed in to offer your congratulations ahead of the rest, so as not to be lost in the crowd, while your pupil will follow right behind you."

On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Unable to contain his delight,

and ordered his attendants, along with several servants from Chai Ch'ien's household, to transport the twenty carrier loads of silver and gold, bolts of silk, etc., out to the front of the grand preceptor's residence. The entire retinue responded with one voice and set about their task without delay, while Hsi-men Ch'ing donned his official cap and girdle and proceeded after them in a sedan chair.

What should he encounter but a confused hubbub created by the crowds of officials, both high and low:

Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,

as they gathered to offer their birthday congratulations. From a distance, Hsi-men Ch'ing caught sight of another official, riding in a sedan chair, on his way into the Dragon's Virtue precinct, whom he recognized, after taking a closer look, to be none other than the now well-to-do gentleman and holder of a supernumerary title as squire, Miao Ch'ing. Who could have anticipated that Miao Ch'ing had also caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The two of them got out of their sedan chairs, bowed to each other, and exchanged the customary amenities about the weather.

It so happens that Miao Ch'ing was now a substantial man of property and had also acquired a prestige title for himself, in addition to which, he had earlier contrived to become a protégé of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. That is why he had come to offer his birthday congratulations and happened to run into his old friend. On this occasion, the two of them hastily exchanged a few words by the roadside before taking leave of each other.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in front of the grand preceptor's mansion, what should he see? Behold:

The hall extends like P'ei Tu's Green Wilderness Hall,¹⁶

Seeming to reach into the cloudy empyrean;

The pavilion rises like T'ai-tung's Ling-yen Pavilion,¹⁷

As though extending right up to the stars.

The area in front of the gate is spacious enough for horses to wheel around;

The memorial posts outside the entrance are fit for the display of banners.

Throughout the forest of brocades,¹⁸

The wind carries the brilliance of the thrushes' cries;

Amid the piles of gold and silver,¹⁹

The sun enhances the fragrance of the flowering trees.

The rafters and beams are crafted out of sandalwood;

The steps and stairs are paved with "sobering stones."²⁰
To either side the ladies forming "fleshly screens,"²¹ are all Hsi-shihs or Red-dusters;²²
Throughout the halls are arrayed valuable antiques, all Chou tripods or Shang vessels.
Shining ever so brightly,
There are twelve luminescent pearls suspended on high;
So that even in the dark of night no lamp oil is needed.
Prestigious in appearance,
Three thousand retainers gather in pearl-studded shoes;²³
Those strumming their sword hilts are all eminent men.²⁴
Though they hail from the Nine Provinces and Four Seas,²⁵
The teeming crowds of officials, both high and low,
Have all come to proffer congratulations.
Even among the grand secretaries of the Six Ministries,
And the supreme commanders of the Three Border Regions,
There are none who do not bow their heads.

Truly:

Second only to the respect due the Son of Heaven, Lord of Ten Thousand Years,
Is the veneration extended to the chief councilor who presides over the court.

Hsi-men Ch'ing made a respectful bow as he approached the main gateway. He noticed that the door in the center was closed, and that the officials all went in through a side door.

"Why is it," Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "that on such a special day as this, the main door is not open?"

"It so happens," explained Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, "that the main door has been used by the emperor when favoring the grand preceptor with a visit. For this reason, no one else presumes to go in or out through that door."

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Majordomo Chai Ch'ien proceeded through a number of doors, all of which were guarded by military officers, who did not permit the slightest irregularity.

Upon seeing Chai Ch'ien, each of them asked, "Majordomo, where does your guest come from?"

"My kinsman is from Shantung," replied Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "He has come to congratulate His Honor on his birthday."

After this interrogation, they proceeded through several more doors and turned a number of corners. Everywhere they looked they saw nothing but:

Painted beams and carved rafters,²⁶

as befitted:

The residence of a Chin or Chang.²⁷

They also became aware of the faint sound of drums and music, that

Seemed to come from Heaven itself.

Once again, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked about this, saying, "Since, in this location, we are:

Isolated from the homes of the people,

where does this:

Resounding clamor of drums and music,

come from?"

"It is created by the female musicians that His Honor is training," replied Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "They form a troupe of twenty-four persons in all. They know how to perform the Dance of the Daughters of M \bar{a} ra,²⁸ the Dance of Rainbow Skirts,²⁹ and the Dance of Kuan-yin.³⁰ They perform before His Honor during breakfast, at lunch, and at evening banquets. I imagine that at present they are entertaining him at breakfast."

Before Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard him out, his nose sensed:

The aroma of an exotic fragrance,³¹

and the sound of the music drew ever nearer.

"We are now approaching His Honor's studio," said Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "Walk a little more softly."

After they had traversed a zigzag gallery, what should they see but a large reception chamber that resembled:

A temple hall or an immortal's palace.

In front of this chamber there were cranes such as those ridden by immortals, as well as peacocks and other varieties of rare birds. In addition:

All four seasons produced their never-fading flowers,
including alabaster blossoms, night-blooming cereus, and Chinese hibiscus. The entire scene:

Glittered and scintillated,³²

to such effect that:

It is impossible to do it justice.³³

Hsi-men Ch'ing was too diffident to barge in unannounced and asked Majordomo Chai Ch'ien to precede him, after which, he also made his way:

Hesitatingly and punctiliously,

to the front of the hall. In the position of honor at the upper end of the chamber, there was placed a grand preceptor's folding armchair,³⁴ covered with a tiger skin, on which there sat a figure, garbed in a crimson python robe. It was the grand preceptor himself. Behind a standing screen, there were arrayed thirty or forty beautiful women, all of whom were dressed in palace style, holding towels and fans, in order to minister to his needs.

Majordomo Chai Ch'ien stood to one side, while Hsi-men Ch'ing faced the upper end of the chamber and kowtowed four times. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching then stood up and, availing himself of a velvet mat, responded to the homage of his visitor with a single obeisance, in recognition of the fact that this was the first time they had met. After this, Majordomo Chai Ch'ien went up close to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, whispered a few words into his ear, and then came back down again.

Recognizing that this colloquy must have pertained to his request, Hsimen Ch'ing, once again, faced the upper end of the chamber and kowtowed four times, while, this time, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching did not reply in kind. These four kowtows signified that he recognized the recipient as his adoptive father. From that time on, the two of them addressed each other as father and son.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then initiated the conversation by saying, "Your son has no way to adequately express his filial feelings for his father. But since today is your birthday, I have brought a few insignificant gifts from home, merely to express the meaning of:

A goose feather conveyed a thousand li,³⁵
and to say to Your Honor:

May you live as long as the Southern Hills."

"How could I be worthy to accept what you have to offer?" said Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. "Please have a seat."

An attendant brought in a chair for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed toward the upper end of the chamber, announced, "I am taking my seat," and then sat down on the west side of the room to have some tea.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Observes a Birthday in the Eastern Capital

Meanwhile, Majordomo Chai Ch'ien ran hastily out to the gate and called for the bearers of the gifts to bring their twenty-odd loads inside, where he had the lids taken off the rattan boxes, and handed up a list of the presents. These consisted of a crimson python robe,

a dragon robe of statutory green, twenty bolts of brocade in Han dynasty patterns, twenty bolts of Szechwan brocade, twenty bolts of asbestos fabric, and twenty bolts of cloth imported from the Western Ocean.³⁶ In addition, there were forty bolts of fabrics in flowered and plain patterns, a girdle with a jade plaque depicting the king of the Lion Barbarians,³⁷ a girdle with a plaque of aloeswood encased with gold, ten pairs each of jade cups and cups of rhinoceros horn, eight goblets of pure gold encased with floral designs, ten luminescent pearls, and two hundred ounces of gold for his personal expenditures. All of these things were being offered to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching as:

The customary presentation gifts.

When Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching had finished perusing the list of presents and observed that some twenty carrier loads had been brought in, he was exceedingly pleased. On the one hand, he expressed his gratitude repeatedly, while telling Majordomo Chai Ch'ien to have them moved into the storehouse, and, on the other hand, he ordered that wine should be served for the entertainment of his guest.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing how busy his host was, put forward a pretext for taking leave of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, to which the grand preceptor responded, "In that case, be sure to come back early this afternoon."

Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed to his host and got up to leave, while Grand Preceptor Ts'ai saw him off for a few steps but did not continue any further. Hsi-men Ch'ing, as before, was accompanied on his way out by Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, who, because he had further business to conduct inside the mansion, then bade him farewell and went back inside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to Chai Ch'ien's quarters, where he doffed his official cap and girdle, consumed another fine repast that had been prepared for him, and then went back to the studio to take a nap.

In due course, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching sent a houseman to invite him to a party, and Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with some "fan money" and told him, "You go ahead back. I'll follow along shortly."

He then brushed off his official cap and girdle, directed Tai-an to prepare a considerable number of sealed envelopes containing tips and put them into a calling card case, and set off for the grand preceptor's residence in a sedan chair, accompanied by his four page boys. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching had invited each and every one of the officials, both civil and military, from the entire court, who had come to tender their congratulations, to attend a drinking party. Beginning with the next day, they were to come in three contingents. The first day was to be for the distaff relatives of the imperial family and palace eunuchs. The second day was to be for the grand secretaries of the Six Ministries and officials from other prestigious offices. The third day was to be for other officials, both high and low, from the Inner and Outer Courts. An exception was made in the case of Hsi-men Ch'ing alone. On the one hand, because he was a guest who had come from afar, and on the other hand, because he had presented so many gifts, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching was particularly pleased with him. For this reason, on the actual day of his birthday, he had invited only Hsi-men Ch'ing to come all by himself.

Upon hearing that his newly adopted son, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had arrived, he hastened out to the portico to welcome him in.

Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, saying, "Pray precede me, Father," before bending his back and circumspectly stepping over the threshold.

"I have put you and your entourage to the trouble of coming a great distance," said Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, "and occasioned you the expense of your magnanimous gifts. The fact that I have invited you over for a brief visit today is merely:

A paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings."³⁸

"The fact that your son is still able to:

Bear Heaven above and tread the Earth below,"³⁹

said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is entirely owing to his father's abundant grace. These insignificant expressions of his respect are:

Scarcely worthy of consideration."⁴⁰

The two of them went on to engage in:

Intimate laughter and conversation,

just as though they were really father and son. Meanwhile, the twenty female musicians simultaneously struck up a tune, and the members of the household staff who were on duty served them with wine. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching wished to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a preliminary toast, which Hsi-men Ch'ing stalwartly declined, on the grounds that he was unworthy of the honor, but was finally induced to accept, remaining on his feet as he drained it to the bottom. After this, they sat down to the feast.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung to bring him a gold goblet in the shape of a peach, which he filled to the brim with wine, and then, approaching Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's seat, got down on his knees before him and said, "May my father live for a thousand years."

Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's face was suffused with joy as he said, "Get up my son," and, accepting the proffered cup, drained it to the bottom.

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing get back to his feet and then sit down in his place as before. On this occasion, it being a lavish feast in the residence of the grand councilor, a myriad varieties of exotic rarities were served up, but there is no need to describe all of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking with his host until dusk, when he distributed the sealed envelopes containing tips to the various servitors and then expressed his gratitude and took his leave, saying, "Father, I know how busy you are. Your son would like to hereby express his humble thanks. In the days to come I will not presume to seek another meeting with you."

He then proceeded out the gate of the mansion and returned to the quarters of Chai Ch'ien to rest overnight.

The next day he wanted to go pay his respects to Miao Ch'ing and sent Tai-an to find out where he was staying. After the better part of the day, Tai-an succeeded in tracking him down and ascertained that he was living in the residence of Eunuch Director Li Yen,⁴¹ which was located behind the Forbidden City.

Upon making his way there, he sent Tai-an ahead with a calling card to announce his visit, and Miao Ch'ing came out to welcome him, saying, "Your pupil has been sitting here all by himself and was just thinking how nice it would be to have an intimate friend with

whom to chat. Your arrival is providential.”

He then insisted on entertaining his visitor with a feast, and Hsi-men Ch'ing could not refuse but consented to remain for the occasion. There and then:

Rare viands from the hills and seas,
too many to describe, were laid before them. There were also two singing boys, with:

Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes,⁴²
who opened up their throats and sang several song suites for their entertainment.

During the course of their performance, Hsi-men Ch'ing pointed to Taian, Ch'in-t'ung, Shu-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung and remarked to Miao Ch'ing, “Just look at that bunch of imbeciles. All they care about is their food and drink. How can they be compared to these two of yours?”

Miao Ch'ing laughed and said, “My only fear is that they might not be able to serve you satisfactorily. But if you admire them that much, I would have no problem making you a present of them.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing demurred, saying, “How could I presume to:

Appropriate the source of another's pleasure?”⁴³

They continued drinking until the late watches of the night, when Hsi-men Ch'ing took leave of Miao Ch'ing and returned, as before, to Chai Ch'ien's dwelling to sleep.

During the days that followed, each and every one of the officers on the staff of the grand councilor's mansion insisted on inviting him for a drink, so that he was detained for another eight or nine days.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Anxious to return as swiftly as an arrow,⁴⁴
so he told Tai-an to get his baggage together, but Majordomo Chai Ch'ien tried as hard as he could to get him to prolong his stay. As a result, he felt compelled to spend another evening drinking with him, during which they reiterated their gratification at the fact that they were united by the ties of marriage and felt the greatest affection for each other.



Miao Ch'ing Presents Hsi-men Ch'ing with Two Singing Boys

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up bright and early, took leave of his host, and headed back for Shantung. Along the way they suffered the usual vicissitudes of travel:

Sleeping by the waters and dining in the wind,⁴⁵
but no more of this.

To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had set off for the Eastern Capital to offer his birthday congratulations, the sisterhood of his wife and concubines had anxiously awaited his return, concerned as they were for his safety. For the most part they kept to their quarters, doing needlework, and not coming out to engage in idle pastimes.

Among them, only P'an Chin-lien dressed herself up to look:

As lovely as a flower or a piece of jade,⁴⁶
Making a captivating spectacle of herself,
as she sallied forth to join the maidservants in playing at guess-fingers, or competing at dominoes.

She talked, and she laughed,
with total abandon, guffawing raucously, heedless of whether anyone saw her or not. All she could think about was how to hook up with Ch'en Ching-chi, the thought of which produced turmoil in her heart and got her all hot and bothered, so that she:

Gave vent to long sighs as well as short,
propped her cheek upon her hand, and stared vacantly into space. She kept hoping that Ch'en Ching-chi would come back inside, so they could get down to business together, but what she did not realize was that he was on duty in the shop every day and didn't have time for such things. She would have liked to go out looking for him herself, but there were so many maidservants going back and

forth that it was not convenient for her to do so. During the daylight hours, just like:

An ant on a hot plate,
she constantly:

Ran in and ran out,
without being content to sit in her quarters.

One day, when:

The breeze was genial and the sun was warm,⁴⁷

Chin-lien enhanced her person with quantities of aromatic musk and liquid-ambar, walked out behind the summerhouse, and gazed longingly in the direction of the "snow cave." But Ch'en Ching-chi was doing his daily stint in the shop up front and was unable to get away and come into the garden. After gazing for a while without seeing him, all she could do was to return to her quarters:

Take her writing brush in hand,
and incant a few lines to herself before jotting them down in the form of a letter, sealing it, and giving it to Ch'un-mei to deliver to Ch'en Ching-chi.

When Ching-chi received it, he tore open the envelope and read it over from the beginning. It turned out to be not an ordinary letter, but the words of a song. When Ching-chi finished reading it, he was so flustered he dropped his business in the shop and rushed inside to the back of the summerhouse, where he proceeded to look around. Lo and behold, when Ch'un-mei had gone back to her quarters and reported to P'an Chin-lien, she lost no time in running out to the summerhouse herself, so the two of them ran into each other there. Just like someone whose:

Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin,
she couldn't help throwing herself into Ching-chi's arms, pinching his cheeks, and giving him a succession of kisses, in the course of which they sucked each other's tongues so assiduously that the sound of the sucking was quite audible.

"You fickle short-life of a lousy jailbird!" she complained. "Ever since you had to leave after our rendezvous in my room was broken up by Hsiao-yü,⁴⁸ it's been some time since we've been able to meet. In the last few days, since your father-in-law went off to the Eastern Capital, I've been sitting on the k'ang all by myself, longing for you, with the tears streaming from my eyes. Do you mean to say that your ears haven't even gotten hot? I've been thinking things over carefully, and concluded that if you're going to be so fickle, even if you should desert me, I'd simply have to give you up. But when it comes to the crunch, I just can't let you go. It's the old story of:

The fond female and the fickle lover,
only you seem to be completely devoid of feeling."

Just as they were beginning to get into it together, who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou should catch sight of what they were up to with her sardonic eye. When Chin-lien happened to look up and see that they were being observed, she responded by giving him a shove with her free hand that nearly knocked Ching-chi head over heels, and the two of them hastily went their separate ways. But no more of this.

Later that same day, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh were sitting together, when whom should they see but Tai-an, who came agitatedly running through the door, kowtowed upon seeing Yüeh-niang, and said, "Father is about to get back. I've been riding ahead on horseback, carrying the official tally authorizing the provision of fresh mounts at the relay stations along the way, which is why I've arrived ahead of him. By this time, he must be no more than twenty li from here."

"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"I had breakfast this morning," said Tai-an, "but I haven't had any lunch."

"Go to the kitchen and get something to eat," said Yüeh-niang, "and tell them to prepare some food for when the master gets home. At that time, our entire sisterhood of wives from all six chambers will go as a group to welcome him in the reception hall."

Truly:

Though the poet may have grown old, Ying-ying remains at hand;

When the gentleman comes home again, Yen-yen will bestir herself.⁴⁹

The four of them engaged in idle chat for some time, when, before they knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in front of the gate and dismounted from his sedan chair. The crowd of his wife and concubines welcomed him inside together. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang exchanged greetings first, after which, Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and P'an Chin-lien greeted him in turn. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished exchanging the customary amenities about the weather with his wife and concubines from all six chambers, Shut'ung, Ch'in-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung also came in and kowtowed to the ladies, after which, they went to the kitchen to get something to eat.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told them in detail about the hardships he had encountered on the road, about how he had put up at Chai Ch'ien's residence, about Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's lavish kindness the next day, and about how he had been invited to drinking parties day after day by various palace eunuchs.

He then asked Li P'ing-erh, "How has the child been doing all this time? And how have you been treating your own ailments? Have the medications prescribed for you by Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i proven to be at all effective? Although I made the trip to the Eastern Capital, I haven't been able to get our household affairs off my mind. And I haven't known how business has been going in my various shops. For all these reasons, I've been anxious to get home."

"Nothing has happened so far as the child is concerned," said Li P'ing-erh, "and as for my own state, after taking the prescribed medicine, I've been feeling somewhat better."

Yüeh-niang, on the one hand, directed everyone to help stow away the luggage, in addition to the gifts for the road he had received from Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, while, on the other hand, she arranged to have a meal prepared for Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. That evening, she also saw to it that wine was served in order to welcome Hsi-men Ch'ing back home from his trip. Hsi-men Ch'ing elected to spend that night, as well as the next, making two nights in all, in Yüeh-niang's quarters. Truly, their feelings of mutual affection were like:

Encountering sweet rain after a prolonged draught, or

Meeting an old acquaintance when traveling abroad.⁵⁰
But there is no need to describe all of this.

The next day, Ch'en Ching-chi and Hsi-men Ta-chieh came to see him and discussed the accounts for the shop. When Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Shih-chieh heard that he had returned home, they also came to see him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out to greet them, the two of them said with one voice, "Brother, you must have had:

A hard time of it on the road."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told them in detail about the opulence of the Eastern Capital, and about the kindness with which he had been treated by the grand preceptor, to which the two of them responded by expressing no end of wonderment and admiration. That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing retained the two of them and drank with them all day.

When Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, was on the verge of getting up to go, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I have a request I'd like to make of you, Brother, but I don't know whether you will accede to it or not."

As he spoke, he lowered his face:

Half choking on his words and half spitting them out.

"Pray express yourself without constraint," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The fact is," said Cadger Ch'ang, "that the house I'm living in is not convenient, and I'd like to find another one to move into, but I don't have the necessary silver. For this reason, I'd like to ask you, Brother, if you'd be willing to help me out. At a future date, of course, Brother, I'd pay you back with interest."

"Among companions like ourselves," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need is there to speak of interest? At the moment, however, I'm rather pressed for cash and have no way to come up with the silver. You'll have to wait until my manager, Han Tao-kuo, gets back with his boatload of goods. I should be able to manage it then."

When they had finished speaking, Cadger Ch'ang and Ying Po-chüeh expressed their thanks and departed. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Miao Ch'ing met with Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the grand preceptor's mansion, he had invited him to a party, and at the party he had promised to make him a present of the two singing boys. On a later day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been:

Anxious to return as swiftly as an arrow,

and consequently had departed for home without saying goodbye to him. Thinking that Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the capital, Miao Ch'ing sent one of his retainers to Chai Ch'ien's residence to ask after him, only to be told that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had set out for home three days before.

Only after this retainer reported back to him did Miao Ch'ing understand what had happened, and he thought to himself, "As the saying goes:

A single word from a gentleman, is like

A single whip stroke to a swift steed.

Under the circumstances, if I don't give them to him, it really wouldn't matter, but if he should hold it against me, it would be hard to remain on speaking terms with him in the future."

Consequently, he called out the two singing boys and said to them, "The other day, when I invited His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing from Shantung to come over for a drink, in the course of the party, I promised to make him a present of the two of you, but I find that he has already left the Eastern Capital to return home. It is, therefore, now my intention to send you to him there. You must pack up your things right away, so that, as soon as I've prepared a letter for him, I can send you on your way."

The two singing boys pled with him together, saying, "We have served you faithfully for some years already, so how can you now consent to get rid of us so callously? Besides, we don't know a thing about the disposition of this Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing. We hope that you will make an appropriate decision on our behalf."

"You don't know it," said Miao Ch'ing, "but the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is possessed of:

Wealth enough to splash against the sky,

and is:

Copiously supplied with gold and silver.

The position he occupies:

Combines both civil and military duties.

And at present he has been acknowledged as an adopted son under the patronage of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. Even among the palace eunuchs and court officials there are few who are not on intimate terms with him. Out of his home he operates two shops selling silk and satin piece goods, and currently he is also thinking of opening a commercial armed escort service for the protection of goods in transit. The profits he takes in from these enterprises are truly incalculable. Moreover, he is:

Good-natured and agreeable in disposition,⁵¹

given to:

Saluting the breeze and invoking the moon.⁵²

In his home he supports some seventy or eighty maidservants, every one of which is:

Dressed in satins and affects a jacket;

while in his inner apartments he has at his disposal some five or six wives, every one of which is:

Studded with pearls and draped in gold.

Each one of the boy actors and adult troupers that he patronizes borrows money from him and does his bidding. Virtually all of the courtesans from the different streets of the licensed quarter are also the recipients of his favor. All of this goes without saying. The problem is that at that drinking party the other day I promised to make him a present of the two of you, and now you can hardly expect me to go back on my word."

To this the singing boys responded by saying, "Master, over the last few years, who knows how much effort you have expended in training us to play music and sing; and now that we have finally begun to master our stringed instruments, rather than keeping us at home for your own enjoyment, how can you bring yourself to give us away to minister to the pleasure of someone else?"

When they had finished speaking, before they knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow from their eyes.

Miao Ch'ing, who also felt himself to be:

Wretched and unhappy,⁵³

said, "My little ones, what you say is true enough. I also have wondered why I should feel compelled to do such a thing. But:

If a man is untrustworthy,

How can that be tolerated?⁵⁴

I can scarcely disregard these words, uttered by the sage Confucius himself. Under the present circumstances, there is nothing you can do about it. I'll depute a retainer to escort you there, and write a letter enjoining him to look upon you with a favorable eye. When you get there, you'll have an even happier time of it than you've had in my service here."

He then had his private secretary draft a conventional letter inquiring about the health of the recipient on eight-columned note paper, to which he appended the fact that he was sending him the singing boys and asked him to look favorably upon them. He also had him write out a list of presents, including a bolt of silk and the customary book and kerchief, to serve as indications of his good will, and ordered his servants, Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, to take charge of these documents, and escort the two singing boys on their journey. In no time at all, their mounts were saddled, and, taking their bags of bedding and luggage with them, they set out for the home of Hsi-men Ch'ing in Shantung.

At the time of their departure, they were unable to suppress their feelings, with the result that:

The tears dripped down their cheeks.⁵⁵

But since:

A master's order is hard to disobey,
there was no alternative, so:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
they kowtowed several times, bade Miao Ch'ing farewell:

Vaulted onto their horses,
and proceeded to wend their way forward. Behold:

Blue mountains encompass the horse's head,
Green waters surround the traveler's whip;
A wine flag is visible deep in the forest,
Before a thatched hut among sunset clouds.

Only due to the fact that,
Diverting the moving clouds,
The sound of their singing is peerless;
Before they are aware of it,
They must leave a kind master,
To brave the winds and mists of a trip.
The two of them,
Longing for home and thinking of their master,
Have taken the,
Romantic overtones of sandalwood clappers,
The classic tunes "Warm Spring" and "White Snow,"⁵⁶
And completely forgotten them.
The two of them,
Hasting to their goal and speeding on their way,
Think only of,
The early accomplishment of their mission,
Enveloped in stars, proceeding by moonlight,⁵⁷
Forgetting to sleep at night.

Truly:

In the morning they were gifted singing boys in Miao Ch'ing's residence;

But by evening they were merely entertainers in the Hsi-men establishment.

Gazing into the distance, they observed that there was a wine flag suspended deep in a forest of green trees before them.

One of the boy-singers said to the other, "Brother, we've been traveling all day long and are getting rather hungry. Let's stop for a cup of wine before going any further."

Lo and behold, the four of them promptly:

Rolled out of their saddles,⁵⁸

and walked into the wine shop. On the signboard were displayed two lines that put it very well:

Spirits and immortals have deposited their jade girdles;

Ministers and councilors have pawned their golden sables.⁵⁹

Truly, it was a fine wine shop.

The four of them sat down and called for the waiter, telling him, "Draw us two ewers of wine, pound some scallions and garlic, and serve us a large side of pork, together with a few saucers of bean curd and other side dishes."

Just as they were about to:

Unburden themselves and drink lustily,
all of a sudden they happened to look around and saw that on the whitewashed wall there were two columns of characters in "flying

white”⁶⁰ calligraphy, that read:

A thousand li is not a great distance,
To return after ten years is not late.
So long as we remain in this universe,
Why need we mourn over our separation?

When the eyes of the two singing boys were confronted with these sentiments, they couldn't help feeling affected by them, like:

The apothecary who finds himself to be ill.

Before they knew it, with a gush, two rows of tears began to flow from their eyes.

One of them said to the other, “Brother, we served Squire Miao faithfully, in the expectation that we'd remain together till the end, like:

A plant-stem that reaches all the way to the ground.⁶¹

Who would have thought that in the course of a drinking party:

With a single word or a couple of sentences,⁶²

he would casually give us away to someone else?

People away from home are at a disadvantage.⁶³

Who knows what will happen to us after leaving him?”

Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih attempted to reassure them with soothing words for a while, after which, having eaten a meal, they remounted their horses and resumed their journey.

What with their:

Four horses, and

Sixteen hooves,

they made decidedly good progress. In no more than a few days, they arrived in the vicinity of Ch'ing-ho district in Tung-p'ing prefecture. The four of them, after dismounting and tethering their horse, inquired for directions and eventually found their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence on Amethyst Street.

To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned home from the Eastern Capital, he had been kept busy every day by people sending gifts to him, or inviting him to parties, so that day after day was spent carousing with his:

Three friends and four companions.

Not only did Wu Yüeh-niang provide an entertainment to welcome him back from his trip, but he was also obliged to resume intimate relations with each of his concubines in their various quarters, so that, for days on end, he was:

Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain.

For this reason, he had not even reported to the yamen, or canceled the certificate entitling him to time off from his official duties.

On this particular day, finding himself at leisure, he went to the yamen, where he took his place on the bench, held roll call, reheard the cases of all the defendants who had been brought to court for the crimes of rape, assault, gambling, or larceny, and took the time to sign the documents that had accumulated during his absence. He then got into an open sedan chair and headed for home, escorted by a number of jailers who shouted to clear the way.

Whom should he see upon his arrival but Miao Hsiu, Miao Shih, and the two singing boys, who had been waiting at the gate for some time and now followed his sedan chair to the front reception hall, where they got down on their knees and explained, “We come from Squire Miao Ch'ing of Yang-chou and are the bearers of a letter asking after Your Honor's health.”

Having kowtowed to him, they got up and stood to one side. Hsi-men Ch'ing, after acknowledging their salutation by raising his hand, and telling them to get up, spent some time running through the customary formalities of inquiring about Squire Miao's doings since they parted, and discussing the weather. He then summoned Shu-t'ung and had him cut open the protective outer envelope with a pair of silver scissors, after which he tore open the inner envelope, unfolded the enclosed note, and carefully perused it.

What should he observe at this juncture but Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, who got down on their knees as before, in order to present the numerous gifts they had brought with them, saying, “These are just a few tokens of our squire's filial sentiments, which we beg that Your Honor will deign to accept.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was:

Unable to contain his delight,

promptly told Tai-an to take charge of the gifts, while he invited Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih to get up, saying, “Who would have thought that when your master and I:

Encountered each other a thousand li from home,⁶⁴

Our feelings were genial, our thoughts in accord,

to such an extent that the squire, in his boundless good will, promised to make me a present of these singing boys? Thinking at the time that these were merely:

Words uttered in his cups,

I had long since forgotten them. Because I was anxious to get home without delay, I failed to call upon him in order to say goodbye. And now, just as I was thinking about this, who would have thought that, for the squire:

A word of assent is worth a thousand pieces of gold,⁶⁵

so that, even at a distance, he has remembered his promise. I recall that among famous examples of fidelity between men of yore, the pledge of friendship that led Fan Shih to honor his promise to visit Chang Shao at an appointed time though they were a thousand li apart,⁶⁶ in both ancient and modern times:

Is considered to be an exemplary tale.⁶⁷

And nowadays, truly, men such as this squire of yours are not easily come by.”

Praising his strong points and acclaiming his virtue,

he continued expressing his gratitude in fulsome detail for some time.

Lo and behold, at this juncture, the two singing boys once again approached him and kowtowed several times, saying, “The squire enjoined us to serve Your Honor faithfully and expressed the hope that you would look upon us with a favorable eye.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the two singing boys were clean-cut in appearance, and truly:

Both slender and seductive.

Although they may not have been females, who:

Wear their clothes in two pieces;⁶⁸

they were superior to mere girls, whose:

Lips are red and teeth are white.⁶⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing felt:

As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make him happier,

and celebrated the occasion by inviting his four managers to a party in the front reception hall. On the one hand, he prepared generous gifts of silks and satins and other valuables, and wrote a letter to thank Squire Miao for his consideration, while, on the other hand, he had a room prepared for the two singing boys and told them that he would expect them to wait upon him in his studio.

Lo and behold, when Ying Po-chüeh and company:

Got wind of this affair, and

Were apprised of this event,

they all came to see for themselves. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly told Tai-an to obtain some dishes of food, appetizers, snacks, and new wine from the rear compound, and lay them out on an Eight Immortals table for the entertainment of his guests. In the course of the proceedings, he called upon the two singing boys to come out and sing for them.

Lo and behold:

Holding up their sandalwood clappers,

they started to sing, performing a song suite beginning with the tune “Fresh Water Song”:

In the little garden last night the river plum blossomed,
Bringing with it an intoxicating aura of a different kind.
I welcome the smiles of the pear blossom,
But envy the lissome waist of the willow,
And inquire of the rose-leaved raspberry,
If it blooms till the crab apple flowers.

To the tune “Stopping the Horse to Listen”:

Over the sparse hedge along the country road,
Gust after gust of fragrant breeze attracts the swallows.
By the secluded paving in the little garden,
Flurry after flurry of clearing rain moves past the woods.
Her fragrant heart remains undetected by the butterflies;
Her subtle fragrance has not yet been scented by the bees.
As she leans over every balustrade,
Who knows how many heartbreaking thoughts she is beset by?

To the binary tunes “Wild Geese Alight” and “Victory Song”:

Lo and behold: in the azure shade, Hsi Shih knits her brows.
With red drops, petals are stained by the cuckoo's pearly tears;
Dancing about, sprigs of flowers adorn shiny silken caps;
Fluttering airily, blossoms cascade down before the belvedere.

As ever, their fragrant aura permeates one's garments;
But their alluring forms are easily soiled in the mud.
Where they fall the fish are startled;
As they flutter hither, the butterflies become confused.
She wonders to herself,
“To whom can I entrust my yearning?”
And sorrows that,
The Peach Blossom Spring remains beyond her reach.

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded with approval and exclaimed, “Sure enough, your singing is superb.”

The two singing boys made a half obeisance by falling to one knee before him and said, “We've also learned the words to a set of four lyrics, which we can perform for you while we're at it, if you like.”

“That would be even better,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and directed them to proceed. To the tune “The Whole River Is Red”:

Tearing off a strip of Shantung silk,
With the aid of pigments and backing,
One depicts the scene of a herd boy in the spring.
The grass is short,
Spread out evenly over the level fields.
He sits idly on his brown water buffalo calf.
With a tattered volume in one hand, perched securely on the buffalo's back,
He sounds a few notes on his short flute, while traversing the emerald mist.
Thinking to indite a verse to go with the picture, one tries to compose a new lyric,
Putting the imagination to work.

If the composition is good enough,
It may be preserved in the Palace Library.
If the tune is sufficiently catchy,
It may be set to woodwinds and strings.

If sung without accompaniment,
Though the classic tune “Warm Spring” is hard to match,
The connoisseurs of a generation may yet praise it.
It will appeal to every taste, and people may compete to transcribe it.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the writing of the “Kao-t’ang fu,”⁷⁰
The sentiment of the lyric will suffice.

To the same tune:

One delineates a scene of summer plowing.
Beyond the suburban plain,
The paths between the fields run east and west.⁷¹
The village commons are irregular,
Encircled by the turquoise hues of the hills.
The embankments and dikes are interconnected.
The color green pervades the enclosed fields, teeming with millet and rice.
The ears of wheat are densely clustered; silkworms fill their frames.
And there also appears to be a stream circling the wattled gate,
By the sheer slopes of the hills.

Someone is leaning on a bamboo staff,
Skirting the hills and valleys,
Traversing the woods and marshes,
Listening to the gibbons and cranes.
His son is plowing, his wife brings a hamper,
As they cooperate in the work of cultivation.
The tall trees provide ample shade where they settle down to rest.
Stroking their bulging bellies, they relax by stretching out their feet.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the composing of the “Airs of Pin,”⁷²
The pleasures of rural life will be conveyed.

To the same tune:

When one has finished applying the colors,
The new picture turns out well,
Embellished as it is with streams and hills.
Faintly discernible,
There are sand spits beyond the riverbanks,
Green clover fern and red smartweed.
A stream of autumn light seems to connect the shorelines.
A figure in a short rain cape and bamboo hat is perceptible amid misty waves,
Trying to estimate how many fresh fish he has netted by this time;
But the perch are small.

Fishermen's songs arise,
Flying geese are remote,
The river moon is white,
Returning clouds are few.
Leaning by his matted window, he looks out for,
His sworn friends, the sea gulls.
One is tempted to ask how the forgotten concerns of the past,
Can be compared with the tranquillity of his present situation.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined, the singing of the song “Blue Waters,”⁷³
One will rise above the dust of the world.

To the same tune:

On all sides the clouds are lowering;
The frozen flakes scatter,
Evenly covering the thatched dwelling.
The red brazier is warm,
In which his wife is baking sweet potatoes.
Pouring out vintage wine for himself,
The cottager tasks a servant to fetch fuel from outside the gate,
And calls to his son, who is playing with a crane in the courtyard.
If one can succeed in capturing this scene, and conveying it in a picture,⁷⁴
It will gladden the mind's eye.

Wealth and distinction,
Are bestowed by Heaven;
To keep clear of excess,
Is one's only ambition.
Giving beauty and wonder free expression,
One adorns the scroll with fine lyrics.
Fearing lest one's own talent for poetic effusions be lacking,
One gives way to one whose literary devices are up to the task.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the joys of “mulberry and elm,”⁷⁵
One's countenance will be like jade.⁷⁶

Sure enough:

Their tones divert the moving clouds;⁷⁷
Their songs create a new “White Snow.”

The quality of their performance induced the ladies from the rear compound, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, to come and listen. They were all exceedingly delighted by it and exclaimed, “How well they sing!”

Lo and behold, from her vantage point amid the crowd, P'an Chin-lien focused her gaze directly on the two singing boys and

quietly muttered to herself, "These two youngsters not only sing well, but, in appearance, they are as handsome as can be."

In her heart, she had already registered something of a partiality for them.

At the time, Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for the two singing boys to stay in an anteroom on the eastern side of the front courtyard. On the one hand, he directed that a meal should be provided for Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, while, on the other hand, he prepared appropriate presents, and a reply, expressing his gratitude to Squire Miao Ch'ing.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 56

HSI-MEN CH'ING ASSISTS CH'ANG SHIH-CHIEH;

YING PO-CHÜEH RECOMMENDS LICENTiate SHUI

Those who endeavor to amass gold by the peck, emulating
the luxury of the "untitled nobility,"¹
Are as deluded as was Chuang Chou in the dream in which
he imagined himself to be a butterfly.²
One has heard tell that the magnificence of the Citadel
at Mei proved difficult to perpetuate;³
Who would have thought that the wealth extracted from
the Copper Mountains could be exhausted?⁴
Nowadays Pao Shu-ya is praised for the way in which he
divided the proceeds with Kuan Chung;⁵
In former times P'ang Yün was laughed at for choosing
to sink his entire fortune in the sea.⁶
As one approaches the inevitable end of life's journey,
who can be said to be a bosom friend?
It is only such a noble friend who can continue to pay
due honor to the customs of antiquity.

THE BURDEN of the above eight lines of regulated verse is simply that:

For humans residing in this world,⁷
Glory and luxury, wealth and honor,
cannot be retained forever. One fine day, when:
Impermanence, or death, visits you,⁸
no matter how much you may have in the way of:
Piled up gold and accumulated jade,⁹
you will wind up:
Returning to the shades empty-handed.
Because Hsi-men Ch'ing was so:
Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth,
as well as being:
Willing to lend aid to those in poverty and distress,
everyone sang his praises. But no more of this.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing retained the two singing boys to await his pleasure, telling them, "When I have occasion to call upon you:
You must not be disobedient."¹⁰

The two of them nodded their assent and withdrew.

He then saw to the preparation of a reply and return gifts to entrust to the retainers from the Miao household, and he also rewarded them with some silver. Miao Shih and Miao Hsiu kowtowed to him in gratitude and then made their departure.

Later on, because Hsi-men Ch'ing found no use for the two singing boys, he ended up making a present of them to the grand preceptor's household. Truly:

When one has spent thousands in gold¹¹ teaching her how to sing and dance;

One must bequeath her to someone else to provide pleasure during his youth.¹²

To resume our story, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, from the time he had asked for Hsi-men Ch'ing's assistance at the party on a previous occasion, did not yet have anything to show for it. Moreover, day and night, his landlord had been pressing him incessantly for his arrears. It so happened that, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home from the Eastern Capital, he had been invited out to parties to celebrate his return day after day, so that ten days in a row had gone by without Cadger Ch'ang's having a chance to meet with him. As the saying goes:

Even when people meet face to face, it is hard to express everything.

If one cannot even arrange a meeting, to whom is one to make an appeal? Every day, he asked Ying Po-chüeh to accompany him in going to Hsi-men Ch'ing's front gate and asking after him; only to be told that he was not at home, and having to return empty-handed.

Moreover, when he arrived home, his wife berated him, saying, "You claim to be a male of the species, a man of mettle, and yet you don't even have a house to call your own and have to put up with all this annoyance. You customarily boast of your friendship with His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, yet today, when you ask a favor of him, it's like a pitcher falling into the water."

She railed at Cadger Ch'ang so effectively that:

Though he had a mouth he was left speechless,
and could only stare vacantly into space, without daring to utter a word.

The next day, he got up early, sought out Ying Po-chüeh, and invited him to join him in a visit to a wine shop. What should they see

there but a small thatched hut, situated by a bend in a flowing stream.¹³ In front of the door, amid the shade of the green trees, a wine flag was visible, and five or seven workers were seen to be busily engaged in carrying in supplies of wine and meat. Across the front of the shop there was a counter, over which there were suspended fresh fish, geese, ducks, and the like. It was really a nice clean place to sit, so he invited Ying Po-chüeh to share three cups of wine with him in the shop.

"I really ought not to put you to the trouble," demurred Ying Po-chüeh, but Cadger Ch'ang dragged him into the shop, and they sat down together.

The waiter measured out some wine for them and laid out a platter of smoked pork, and a platter of fresh fish.

After:

Two rounds of wine had been consumed,

Cadger Ch'ang said, "With regard to that matter that I have asked you to speak to His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing about, for some days now we haven't been able to arrange a meeting with him. Meantime, my landlord has been pressing me hard for my arrears, and last evening my wife bickered with me about it for half the night. Not being able to put up with it anymore, I extricated myself at the fifth watch this morning, only to implore you, Brother, to join me in taking advantage of the earliness of the hour to wait patiently outside his gate and waylay him before he goes out. What do you think of this proposal, Brother?"

Ying Po-chüeh replied:

"Once one has acceded to someone's request,

It is imperative to see the job through to the end."¹⁴

Today, for better or for worse, I'll make sure that His Honor helps you out, that's all there is to it."

The two of them shared another few cups of wine, after which Ying Pochüeh protested, "We'd better not drink any more so early in the morning."

Cadger Ch'ang urged him to have another cup, after which he settled the score, and they left together, going straight to the residence of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

At that time, it was early in the fall, and:

The metallic autumn wind was brisk.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had gotten drunk for several days in a row and was feeling somewhat under the weather, had received yet another invitation to a drinking party from Eunuch Director Chou, which he had found some pretext for refusing. Instead, he was relaxing in the Hidden Spring Grotto in his garden.

It so happens that the Hidden Spring Grotto in the rear of Hsi-men Ch'ing's garden was surrounded by fruit-bearing trees and fresh flowers, which:

Flourished throughout the four seasons.

At this time, although it was early autumn, an incalculable number of flowers were blooming in the garden. Hsi-men Ch'ing, being at home with nothing to do, was enjoying himself in the flower garden with Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, five of them in all. On his head, Hsi-men Ch'ing wore a "loyal and tranquil hat." On his body he wore a long gown of willow-green moiré, and white-soled boots. Yüeh-niang was wearing a willow-green jacket of Hang-chou chiffon that opened down the middle, over a light blue skirt of water-patterned pongee, and gold-red phoenix-toed, high-heeled shoes. Meng Yü-lou was wearing a raven-black satin jacket, over a skirt of gosling-yellow pongee, and peach-red high-heeled shoes of plain silk with purpled gold-spangled edging. P'an Chin-lien was wearing a pink crepe blouse that opened down the middle with a white chiffon lining, and a vest of gold-red material with a bright green border, over a skirt of white Hang-chou chiffon with a decorated border, and high-heeled shoes of pink patterned silk. Only Li P'ing-erh was wearing a wide-lapelled jacket of plain blue Hang-chou chiffon, a skirt of finished pale blue moon-colored chiffon, and light blue plain silk high-heeled shoes. The four of them:

Seductively and bewitchingly,

kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company while he enjoyed himself:

Scanning the flowers and inspecting the willows.¹⁵

To resume our story, when Cadger Ch'ang and Ying Po-chüeh got as far as the reception hall and learned that His Honor was at home, they sat down happily and waited for what seemed like half a day, but no one appeared. What should they see at this juncture but Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung, who came in the gate from outside, panting for breath, and carrying a trunk full of satin and chiffon clothing.

Calling out agitatedly, "We waited half a day and were only able to pick up half the order," they set the trunk down in the reception hall.

"Where has your master gotten to?" Ying Po-chüeh asked them.

"Father is in the garden enjoying himself," replied Shu-t'ung.

"May I trouble you to say a word to him?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

The two of them, carrying the trunk as before, then proceeded inside.

Before long, Shu-t'ung came out and said, "Father requests Master Ying the Second and Uncle Ch'ang the Second to wait a bit. He'll be right out."

The two of them sat down and waited a while longer before Hsi-men Ch'ing finally came out. After they had saluted him with a bow, they were asked to resume their seats.

"For days on end, it seems," said Ying Po-chüeh, "Brother has been so busy attending drinking parties that he hasn't had any time to himself. How do you happen to be at home today?"

"Ever since the last time I saw you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been invited out to drinking parties every day and have been as drunk as can be, which has left me completely enervated. I was invited out to another party today, but I concocted a pretext for not going."

"Where did that trunkful of clothing that was carried in just now come from?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"At the present time, autumn has already begun," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and everyone needs to be supplied with autumn clothing.

That trunkful just now was for your senior sister-in-law, but they haven't finished completing the order. That was only the first half of it."

Cadger Ch'ang stuck out his tongue in disbelief and said, "In that case the six chambers of my sisters-in-law will require six trunkloads. What a lot of expense that will entail. As for such mean folk as ourselves, we can hardly afford a single bolt of cotton. The fact that you can arrange to have so many clothes of satin and chiffon made up for you is an indication, Brother, that you have become a real plutocrat."

This remark induced a fit of laughter on the part of Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh.

"How is it," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "that during these last few days your boatload of goods from Hang-chou has not yet been seen to arrive? I wonder how the business is going. As for that money that you promised the other day to Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, you agreed that when the money owed you by Hsü the Fourth outside the gate came into your hands, you would use it to make up the sum you promised to turn over to them."

"That boatload of goods," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "seems to have been delayed somewhere or other, and they haven't even sent me a letter about it. It's a real cause for concern. As far as the money for Li the Third and Huang the Fourth is concerned, I have done as you suggested."

Ying Po-chüeh moved his seat closer to that of Hsi-men Ch'ing and took advantage of the occasion to say, "Regarding that matter that Brother Ch'ang the Second besought your help about the other day, you have been so busy since then that he hasn't had a chance to speak to you about it. Brother Ch'ang the Second's landlord has been pressing him so hard for his arrears that he is being driven to distraction. His wife, too, is berating him about it every day, so that he has been reduced to paralysis and doesn't know what to do. Right now, the autumn days are getting colder, and the fur coat he would normally wear is in hock in the pawnshop. Brother, if you are goodhearted about it, as the saying goes:

If you want to help someone, you must do it when they need it the most.¹⁶

That would also spare him the:

Incessant bickering,¹⁷

that his wife subjects him to in their room, day and night. What is more, if he can find a proper house to live in, the figure that he cuts in society will only serve to enhance your prestige. For this reason, Brother Ch'ang the Second has asked me to come here for the sole purpose of beseeching you to come to his assistance as soon as possible."

"I originally promised him that I would do so," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But, because my trip to the Eastern Capital cost me a lot of silver, I had planned to wait until Manager Han Tao-kuo returned from his excursion before taking care of it. Since he is in need of a house, I will weigh out the silver required for him to buy it if it is now such an urgent matter."

"It's not so much an urgent matter for Brother Ch'ang the Second," said Ying Po-chüeh, "as it is that he can't stand his wife's nagging. That is why he feels compelled to ask you to take care of it as soon as possible."

Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated for some time before saying, "If that's the case, it won't be all that difficult. Let me ask you, though, how much of a house will suffice for him to live in?"

"The two of them," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "will need a front room opening onto the street, a sitting room for the entertainment of guests, a bedroom, and a kitchen, those four rooms at a minimum. As for the price, it will certainly amount to more than three or four taels of silver. Brother, see if you can't, sooner or later, get together an appropriate amount, and enable him to complete this transaction."

"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll give him a few pieces of loose silver to start off with. He can use them to buy himself a coat, purchase some furniture, and take care of his current expenses. After he has located a suitable house for himself, of course I'll weigh out the required amount of silver for him, so that he can complete the transaction. How would that be?"

The two of them thanked him with one voice, saying, "Brother, such good-heartedness is a rare thing."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Shu-t'ung and told him, "Go ask the First Lady for the packet of loose silver in the leather case, and bring it back with you."

Shu-t'ung nodded assent and went off on his errand. Before long he came back out with a packet of silver and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Cadger Ch'ang, "This packet of loose silver contains twelve taels of silver left over from the sealed envelopes containing tips that I took with me on my visit to the grand preceptor's mansion in the Eastern Capital. You take them and use them for your miscellaneous expenses."

He then opened up the packet and showed the contents to Cadger Ch'ang, which consisted entirely of loose lumps of inscribed silver weighing three to five mace apiece. Cadger Ch'ang accepted them, put them in the sleeve of his gown, and bowed his thanks.

"These last few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it has not been my intention to delay the fulfillment of my promise. I have only been waiting for you to locate a suitable house, at which time I would complete the transaction with you at one stroke. And you haven't located a house yet. Right now, you should do your best to locate one as soon as possible, and then, when I have the silver in hand, I'll be prepared to weigh it out for you, that's all."

Cadger Ch'ang, once again, expressed his gratitude repeatedly. The three of them sat down as before, and Ying Po-chüeh said, "There are numerous cases among the men of old who:



Hsi-men Ch'ing Comes to the Assistance of Cadger Ch'ang

Disdained wealth and practiced philanthropy,¹⁸
in which, later on, their descendants succeeded in:

Enhancing the height and size of their gates,¹⁹
significantly increasing the estates of their ancestors. Among the stingy, on the other hand, who were only interested in accumulating gold and valuables for themselves, there are many cases in which, later on, their descendants turned out badly, and not even the graves of their ancestors were preserved. From this it is clear that:

The Way of Heaven favors reversion."²⁰

"Money," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is something which:

Likes movement and dislikes inertia.

It will not allow itself to be immured in any one place. And it is designed by Heaven for human use. For every person who accumulates a surplus there will be another who suffers a deficiency. It is very wrong, therefore, merely to pile up wealth and valuables."

There is a poem that testifies to this:

There are those who are not happy unless they can accumulate jade and pile up gold;²¹
They remain unaware that wealth and valuables are merely the roots of catastrophe.
They treasure every single cash as though it were a part of their flesh and blood;
While those who are chivalrous by nature can only laugh at them for their inanity.
They treat each one of their relatives and friends as if they were total strangers;

They preserve a facade, but their hearts are dead, which is certainly regrettable.
One can anticipate that one fine day impermanence, or death, will pay them a visit;
And they will proceed, empty-handed and all alone, to the abode of everlasting night.

As they were speaking, who should appear but Shu-t'ung, who brought out some refreshments for them. When they had finished eating, Cadger Ch'ang thanked his host, stood up to go, and went happily home with the silver tucked in his sleeve.

He had scarcely entered the door, when his wife came noisily out to meet him and berated him in a strident voice, saying:

“When the leaves fall off the phoenix tree,²²

Nothing is left but a trunk of ‘bare sticks.’

You good-for-nothing! You've been gone the whole day, leaving your wife to starve at home. And now you come back with:

A thousand or ten thousand signs of joy.²³

How can you be anything but ashamed of yourself? You don't have a house to call your own, which only elicits the contumely of our neighbors, but you leave it to the ears of your wife to suffer their abuse.”

Cadger Ch'ang did not even open his mouth but waited until his wife had finished her tirade before gently groping the silver out of his sleeve and placing it on the table.

Opening up the packet and gazing at it, he said, “My ‘square-holed brothers’! My ‘square-holed brothers’!²⁴ You are truly:

A priceless treasure,

and when I contemplate your shining and jingling qualities:

My whole body turns numb with delight.²⁵

I only wish I could swallow you whole, like a mouthful of water. If you had only come my way a little earlier, I wouldn't have had to put up with all the quarreling this whore has subjected me to.”

When the woman clearly saw that there was a pile of twelve or thirteen taels of silver in the packet, she started forward in her excitement, as though she intended to seize it from the hands of her old man.

“You're congenitally given to abusing your husband,” exclaimed Cadger Ch'ang, “but, no sooner do you see silver in the picture, than you want to cozy up to him. Tomorrow, I'll take this silver to buy a new outfit of clothes for myself, and go live somewhere else, so I won't have to fool around with you anymore.”

Putting a smile on her face, the woman said, “My dear, where did it ever come from, all this silver?”

Cadger Ch'ang did not deign to reply.

“My dear,” the woman went on to say, “no doubt you resent all I've had to say to you. But my only desire has been for your success. Now that you have the silver, we ought to discuss what to do, buy a house for ourselves, and settle down. Wouldn't that be the best thing to do, instead of carrying on like this? As your wife, I haven't been remiss in any way. You can resent me if you like, but it isn't just.”

Cadger Ch'ang, again, did not deign to open his mouth.

The woman continued to chatter away, but, when she noticed that Cadger Ch'ang was not paying any attention to her, she began to feel some compunction about the situation and couldn't help giving way to tears.

When Cadger Ch'ang saw this, he sighed, saying, “For a woman, who:

Neither plows nor weaves,²⁶

you certainly give your old man a hard time!”

At this, the woman wept even more copiously, and the two of them lapsed into silence. There being no one there to admonish them to make up, they simply sat there, sunk in depression.



Cadger Ch'ang with Silver in Hand Lords It over His Wife

Finally, Cadger Ch'ang thought to himself, "It is not easy to be a woman. She has had to put up with a lot of hardship and can hardly be blamed if she resents me for it. Now that I have some silver today, if I don't pay her any attention, people will say that I'm hardhearted. Even His Honor, if he finds out about it, will judge me to be in the wrong."

Turning to the woman with a smile, he said, "I was only having some fun with you. I don't hold anything against you, it's just that you're constantly nagging me. This morning, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I made a point of inviting Brother Ying the Second to join me for three cups of wine in a tavern, and then accompany me on a visit to His Honor's place. Providentially, he happened to be at home and had not gone out drinking anywhere. It was only thanks to the efforts of Brother Ying the Second, who gave his lips and tongue a real workout on my behalf, that I ended up with this silver in hand. And he also elicited a promise from His Honor that when we find a house, he will weigh out the necessary silver in order to close the deal for us. These twelve taels, he told me, were merely an advance that we can use to cover our daily expenses."

"So it turns out that this is really a gift to you from His Honor," the woman said. "We mustn't allow it to be wasted. You must find a winter coat for yourself, in order to fend off the cold."

"That's just what I wanted to discuss with you," said Cadger Ch'ang. "If we use these twelve taels of incised silver to buy a few items of clothing, and a few articles of furniture, once we have a new house to move into, we'll look a little better off. We can't thank His Honor enough for his generosity. On a later day, when we have moved into our new house, we'll have to invite him over for a visit."

"We'll have to wait until the time comes," said the woman. "We can decide what to do then."

Truly:

It has always been true that gratitude for kindness and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand or ten thousand years will never be allowed to gather dust.

After Cadger Ch'ang and his wife had talked things over for a while, the woman asked, "Did you have anything to eat while you were over there?"

"I did have something to eat at His Honor's place," said Cadger Ch'ang. "If you haven't had anything to eat, let's take some of this silver and buy some rice with it."

"Be careful how you keep that packet of silver fastened up," the woman said. "I'll wait for you. Come back right away."

Cadger Ch'ang took a wicker basket and went out onto the street. Before long, when he came back after buying the rice, there was also a large hunk of mutton lying in the basket.

When he came rushing back, laughing out loud, the woman met him in the doorway and said, "This hunk of mutton! What on earth did you buy that for?"

"Just now you were complaining about all the hardships you had suffered," said Cadger Ch'ang with a smile. "Not to mention this bit of mutton, I really ought to have had several oxen slaughtered in order to treat you."

"You heartless louse!" the woman scolded Cadger Ch'ang with a laugh. "Today I'll just store up the resentment in my heart and wait to see how you treat me in the future."

"I can foresee," said Cadger Ch'ang, "that one of these days, though you may plead with me ten thousand times, saying, 'Darling, spare this little whore of yours,' I'll refuse to spare you. Just try your luck and see."

When the woman heard this, she merely laughed while she went out to the well to draw some water.

There and then, the woman cooked up some rice, cut up a bowl of mutton, and placed them on the table, saying, "Come have something to eat, dear."

"I've already eaten at His Honor's place," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I don't want anything. You're as hungry as can be. Just help yourself."

The woman then proceeded to eat it all up by herself, and clear away the utensils, before sending Cadger Ch'ang out to buy the clothes.

Cadger Ch'ang put the silver in his sleeve and headed straight for Main Street, where he looked over the wares in several shops before finding anything that suited him. In the end, he merely bought a blue woman's jacket of Hang-chou chiffon, a green pongee skirt, a pale blue moon-colored blouse of cloud-patterned silk, a red satin jacket, and a skirt of white pongee, five items in all. To match these purchases, he bought for himself a gosling-yellow satin jacket, a long robe of lavender-colored pongee, and several items of coarse cotton clothing. Altogether, he spent six taels and five mace of silver.

Wrapping all of these items up in a single package, he came home carrying it on his back and told the woman to open it up and see what it contained.

The woman promptly opened it up to take a look and then asked, "How much did it cost?"

"I was able to get it all for six taels and five mace of silver," replied Cadger Ch'ang.

"Although they weren't cheap," the woman said, "they were good value for that amount of silver. On the one hand, we should get out a trunk and pack them safely away, while tomorrow we can go and buy some furniture."

That day the woman went about her daily tasks:

As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make her happier;
while all her customary complaints were:

Relegated to that great sea, the Eastern Ocean.

But no more of this.

To resume our story, after Ying Po-chüeh and Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Cadger Ch'ang on his way, the two of them continued to sit together in the reception hall as before.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then reopened the conversation, saying, "Though I am merely a military official and am only able to maintain the sort of front that I do, I have managed to become acquainted with quite a few officials serving both inside and outside the capital. And recently I have also been acknowledged as a protégé of the grand preceptor. As a consequence, the number of letters and cards going back and forth has become:

Like a stream of flowing water.

I don't have the spare time to devote to it, so that a good deal of it is not properly dealt with. I would very much like to find a live-in social secretary, to whom I could turn over the task of handling this correspondence for me. It would be very helpful to be spared this expenditure of effort. The only trouble is, I haven't been able to locate anyone with the requisite talent and learning. If you happen to know of such a person, let me know about it. I will undertake to find an empty room to accommodate him and will also provide him with an annual stipend of several taels of silver for the support of his family. If it should turn out to be someone with whom you are on intimate terms, so much the better."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh:

"If you had not spoken, I would not have known.²⁷

If you were looking for any other sort of person, they would be readily available, but this particular sort of person is hard to find. Why is this the case? In the first place, it must be someone with the requisite talent and learning. In the second place, it must be someone of personal integrity, and also someone with whom you can get along. You're better off without anyone who:

Engages in the pros and cons of idle tattle,²⁸

or:

Wiggles his lips and waggles his tongue;²⁹

and, as for persons of mediocre talent and learning, who are old hands at chicanery, what use would you have for them?

"The only person I can think of is the grandson of an old friend of my grandfather's. At present he holds the rank of a licentiate in this subprefecture. He has taken the provincial examinations several times but did not succeed in passing. The talent and learning he

has acquired actually make him superior to Pan Ku or Ssu-ma Ch'ien, while, as for his personal integrity, he is in a class with Confucius and Mencius. Because of the long-standing relationship between our families, he is like a brother to me. We are extremely close.

"I remember that when he took the provincial examinations ten years ago, the examining official praised his two essays on public policy to the skies. But, who could have anticipated that there was another candidate whose essays were even better, so that he did not pass. Since then, he has taken the examinations several more times but has been unsuccessful, with the inevitable result that the hair on his head and around his temples has become speckled with white. Right now, he is:

A scholar at large with his books and sword.³⁰

But his family still possesses more than fifteen acres of arable land, and three or four houses, which are fit to live in."

"That ought to be more than enough to maintain his family," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why should he be willing to hire himself out as a live-in secretary in someone else's place?"

"The land and houses that he formerly possessed," said Ying Po-ch'üeh, "have all been purchased by more affluent families, so that, right now, he has nothing left but the skin on his two hands."

"So the land that you mentioned has already been sold off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What does that amount to?"

"True enough, that doesn't amount to anything," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "But he has a wife who is only about nineteen years old and is exceedingly attractive, as well as two children who are just two or three years old."

"If he's got an attractive wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why should he be willing to take a job away from home?"

"The good news on that front," said Ying Po-ch'üeh, "is that two years ago his wife, who was addicted to extramarital affairs, ran off to the Eastern Capital with someone, and his two children have died of smallpox, so he is the only member of the household left. Of course, he'd be willing to take a job away from home."

"In that case," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're really doing a job on him. It's all folderol. Tell me, what is his surname?"

"His surname is Shui," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "His talent and learning are really incomparable. If you were to employ him, Brother, I guarantee that every last one of the poems, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies that he might compose would serve to augment your stature. When people saw them, they would all say to themselves, 'His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is certainly possessed of talent and learning.'"

"The first two things you mentioned about him just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "turned out to be humbug. I don't believe this humbug of yours. If you happen to remember any compositions of his, recite them for me. If they impress me favorably, I'll invite him to become a member of my household, and set aside a room for him to live in. Since it's only a matter of a single individual, it should be easy to manage. We can just pick an auspicious day and invite him over, that's all."

"I can remember something of a letter he sent me," said Ying Po-ch'üeh, "asking if I could help him find an employer. I recall a few lines of it, which I'll recite for your delectation. To the tune 'Yellow Oriole':

This letter is addressed to Brother Ying.
My thoughts of you since we parted go without saying.
Thanks to your kindness, my whole family is in good health.
The character *she* and the character *kuan*,
Combine to mean the post of live-in secretary.³¹
If you hear of such an opening, I will, of course, beseech your help.
If anyone is desirous of a brush sturdy as a beam,
To compose his correspondence,
My brush is capable of engendering clouds and mist."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he started to laugh out loud, saying, "If he were wholeheartedly serious about wanting you to find him an employer, why didn't he send you a regular letter, instead of putting his request into a song, which is not even very well written? It's obvious that his talent and learning are inadequate to the task, and his personal integrity leaves something to be desired."

"You ought not to be so sure of that," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "It's only because our families have been close to each other for three generations. When I was one or two years old, he was no more than three or four. In those days, when we shared candy and cake, biscuits and fruit, or the like, we didn't even quarrel over them. Later on, when we had both grown up and started to school in order to learn to read and write, the teacher used to say, 'Scholar Ying and Scholar Shui are both as smart as can be and are sure to be successful in their future lives.' And later still, when we took up composition, we would compete in writing essays together, without a trace of jealousy or envy. By day, we walked together, and sat together, and at night, we sometimes even slept together. And when we reached adulthood and donned hairnets, we remained as fast friends as ever. Consequently, the two of us are almost like one person and are fond brothers to each other. For this reason, ignoring convention, he felt free to express his ideas to me in the form of a song."

"When I first saw it, I was also somewhat annoyed. But later, when I thought about it, I concluded that it was only because he was making his appeal to a friend that he presumed to do what he did, and I was no longer annoyed by it. Moreover, that song of his is actually rather cleverly done, though you may not have noticed it. The first line, where he says 'This letter is addressed to Brother Ying,' is the salutation, just like when people write, 'For the perusal of so-and-so.' Isn't that appropriate? The second line, where he says, 'My thoughts of you since we parted go without saying,' is like the conventional amenities about the weather. It is both concise and literary. Is that not appropriate also? The third line reads, 'Thanks to your kindness, my whole family is in good health.' That is simply to say that his family is all right. After that it gets even better."

"What are the fourth and fifth lines intended to convey?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Brother, you may not get it," said Ying Po-ch'üeh, "but this is an example of the word game of breaking characters down into their component parts, which people often find difficult. 'The character *she* and the character *kuan*, combine to mean the post of live-in secretary.' That is to say, if they are written together, do they not form the character *kuan*, meaning the post of live-in secretary? If such a post becomes available, he is anxious that I should recommend him for it, which is why he says, 'If you hear of such an opening, I will, of course, beseech your help.' The line, 'If anyone is desirous of a brush sturdy as a beam,' means that his brush is as sturdy as a beam, and that in handling correspondence, he has but to put his brush to work in order to fill the paper with clouds and mist."

"Brother, if you examine this composition of his, is there so much as a single word that is wasted? With just these few lines, he has

succeeded perfectly in putting the feelings in his mind on paper. Isn't that a worthy accomplishment?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by Ying Po-chüeh's praise of Licentiate Shui's composition that he was unable to respond further.

All he could do was to say to Ying Po-chüeh, "Since you have been emphasizing all his good points, let me ask you, do you have any serious communications of his? If you can show me one, I'll consider hiring him."

"I do have some examples of lyrics and rhapsodies that he has written at my place," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but I didn't bring any with me to show you. I happen to have memorized a composition of his, however, that is very well written. Let me recite it for you.

When I first donned a scholar's cap, my heart was filled with delight;
How was I to know that today, it is this very cap that has done me in;³²
Others generally manage to wear you for no more than three to five years;
But you have chosen to remain enamored of my head for a good thirty years.
Now that I wish to don an official black silk hat, I pray your indulgence;
I have composed these lines of verse in order to bid Your Honor farewell.
On this occasion it is not to be understood that my feelings are fickle;
It is the white hair that encroaches on my head that I find hard to bear.
This autumn if I fail to pass the examinations with the highest honors;
I will trample my enemy to pieces under my feet and take up husbandry.
It is the year for the triennial provincial examinations,
And the time has come for the results to be publicly announced.
In order to divulge the feelings in my heart,
I hereby lodge a complaint against you, my cap.
With your help I aspired to mount to the blue clouds and thereby bring glory on myself;
Who could have known that now, despite my white hair, you remain true to your old friend.
Alas!
I recall when I first donned a scholar's cap,
"Blue, blue was my student's collar."³³
Thanks to your condescending favor,
I was proud of my newly acquired dignity.
But you did not permit me to gain early success while still a young man;
Nor allow me to remain stooped for long, only to stand upright in the end.
Above, I do not hold a position as senior official or grand master;
Below, as a citizen, I am not a farmer, an artisan, nor a merchant.
Year after year, I dwell in the house of a commoner;
Day after day, I report for duty at the local school.
Whenever the education intendant comes to inspect us,
My heart is filled with nervousness and trepidation.
Whenever it is necessary to entertain superiors,
I am compelled to run around, now east, now west.³⁴
On your account, I spend my lifetime,
In anxiety and perturbation,
Suffering from a multitude of hardships.
During all four seasons of the year,³⁵
In scattered bits and pieces,³⁶
My teacher's salary has remained unpaid.
When I have sued for aid on the grounds of poverty,
I have been allotted five pecks of grain.
At the biannual sacrifices I have received coupons,³⁷
Entitling me to obtain half a pound of meat.
When officials encounter me,
They can't help being irritated.
When yamen runners refer to me,
They designate me an instructor.
Upon the road to the Eastern Capital,
I have accompanied others several times.
Among the prefects in the schoolroom,
I, alone, am the most venerated of all.³⁸
You see that my black boots are both down at the heel,
While my blue scholar's gown is completely threadbare.
Having buried my head in the books for many years,
I cannot completely describe all the hardships and vicissitudes I have suffered.
What hope is there of ever getting a start in life?
I have undergone all of this forsaken solitude and painful suffering for nothing.
Though I have approached all the established figures,
In my entire career, I have yet to gain any advantage from my compositions;
Not having known the benefit of imperial benevolence,
For years on end, I have continued to harbor the hope of conspicuous success.
Alas and alack!
I bemoan this scholar's cap.
If you only look at its shape,
It is something to be proud of.
Vertical behind and horizontal in front,
What sort of an object are you anyway?
With seven fissures and eight holes,
You are truly the root of catastrophe.
Alas!
The cloud-soaring bird has not yet folded its wings;
But the fish with dragon potential has lost its scales.
Have you not heard that:
The bird that has not flown for long,
Once it does, will soar to the clouds;
The bird that has not cried for long,
Once it cries, will startle everyone?³⁹
Early on, I entreated you to help me make a new person of myself;⁴⁰
This is not a case of my abandoning the old in favor of the new.
As a famed exemplar of this culture of ours,
I thought you possessed supernatural powers.
If only from now on we are forever separated,
Then will I be grateful for your magnanimity.
Of these few words and this meager libation,
I would prevail upon you to come and partake.
Your rationale and your destiny are exhausted;
I cannot overstate the urgency of my request.

From this point on, I would bid you farewell.⁴¹

Please take yourself off as soon as possible."⁴²

When Ying Po-chüeh had finished his recitation, Hsi-men Ch'ing clapped his hands and laughed loudly, saying, "Well, Brother Ying the Second, so you really consider this sort of talent and learning the equivalent of that of Pan Ku or Yang Hsiung?"⁴³

"His personal integrity ranks even higher than his talent and learning," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Now let me tell you something of his personal integrity."

"Go ahead and tell me about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Some years ago," said Ying Po-chüeh, "he held a position as live-in secretary in the establishment of Vice Minister Li. The Li household had several tens of maidservants, each and every one of which was attractive and clever. Moreover, there were also a number of page boys, each and every one of which was a good-looking catamite. This Licentiate Shui resided there for four or five years, without getting any improper ideas. But, later on, who would have anticipated that several mischief-making maidservants and page boys, seeing that he put on the airs of a saint, actually devoted themselves, day and night, to tempting him. This Licentiate Shui, who is extremely magnanimous by nature, eventually allowed his resistance to soften so far as to be enticed into an affair, for which his employer drove him out the door. This created quite a stir in the neighborhood, and everyone accused him of immoral conduct.

"The fact is that this Licentiate Shui is actually:

Impervious to the temptations of the flesh.

If you were to employ him in your home, Brother, no matter how many maid-servants and page boys you might have, even if they were to:

Sleep together or share the same quarters,⁴⁴
would this Licentiate Shui resort to disorderly conduct? He would never do so."

"Since he was driven out the door by his previous employer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there must definitely be something not quite right about him. Even though you and I are on the best of terms, I am not prepared to accept this recommendation of yours. The other day, a friend of my colleague Hsia Yenling, the venerable gentleman Ni P'eng, mentioned that he was acquainted with a fellow licentiate surnamed Wen. I'll wait until he comes to see me before deciding what to do."

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 57

ABBOT TAO SOLICITS FUNDS TO REPAIR

THE TEMPLE OF ETERNAL FELICITY;

NUN HSÜEH ENJOINS PAYING FOR

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE *DHĀRANĪ* SUTRA

If one's basic nature is perfected,¹ one can
comprehend the Way;
Turning over a new leaf, one may jump free of
the entangling net.
Disciplining oneself to achieve dhyāna is not
an easy thing to do;
Refining oneself in order to achieve no-birth
is no ordinary task.
Let the clear and the turgid alternate as the
wheel of dharma turns;
Break open the kalpas, so that one may travel
either east or west.
One may wander free and easy for myriads of
aeons without number;
One's single ray of divine light² will forever
illuminate the void.³

THE STORY GOES that in Tung-p'ing prefecture of Shantung province, there was in former times a Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity. It was erected in the second year of the P'u-t'ung reign period,⁴ during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty,⁵ and its founder was the venerable patriarch Wan-hui.⁶

Why do you suppose he was called the venerable patriarch Wan-hui? It was because, when the old master was only six or seven years old, he had an elder brother who had joined the army and was stationed on the frontier. Since:

The normal communication of news was difficult,⁷

They did not know whether he was alive or dead.⁸

For this reason, his aged mother could not get concern for her eldest son out of her mind and constantly wept about the house.

Suddenly one day, the child questioned his mother, saying, "Mother, at a time like this:

The world is at perfect peace,⁹

and your children are not troubling you. Though we have nothing to eat but meal after meal of millet, we are able to get by. Why is it, then, that you are constantly giving way to tears? Tell me about it Mother, and perhaps I will be able to share the burden of your sorrow with you."

"As a little child," his aged mother replied, "you do not yet comprehend the sorrows of your elders. During the four or five years since your father died, and your elder brother was dispatched to the frontier to serve as a senior officer, he has not sent a single letter home. I don't know whether he is dead or alive, or whether he exists or not. How can I ever get it off my mind?"

As she spoke, she started to cry again.

"Fortunately," the child responded, "if that's all it is, what's the difficulty about it? Mother, if you'll just tell me where my elder brother is stationed right now, I, his younger brother, will simply go there, sooner or later find my elder brother, get a letter from him, and come home to report back to you. Wouldn't that be a good idea?"

The old lady, crying on the one hand, and laughing on the other, said, "What a crazy simpleton you are! To take up the question of where your elder brother is located, if it were a trip of no more than a hundred or two hundred li, you might be able to make it. But he's somewhere in Liao-tung, more than ten thousand li from here. Even a stalwart young man, making the best possible time, would take four or five months to get there. I'm laughing because a child like you could hardly be expected to make such a trip."

"Aha!" said the child. "If it's only Liao-tung where he is, it's not as though he were up in the sky, or anything like that. I'm going to set out, find my elder brother, and come right back."

Lo and behold, he proceeded to fasten on his sandals, adjust his long gown, bow to his mother, and disappear in a cloud of dust. The old lady, finding that:

Though she might call after him, he did not respond;

Though she might pursue him, she could not catch up,

became even more depressed than before.

Among her neighbors in the locality, there were women, both old and young, who:

Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,

Providing soup and supplying water,
Praising here and faultfinding there,¹⁰
came forward to comfort her in her distress.

Some among them endeavored to reassure her, saying, "How could the child have gone very far? Sooner or later, before long, he is bound to return."

As a result, the old lady allowed the tears flowing from her two eyes to dry up and sat down in a state of depression. After a while:

The red sun began to set in the west.¹¹
While, as for her:

Neighbors to the east and the west,¹²
each and every one of them:
Heated her soup and cooked her rice, or
Mounted her k'ang and shut the gate.

The old lady continued to:

Stick out her head and crane her neck,¹³
while the two pupils of her eyes were habitually directed outside, as though she only wished she could follow in his footsteps. Lo and behold, at this juncture, as she gazed into the distance, she saw the figure of a youngster emerging from the darkening shadows.

At this, the old lady exclaimed:

"Thanks to Heaven and thanks to Earth,
and thanks to:

The light of the sun, moon, and stars,¹⁴
if this is really my youngest child coming, my resolution:

To fast and maintain a vegetarian diet,
will not have been in vain."

Lo and behold, before she knew it, the venerable patriarch Wan-hui knelt down in front of her and said, "Mother, before you have even gone to sleep on the k'ang, I have been to Liao-tung, found my elder brother, and brought back a family letter indicating that all is well with him."

At this, the old lady laughed and said, "My child, it's a good thing you haven't actually gone, leaving your old mother behind to worry about you. But you really oughtn't to indulge in such a whopper in order to fool your old mother. Since when is it possible to travel a distance of ten thousand li and back between the morning and evening of a single day?"

"Mother," the child responded, "can it really be that you don't believe me?"

He then proceeded straightaway to put down his clothes bag and take out the family letter indicating that all was well with his elder brother, and, sure enough, it turned out to be in his elder brother's handwriting. He also took out an undershirt that he was bringing back to be laundered, which had been hand-stitched by the old lady herself, so that she could identify it as authentic:

Without the slightest possibility of error.¹⁵
This event created quite a stir in the neighborhood, and he came to be referred to as Wan-hui, or "The one who returned from a journey of ten thousand li." Later, when he had:

Abandoned lay life to take up a religious vocation,
he became known as the Venerable Wan-hui. To be sure, it turned out that:

His prowess and virtue were lofty and marvelous,
His superhuman powers were both broad and great.¹⁶

On one occasion, during an audience before Shih Hu, the emperor of the Later Chao dynasty,¹⁷ he demonstrated his prowess by swallowing two pints of iron needles.¹⁸ On another occasion, in the audience hall of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, he extracted three relics from the crown of his head. That is why the Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity was established by imperial decree on behalf of the venerable patriarch Wan-hui, and dedicated to the perpetuation of his memory. There is no knowing how much money was expended on this project. Truly:

The divine monk was born into this world with vast supernatural powers;
He was highly regarded by the sage ruler whose generosity was profound.

Who would have thought that:

The years and months resemble shuttles;¹⁹
The times change and circumstances differ.²⁰

Lo and behold, in due course, the venerable patriarch Wan-hui:

Returned to Heaven, having achieved parinirvana,
and those monks of superior attainments in his entourage, who:

Still retained their skin and flesh,
one by one, passed away. Eventually the temple fell into the hands of a bunch of shiftless monks who repudiated the monastic code of conduct known as *Pai-chang ch'ing-kuei*, or *Pai-chang's Rules of Purity*,²¹ maintaining mistresses, drinking distilled spirits, and engaging in every kind of forbidden activity. Even going so far as incitement to homosexual vengery, there was no conduct in which they refused to indulge. But they ended up falling victim to crooked swindlers and profiteers who provided them with illicit liquor at inflated prices. When they were unable to pay their debts, it was not long before they started to pawn their cassocks, and hock their bells and chimes. They tried to sell the rafters from the main hall of the temple, but nobody wanted them, so they were reduced to burning them for fuel, and even bartered the bricks and tiles of the structure for liquor. Exposed to:

The drizzling rain and blustering wind,
the Buddhist idols began to tumble down, leaving the premises in:

A state of utter bleakness and desolation,²²
with the result that those who had been wont to burn incense there ceased to come. And, as for the former patrons and disciples, and those who had sponsored religious ceremonies or services for the salvation of the departed, it was just like:

Kuan Yü, the God of War, trying to peddle bean curd:

Not even a ghost would venture to come to the door.²³

What had been the site of:

Sacred rites performed to bell and drum,
was suddenly transformed into a place of:

Desolate mists and withered vegetation.²⁴

Before anyone knew it, thirty or forty years had elapsed, and there was no one prepared to:

Deal with the destruction or renovate the ruins.

It so happens that in this temple there was an Abbot Tao-chien. He was originally a native of western India who so admired the splendor of the Middle Kingdom that he formed the wish to make a pilgrimage to that exalted place. Traversing the River of Flowing Sands, the Sea of Stars, and the basin of the Kuan River, he traveled for eight or nine years before finally reaching Chinese territory. Wending his way forward, he finally reached the region of Shantung and chose to stick his staff into the soil on the grounds of this dilapidated temple.

He meditated for nine years with his face to the wall,²⁵

Without saying anything or uttering so much as a word.²⁶

Truly:

The Buddhist dharma originally dispenses with the impediment of written words;
The fruits of ritual performance are only won in the practice of meditation.

Suddenly one day, a thought occurred to him, and he said to himself, "Even a temple of these dimensions has been allowed to fall into such a state of dilapidation. If one contemplates these shaven-pated donkeys, with their:

Muddled heads and uncouth brains,

all they are capable of is:

Drinking wine and devouring food.

Is it not a pity that they have taken this sanctuary of an ancient Buddha and reduced it to the barest ruins? If only someone could be induced to come up with:

A single brick or half a tile,

in order to:

Resurrect its former grandeur.

I remember that a man of yore put it very well when he said about a certain place:

Its men are superlative and its territory is numinous.²⁷

Now that things have come to the present pass:

If I don't take responsibility,

Who will take responsibility?

If I don't stick my neck out,

Who will stick his neck out?

Moreover, nowadays in this region of Shantung there is a prominent official named Hsi-men Ch'ing, who holds a post in the Embroidered-Uniform Guard.

His family property runs into the tens of thousands,²⁸

His wealth is similar to that of princes and nobles.

There is scarcely anything that his household does not possess. The other day, when he was seeing off Censor Ts'ai Yün, he chose this spot at which to provide a farewell libation for him. Because he noticed that the temple was in a dilapidated state, he expressed a desire to:

Contribute some money as a charitable donation,
for the purpose of:

Rebuilding and refurbishing the original edifice.

At the time, although I didn't say anything definite, something in the way of a plan began to develop in my mind. Now today, if I should only prove able to induce that donor to:

Take responsibility for promoting the idea,

I am sure that, sooner or later, my expectations may be realized. But I will have to arrange to pay him a visit myself."

At this juncture, he proceeded to summon his:

Dharma heirs and disciples,

and had them:

Strike the bells, and

Beat the drums,

in order to convene the entire assembly, after which he ascended the hall and announced this idea of his. How was this abbot dressed?
Behold:

The Ch'an cassock that envelops his body is dyed bloodred;
The two rings that dangle from his ears are made of gold.
The metal staff he holds in his hand is as bright as a mirror;
The hundred and eight pearls of his rosary shine like the sun.
He reveals the golden cords that line the way to enlightenment;

And inspires even ordinary men to awaken from their dreams.
With bushy eyebrows, jet-black hair, and eyes like bronze bells;
He is reputed to be a venerable sage monk from the Western Heaven.

When the abbot had finished his announcement, he told an acolyte to bring him:

The four treasures of the writer's studio,²⁹

whereupon he ground the fragrant ink known as "ambergis balm,"³⁰ moistened and his "rat's whisker brush,"³¹ spread out a sheet of stationery with "black thread columns,"³² and proceeded to draft a petition, in which he started out by explaining:

The background of the matter from beginning to end,³³

and ended by urging the recipients to:

Donate money and create good fortune for themselves.

His calligraphy was such that:

Every line was straight, and

Every character was clear.

Truly, this worthy abbot was an avatar of an ancient Buddha or bodhisattva.

At this juncture, he took his leave of the assembly, put on his Ch'an sandals, donned a hooded cloak and bamboo hat, and betook himself straight to Hsimen Ch'ing's residence.

To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had said goodbye to Ying Pochüeh, he headed back toward the rear compound, shedding his outer garments at the summerhouse on the way, and went straight into Wu Yüeh-niang's room, where he told her about Ying Pochüeh's recommendation of Licentiate Shui.

He then went on to say, "The other day, after my trip to the Eastern Capital, all of those relatives and friends of ours were kind enough to come and share a drink with me. Now we can hardly avoid arranging a little party for them in order to reciprocate. Since I happen to be at leisure today, with no other obligations, we might as well take care of this matter."

There and then, he instructed Tai-an to take a basket, go to the marketplace, and buy some fresh fruits in season, pork, mutton, fish, salted and preserved chicken and goose, and other foodstuffs. When he had finished with these instructions, he sent page boys off in different directions to invite the guests.

He then took Yüeh-niang by the hand, and the two of them went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in order to see Kuan-ko. Li P'ing-erh welcomed Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing with an ingratiating smile.

"His mother has come to see the child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Li P'ing-erh told the wet nurse to bring Kuan-ko out, and they observed that his eyebrows were straggly, and he looked just as though he had been molded out of a lump of flour. Smiling happily, he crawled right into Yüeh-niang's arms.

Yüeh-niang took him in hand and embraced him, saying, "My child, how clever you are. When you grow up you're sure to be as smart as can be."

She then addressed him again, saying, "When you grow up, my child, how are you going to look after your old mother?"

To this Li P'ing-erh responded, "Mother, how can you say such a thing? If our son should grow up to adulthood, and succeed in obtaining:

An official post or even half of one,³⁴

the honors bestowed upon his family as a consequence would start at the top. You would surely be the first person to be granted the privilege of wearing:

The phoenix cap and roseate shawl,³⁵

and he would be in an excellent position to look after his old mother."

Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up on this, saying, "My son, when you grow up, you must strive to obtain a position as a celestial official in the civil bureaucracy, rather than following in the footsteps of your old man, and serving in the western ranks of the military bureaucracy, in which, though you may achieve some success, you will never be fully respected."

As they were speaking, they were unaware that P'an Chin-lien was eavesdropping outside the room. Before she knew it:

Anger flared up in her heart,

and she started to curse, saying, "Why you shameless, stinking whore, with your empty pretensions! So you think you're the only one that can raise a child successfully, do you? He hasn't even lived through three rainy seasons or four summer solstices yet, let alone survived to the age of fourteen or fifteen, passed through the gate of puberty, or started to attend school and learn to read. He's still as fragile as a bubble, subsisting here in the company of King Yama. How can anyone foresee that he will become an official, or that official honors will be bestowed on the venerable matriarch? And as for that crazy louse of a jailbird, that shameless good-for-nothing of ours, how can he expect him to become a civil official rather than following in his footsteps?"

Just as she was grumbling and muttering away, cursing on the one hand, and expressing her annoyance on the other, who should appear but Tai-an, who came waltzing in and addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, where is Father?"

"You crazy, sharp-beaked louse of a jailbird!" Chin-lien cursed him. "Who knows where that so-called Father of yours may be? And what would he be doing coming to my quarters anyway? He's already got a grand lady with a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, a venerable noblewoman, ready to wait upon him with:

Eight culinary delicacies in five tripods.³⁶

So what are you asking me for?"

Tai-an, who realized that he was barking up the wrong tree, simply said, "You're right," and headed off in the direction of the Sixth Lady's quarters.

When he arrived in front of the door to her room, he coughed discreetly and addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Master Ying the Second is in the reception hall."

"I just saw Master Ying the Second off a little while ago," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So what's he up to now?"

"Father, you'd better go find out for yourself," said Tai-an.

Hsi-men Ch'ing felt compelled to abandon Wu Yüeh-niang and Li P'ingerh, stopped by the summerhouse to put on his outer garments, and went out to the front compound to receive Ying Po-chüeh.

Just as he was about to interrogate him, it transpired that the venerable abbot Tao-chien arrived at his gate to seek a subscription and called out in a loud voice, "Amita Buddha! Is this the gate to the residence of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing? Would one of you responsible servitors announce my arrival? Just say that if you wish to:

Support your cassia-like sons, and
Protect your orchid-like grandsons,

So that:

Those for whom you seek good fortune obtain good fortune,
And those for whom you seek long life obtain long life,

the venerable abbot Tao-chien from the Eastern Capital has come to seek an interview."

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing was a man who was accustomed to squandering silver and spending money, and he had only recently acquired an heir in the person of Kuan-ko, so he was exceedingly pleased to hear this and wished to perform some charitable deeds for the benefit of his infant son. Since his servants were quite aware of this, they did not:

Respond angrily or make difficulties,

but went inside and reported the visitor's arrival to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Have him come in. I'll see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Lo and behold, the servants:

Covering three steps with every two,³⁷
made haste to invite the abbot inside, as respectfully as though they were dealing with a living Buddha.

The abbot proceeded directly to the elaborately furnished reception room, where he saluted his host by pressing his hands together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "I am a native of western India who, in the course of my peregrinations, has visited the Eastern Capital, Pien-liang, and has chosen to stick my staff into the soil on the grounds of the Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where:

I meditated for nine years with my face to the wall,
And labored to transmit the mind-seal of the Buddha.

Because:

The halls of the sanctuary are falling down,
And the temple is in a state of dilapidation,

it has occurred to me that as a disciple of the Buddha, it is appropriate that I should:

Exert myself on the Buddha's behalf.

Were I not to do so, on whose person should the responsibility devolve? For this reason, I have formed a resolution. On a prior occasion, when my venerable benefactor chose to come there in order to provide a farewell libation for some gentlemen, you expressed regret that the temple was in such a dilapidated state, and also exhibited:

A good conscience and admirable intentions,

by volunteering to take some responsibility for its maintenance. At that time, the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas authenticated the covenant. I recollect that in the Buddhist sutras it is well said that if pious men and pious women contribute alms for the refurbishment of Buddhist effigies, it will ensure that they will be recompensed when their:

Cassia-like sons and orchid-like grandsons,³⁸

are born with:

Well-proportioned and good-looking features,³⁹

and in days to come:

Achieve early success in the examinations,

so that, in turn, their:

Sons are privileged and their wives ennobled.⁴⁰

It is for this reason that I have chosen to knock at your exalted gate. It matters not whether it be five hundred or a thousand taels. I merely beseech my venerable benefactor to:

Open the subscription book and reveal your intentions,

In order to realize the ripening of these good fruits."

He then proceeded to open up an embroidered wrapper, take out the subscription book with its accompanying petition, and proffer them to Hsi-men Ch'ing with both hands. Who could have anticipated that the preceding speech had already had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that his heart was moved. Before he knew it:

As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make him happier,

he had accepted the petition and the subscription book, and told a page boy to fetch some tea.

When he opened the petition, he saw that it read as follows:

I respectfully submit that:

The white horse bearing sutras⁴¹ introduced the religion of symbols into China;

Chu Fa-lan and Ma-t'anga explicated the Dharma and founded the Buddhist sect.⁴²

Of the living beings in the entire realm,⁴³

None fail to confess their allegiance⁴⁴ to the Buddhist patriarchs.

Everywhere within the three chiliocosms,

There are found Buddhist temples that are elaborately decorated,⁴⁵

But if one observes the dilapidated rubble of this establishment,

How can it be considered a famous temple in a scenic location?⁴⁶

If one does not compassionately contribute alms for its restoration,

How can the votaries of Buddha be described as charitable to others?
Now with regard to this Ch'an Temple of Eternal Felicity:
It is the sanctuary of an ancient Buddha,
A blessed place dedicated to religious practice.
Erected in the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty,
It was founded by the ancestral patriarch Wan-hui.
Magnificent in scale,
It resembled the Jetavana Park,⁴⁷
The grounds of which were paved with gold.⁴⁸
Exquisitely sculpted,
It was like the Jetavana Vihara,
The steps of which were made of white jade.
Its lofty chambers grazed the void,
The aroma of its sandalwood extending beyond the nine heavens;
Its layered base covered the ground,
The Buddha's Hall able to accommodate a thousand Ch'an monks.
Its two wings were majestic,
Consisting entirely of resplendent halls and purple buildings.⁴⁹
Its corridors were immaculate,
Truly, even more magnificent than those of the grotto heavens.
At that time, when the bells and drums sounded,
Everyone said it was a Buddhist kingdom within the human world;
Verily, the serried ranks of black-robed monks,
Gave the impression of a human paradise within our mundane realm.
Who could foresee that, during the passage of the everlasting years,⁵⁰
In the blink of an eye, times would change and circumstances alter?
Uncouth monks indulged in drunkenness and wreaked havoc,
Utterly ignoring the Rules of Purity.
Empty-headed lay workers were indolent and coveted sleep,
Refusing to sweep out the premises.
Eventually the temple was deserted,
No longer attracting any disciples.
Finally it became so desolate that,
Those who looked up to it were few.
Moreover, it became infested with birds and rodents;
How could it withstand the beating of wind and rain?
The buildings were dilapidated,
One and then two, two and then three,
Until they could not be maintained.
The walls began to disintegrate,
Day after day, and year after year,
But there was nobody to rebuild them.
Vermilion latticework partitions,
Were used to heat wine or heat tea.
Armloads of rafters and railings,
Were bartered for salt or for rice.
Wind has assailed the arhats until the gold is all washed away;
Rain has fallen upon the effigy of Amitayus reducing it to dust.
Alas! The brilliance of golds and greens,
Has one day turned into overgrown jungle.
Though success may eventuate in disaster,⁵¹
The nadir will be followed by the zenith.⁵²
Fortunately, the zealous devotion of Abbot Tao is such that,
He cannot bear to see the temple of the Brahman prince collapse.
He has sworn a noble-minded vow,
To canvass all potential donors,
In the hope that they will all exhibit benevolence,
By uniformly displaying a compassionate disposition.
Rafters and pillars, beams and columns,
Without regard to their dimensions,⁵³
When they are given, will be inscribed prominently with the names of their donors;
Silver bullion, cloth or paper currency,
No matter how munificent or meager,
Once in the till, will be recorded with the donors' names in the subscription book.
Relying upon the awesome efficacy of the Buddhist patriarchs,
Fortune, emolument, and longevity,
Will be yours for ever and ever,
Even for a hundred or a thousand years.
Thanks to the clear discernment of the guardian spirits,
Your fathers, sons, and grandsons,
Each and every one of them,
Will obtain high emolument and office.
Your posterity will proliferate.⁵⁴
Engendering three locust and five cassia trees.⁵⁵
Your forecourts will be imposing,
Refulgent with golden walls and hills of coins.
Everything that you exert yourself to pursue,
Will turn out auspiciously just as you wish.⁵⁶
When you are presented with the text of this petition,
May each of you overcome the parsimony in your hearts.
Respectfully petitioned.

When he had finished reading the petition, Hsi-men Ch'ing straightened up the pages of the fascicle, put them back in their brocaded case, fastened it by inserting the pins into their clasps, further secured it by wrapping the attached brocade ribbon around it, and then:

Respectfully and reverentially,⁵⁷
placed it on the table.

Folding his hands in front of him, he addressed the abbot, saying, "There is no reason for me to deceive you. Though my family may not amount to much, I do possess property worth several tens of thousands. Although merely a military official, I am not unacquainted with men of contemporary renown. Who could have anticipated that even at my age I should remain without an heir? Though there are five or six women in my household, I had remained worried about this and had determined to perform some

charitable deeds, when, last year, my sixth consort gave birth to a son, thereby consummating my myriad desires. Then, by chance, the need to see off a friend of mine brought me to your exalted quarters, where I noticed that the temple buildings were dilapidated, and I formed a resolution to donate some money for their restoration. Since my venerable preceptor has condescended to approach me on this matter, how could I presume to refuse.”

Taking a fine rabbit-hair brush in hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing was just hesitating over what to contribute, when Ying Po-chüeh said to him, “Brother, since you have formed this good-hearted resolution to make a pledge on my nephew's behalf, why don't you undertake to:

Accomplish the whole task singlehandedly?

It wouldn't be that much of a commitment for you.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, while still holding the brush in his hand, laughed, saying, “My resources are limited! My resources are limited!”

“At the very least you ought to contribute a thousand taels,” said Ying Po-chüeh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed again, saying, “My resources are limited! My resources are limited!”

At this point, the abbot spoke up, saying, “With all due respect, venerable benefactor, I don't wish to be intrusive, but it is our Buddhist practice to let people bestow alms as they see fit, rather than making demands upon them that are difficult to fulfill. Your Honor should feel free to contribute only as much as you wish. If there are relatives or friends besides yourself that might be potential contributors, I hope that you will be good enough to recommend this cause to them.”

“My venerable preceptor is most understanding,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “It would not do to contribute too little.”

So saying, he wrote himself down for five hundred taels and then laid his rabbit-hair brush aside, while the abbot expressed his gratitude by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, “The palace eunuchs and eunuch directors around here, as well as the granary heads, and patrolling inspectors from the local prefectures and districts, are all on good terms with me. In the days to come, I'll take the subscription book around to them and ask them to put down their names. No matter whether they put themselves down for three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, or fifty taels, I can guarantee that this good work of my venerable preceptor will be successfully completed.”

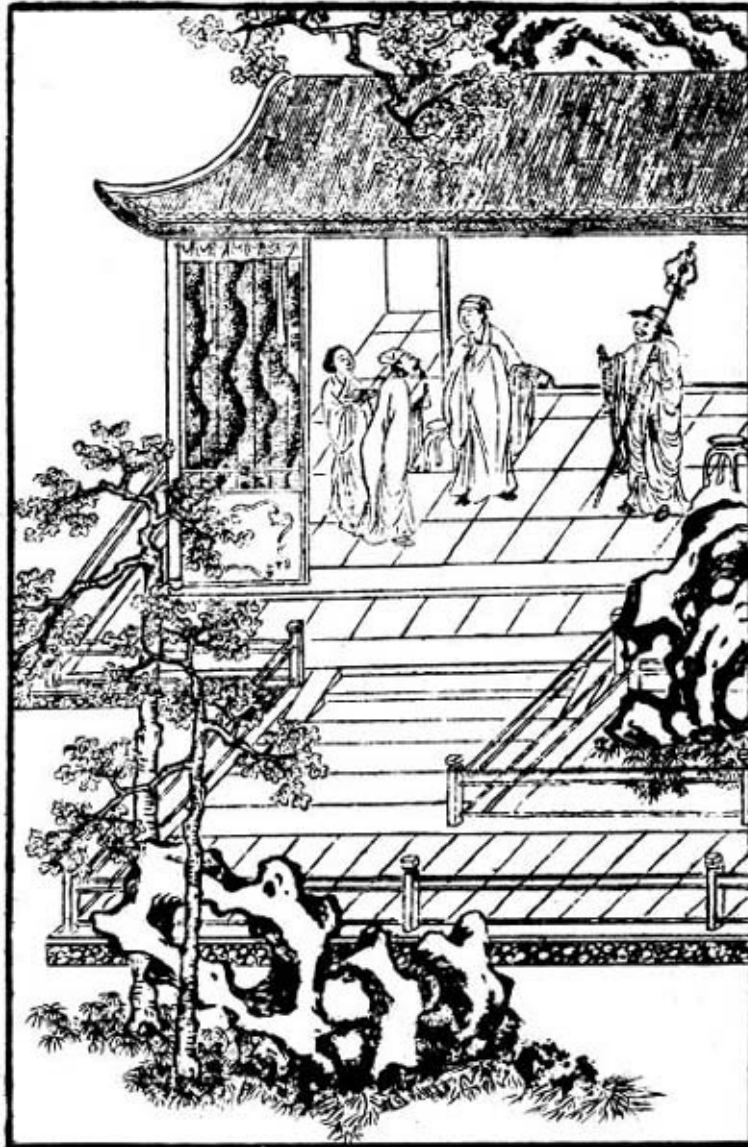
That day, he detained the abbot for a vegetarian meal, before seeing him off at the gate. Truly:

Acts of compassion and good works are the stock in trade of influential families;

Preserving good fortune and dispelling disaster are the considerations of parents.

There is a poem on this subject of charitable donations:

The Buddhist dharma is not very complicated, it merely resides in the heart;
The planting of melons or planting of fruit is what constitutes its basis.
As for pearls and jade, amber, and other such valuables and rarities;
Who is able to take them with him when he comes to confront King Yama?
Those who accumulate good deeds are content even if they live in poverty;
Powerful families that accumulate property throw their money away in vain.
If it were possible to purchase longevity by the expending of one's wealth;
The wicked dictator Tung Cho⁵⁸ might well have lived until the present day.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Subscribes a Sum for the Temple's Repair

To resume our story, as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off the abbot, he returned to the reception hall, sat down with Ying Po-chüeh, and said, "Brother, I was just planning to send someone to invite you over. You've arrived in the nick of time. The other day, after my trip to the Eastern Capital, all of my relatives and friends were kind enough to come and share a drink with me. Today I have sent a servant to buy the necessary provisions, so that your sister-in-law and I may hold a little party for them in order to reciprocate. I wanted you to be here to help keep them company. I could scarcely have anticipated the arrival of this abbot, whose visit has consumed a good deal of time."

"He seems to be a very fine cleric," said Ying Po-chüeh. "No doubt he is really someone of virtuous attainments. In the course of his conversation with you, even my heart was sufficiently moved to make me a benefactor."

"Brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "since when did you become a benefactor? When did you inscribe your name in the subscription book?"

Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "So! Do you mean to say that my intervention was not the act of a benefactor? Brother, you are not familiar with the Buddhist sutras. In the Buddhist sutras the greatest weight is placed on giving of the heart, which is followed in importance by giving of the dharma, and then giving of property. Do you mean to say that my:

Urging from the sidelines,⁵⁹
did not constitute a giving of the heart?"

"Brother," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in your case I fear that:

The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it."

The two of them clapped their hands and had a good laugh over this.

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to say, "I am content to wait here until the guests come. If you have anything important to take care of, Brother, you might as well go and discuss it with my sister-in-law."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, took leave of Ying Po-chüeh and returned to the inner courtyard.

It so happened that P'an Chin-lien:

Mumbling and muttering to herself,

Feeling listless and discontented,⁶⁰

had fallen victim, before she knew it, to a compulsive desire to sleep. After sneezing a couple of times, she had gone into her room, fallen onto her ivory bedstead, and promptly fallen asleep. Li P'ing-erh, for her part, concerned as she was about her child's crying, was sitting in her quarters, together with the wet nurse and her maidservants, looking after Kuan-ko and trying to get him to laugh. Only Wu Yüeh-niang and Sun Hsüeh-o, together with two servants, were in the rear compound preparing a meal.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went up to them, sat down, and proceeded to give Yüeh-niang a detailed account of how Abbot Tao-chien had come to solicit funds for the repair of the temple, and how he had seen fit to enter his name in the subscription book. He also related how Ying Po-chüeh had made a joke out of the matter, and they all had a laugh over it:

As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make them happier.

Now it so happened that Wu Yüeh-niang was basically a serious person, and she was moved on this occasion:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,

Without thought or meditation,

to say a few words that affected Hsi-men Ch'ing like:

The insertion of a needle in the cranium.⁶¹

Truly:

A worthy wife will admonish her husband as often as the cock crows;

Her intimate words will regularly convey doses of therapeutic advice.

Just what were the words that she addressed to him?

"Brother," said Yüeh-niang, "you've had the great good luck to sire a son and have also developed the virtuous intention to:

Extensively contract good affinities.⁶²

How can this be anything but an earnest of good fortune for our entire family? The only thing is, I fear that your virtuous intentions are not many, and your evil intentions have not been completely eliminated. Brother, in days to come, it would be a good idea if you would engage in fewer of these meaningless casual liaisons, and eschew the petty deeds that suggest you are:

Covetous of wealth and given to lust.⁶³

If you were to do a few good deeds in secret, it would benefit the little one."

"Mother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, "you're expressing your jealousy again. As the saying goes:

Even Heaven and Earth are characterized as yin and yang;

It is only natural that male and female should mate.

Those who engage in secret trysts and illicit affairs in this life are all persons whose:

Fates were ordained in a previous life.⁶⁴

Their names were entered in:

The register of amorous affinities,⁶⁵

and they are merely fulfilling their fates in this life. You don't mean to say that they are merely acting on impetuous and reckless impulse, do you? I've heard it said of the Jetavana Park, in the western realm of the Buddhist patriarch himself, that it was only acquired after:

The grounds were paved with gold;

and that even in the Ten Courts of the Underworld,⁶⁶ something in the way of paper money is required if one is to survive. As long as I expend this property of mine in the doing of extensive good works, even if I were to rape Ch'ango, fornicate with the Weaving Maid, kidnap Hsü Fei-ch'ung,⁶⁷ or abduct the daughter of the Queen Mother of the West, it would do nothing to diminish the Heaven-splashing wealth and distinction that I now possess."

Yüeh-niang laughed, saying, "Brother, you're just like:

The dog who devours hot shit;

Taking it to be fragrant and sweet.

Once you get the taste of fresh blood between your teeth;

How can your carnivorous nature ever be altered?"

Just as they were laughing over this, who should appear but Nun Wang, bringing Nun Hsüeh along with her, who barged in carrying a box, flew forward to salute Yüeh-niang, and also kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Your Honor, we're fortunate to have found you at home. Since we parted the other day, I've been preoccupied with various paltry matters that have prevented me from coming to look in on you. But I haven't been able to get you out of my mind, so today I've brought Nun Hsüeh along with me to pay you a visit."

It so happens that this Nun Hsüeh had not left home to take up a religious vocation in her early years. In her youth she had married a husband who lived across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery and peddled steamed wheat cakes for a living. Who could have anticipated that, earnings from his business being meager, Nun Hsüeh, finding herself in this:

Unsatisfactory predicament,⁶⁸
should have resorted to:

Bandyng words and wagging her tongue,⁶⁹

with the monks and acolytes in the monastery.

Exchanging looks with eyes and eyebrows,

Approving this and disapproving that,⁷⁰

she managed to work these monks up into such a state that each and every one of them developed a stiff erection in his groin. Taking advantage of her husband's absence from the house, while:

Anticipating tea or recovering from wine,
she contrived to seduce some four, five, or six of them. They would constantly drop by and present her with baked wheat cakes, stuffed pastries, steamed dumplings, or chestnuts. Some of them would even give her the fees they earned for their religious services to enable her to buy flowers, while others would donate the fabric they received as payment for celebrating the ritual Destruction of Hell for her to make footbindings out of. Her husband remained oblivious to all this, and when, sometime later, he contracted an illness and died, because she was so intimately acquainted with the Buddhist establishment she opted to take the tonsure and become a nun. As such, she spent her time frequenting the homes of the gentry in the endeavor to corner the market for the recitation of Buddhist sutras and litanies of repentance. There were also good-for-nothing women who hankered after illicit affairs and engaged her to smuggle monks into their homes, for whom she acted as a procuress, which turned out to be a lucrative trade.

When she learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing's household was extremely wealthy and observed that he had a plethora of concubines and serving maids at his disposal, she thought she could contrive to reap a profit from this situation and took to frequenting his house accordingly. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, was unaware that:

The three female professionals and the six dames,⁷¹
are persons whom people should do everything in their power to prevent from frequenting their homes. Truly:

Originally, her conduct was that of an unlicensed prostitute.
Setting up shop as a Buddhist monk or preceptor,
She dresses up accordingly, and recites the name of Amitābha.
Every time she opens her mouth, she speaks of the way to the Western Paradise.
Wrapping her head in a length of cloth,
Draping her body in a long gown,
And girdling herself with a yellow sash,
Early and late, she loiters by the gate or lingers beside the door.
She regards relieving others of their gold and silver as acceptable conduct;
While, in the final analysis, in her heart she is utterly benighted.
Any way you look at it, she is scarcely a decent nun.
How many fine reputations have been besmirched by her?⁷²

There is also another song that puts it very well:

Buddhist nuns, of course, are known for their shiny bald heads.
Enticing monks into their quarters, they are busy night after night.
When three shiny knobs congregate,
They resemble a master and his two disciples.
But what are they doing rubbing their cymbals together in bed?⁷³

When Nun Hsüeh had taken a seat, she opened the little box, saying, "We have no way of adequately expressing our respect for you, but we have brought some fruits that were offered to the Buddha by our benefactors, as a makeshift way of presenting you with something fresh."

"If you wish to visit us," said Yüeh-niang, "simply come and visit us. What need is there for you to go to all this trouble?"

It so happened that P'an Chin-lien had awoken from her nap and heard people talking outside. Thinking that it was merely a continuation of what had been going on before, she went outside to see what was up. She saw that Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters playing with her child. When the latter found out that Nun Wang was here, she wanted to have a talk with her about doing something for the protection of Kuan-ko, so she went back to Yüeh-niang's room together with Chin-lien. After everyone had greeted each other, they all sat down.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, realizing that Li P'ing-erh had not heard about it, repeated the story of how Abbot Tao-chien had come to solicit a subscription, and how he had signed the subscription book and agreed to make a donation, in the hope of acquiring good fortune for Kuan-ko. Who could have anticipated that this would have the effect of annoying P'an Chin-lien so much that she took herself off in a puff of smoke, muttering to herself as she went.

At this juncture, Nun Hsüeh stood up, pressed her palms together in front of her chest, and exclaimed, "Buddha be praised! As long as Your Honor has:

The benign intention of creating good fortune,
there is no doubt but that you will enjoy:

A lifetime of a thousand years,
beget:

Five sons and two daughters,⁷⁴
and remain:

United with your seven children.⁷⁵

But there is another opportunity I would like to recommend to you, venerable sir. This instance of karmic cause and effect costs very little to initiate, yet it will:

Procure immeasurable good fortune.⁷⁶
So, venerable benefactor! If you were to perform this act of merit, even the deeds of the venerable Gautama Buddha when he:

Practiced austerities in the Himalayas,⁷⁷
or of the honorable Kāśyapa when he:

Spread his hair to cover the ground,⁷⁸

or of the second Ch'an patriarch Hui-k'o⁷⁹ when he:

Plunged from a cliff to feed a tiger,⁸⁰

or of the venerable Anāpindika⁸¹ when he:

Paved the entire grounds with gold,⁸²
would not equal this act of merit on your part.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and said, “Reverend Sister, pray remain seated and tell me in detail just what this meritorious deed might be, that I may accede to your suggestion.”

Nun Hsüeh then said, “Our Buddhist patriarchs have bequeathed to us the text of the *Dhāraṇī Sutra* in one scroll, that is solely devoted to exhorting us to seek the way to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. The Buddha has told us that the Third Dhyāna Heaven, the Fourth Dhyāna Heaven, the Thirty-third Heaven, the Tusita Heaven, the Grand Veil Heaven, and the Imperfect Heaven are all places to which one cannot expect to gain immediate admission whenever one wants. The only such place is the Western Paradise presided over by Amitābha. There are no seasons of spring, summer, autumn, or winter there; no frigid winds or summer heat. Rather, one always enjoys:

The temperate weather,⁸³
of the three months of spring. Moreover, there are no distinctions between husbands and wives, or men and women there. One is reborn:

In the Pool of the Seven Treasures,⁸⁴
On the Terrace of the Golden Lotus.”⁸⁵

“How large is that lotus blossom?” asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. “If one were reborn on top of it and were struck by a gust of wind, would one not be in danger of tumbling off and falling into the pond?”

“My good sir,” said Nun Hsüeh, “you still don't understand. Let me explain it to you on the basis of what the scripture says. The Buddhists call a distance of five hundred li a *yojana*.⁸⁶ That lotus blossom is really something. It is very large, very large; in fact, five hundred *yojanas* in diameter. When one is reborn there:

Precious garb is furnished to order;
Fine repasts are provided by Heaven;

in addition to which:

Songbirds harmonize with each other,
sounding just like the reeds of a panpipe. Truly, it is a wondrous realm. Only because:

The ordinary man with fleshly eyes,⁸⁷
Does not realize where he is going,
And lacks both reverence and faith,

the Buddhist patriarch chose to promulgate this sutra, urging people to:

Devotedly recite the Buddha's name,⁸⁸
And be reborn in the western realm,

that they might behold the Buddha Amitābha himself. From that time on, from one age to the next, even unto a hundred, a thousand, or a myriad ages, they will never again fall subject to the wheel of transmigration. The Buddhist patriarch put it very well when he said, ‘Anyone who recites this sutra, arranges to have this sutra printed, or copies this sutra, and thus persuades a single person, or a thousand, or a myriad persons to recite this sutra, will thereby:

Procure immeasurable good fortune.’

Moreover, included in this sutra there are sacred incantations for the protection of male offspring. All families that give birth to boys and girls must devote themselves to this in order to insure that:

Their growth and upbringing will both be easy,
and that:

Mishap may be avoided and good fortune assured.

Right now, the printing blocks for this sutra already exist. All that is needed is for someone to take care of their printing and distribution. Venerable sir, all you need to do is to pay for the labor and materials required to produce a print run of several thousand copies, have them properly bound, and distributed in all ten directions. The merit accruing to such an act would be great indeed.”

“That would not be difficult,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “But I don't know how many sheets of paper would be required for the reproduction of this sutra, or the cost of having it bound and printed. Only on the basis of a detailed estimate would it be appropriate for me to proceed.”

“Venerable sir,” said Nun Hsüeh, “you're being unreasonable. How can you say such a thing, or demand a detailed estimate? All you need to do is to give the sutra printing establishment an advance of nine taels of silver; tell them to print several thousand, or several tens of thousands, of copies; and promise to settle accounts with them by paying a lump sum for the cost of labor and paper after the binding has been completed. That's all there is to it. What need is there for such a thing as a detailed estimate?”

Just as they were in the thick of their discussion, lo and behold, Ch'en Ching-chi had something to say to Hsi-men Ch'ing and had been looking for him for some time without finding him. He asked Tai-an where he was and was told that he was in Yüeh-niang's quarters. As he made his way past the summerhouse, as luck would have it, he ran into P'an Chin-lien, who had been leaning on the balustrade sniggering to herself. When she suddenly lifted her head and saw that it was Ch'en Ching-chi, she reacted just like:

A cat upon catching sight of some fresh seafood:
Her only thought was to gobble it up immediately.

Before she knew it, the depression she had been suffering from all day changed into:



P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi Enjoy a Furtive Tryst

The genial atmosphere of a spring breeze.⁸⁹

The two of them, taking advantage of the fact that there was no one about, fell to holding hands and snuggling up against each other, puckering up their lips and sucking each other's tongues, carrying on in the most disgusting way for some time. Because they were afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might come out and catch them at it, they were unable to consummate the matter that really counted. Their two pairs of eyes were like those of rats on catching sight of a cat:

Looking left and glancing right,⁹⁰
forever on the lookout. Their tryst having proven abortive, they ended up scurrying their separate ways in a puff of smoke.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had done listening to Nun Hsüeh's spiel, his heart was moved imperceptibly to a benign intent.

Calling for Tai-an, he had him fetch his card case, opened it with the little key attached to his handkerchief, and got out a sealed packet of silver, consisting of precisely thirty taels of the highest grade of incised silver stamped with the mark of the Sung-chiang mint, which he handed over to Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang, saying, "The two of you should go together to the sutra printing establishment of your choice and have them print five thousand copies of this sutra for me. When the job is finished, I will settle accounts with them, and pay whatever remains due."

While they were still speaking, who should appear but Shu-t'ung, who came in hurriedly to report, "The guests whom you have invited have all arrived."

Needless to say, this group consisted of Wu K'ai, Hua Tzu-yu, Hsieh Hsita, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, the whole bunch of them in fact, all of whom arrived together, properly attired for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing hurriedly straightened his clothing, went outside to greet

them, and ushered them into the reception hall. Tables had already been set up there, with an appropriate array of appetizers.

Wu K'ai was invited to assume the place of honor, after which the rest of them:

Segregating themselves by order of precedence, and

Indicating their relative degrees of seniority,

all proceeded to sit down in their places. Whereupon, whether salted, preserved, fried, or stewed, unlimited quantities of fish and meat, roast chicken, roast duck, and fresh fruits in season were all brought out together. Hsi-men Ch'ing also ordered that Ma-ku wine should be opened up and heated for their consumption.

Behold:

When drinking wine with one's bosom friends,⁹¹

Demeanor and deportment are often forgotten.

Some play at guess-fingers;

Some beat the drum, while

Others pass the flower;⁹²

Two out of three moves are bluffs.

Ballads are performed,

Dramatic arias are sung.

Those telling of breeze and moonlight speak of how,

Tu Fu and Ho Chih-chang⁹³ appreciated the spring season.⁹⁴

Those showing off their book learning also recall how,

Su Shih and Huang T'ing-chien roamed below the Red Cliff.⁹⁵

Those playing pitch-pot want to make the variations known as,

Regular Geese in Flight,

Irregular Geese in Flight, or

The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea.⁹⁶

Those playing at dice want to throw the combinations known as,

The Regular Cavalry,

The Irregular Cavalry,⁹⁷ or

Loaches Entering a Clump of Caltrops.⁹⁸

Those who lose a forfeit of wine,

Must drain their cups to the last drop;

Even if it induces them to,

Collapse like a jade pinnacle.⁹⁹

Those who are the winners at dice,

Must hang up congratulatory red banners;

Would anyone permit them to,

Wear their caps upside down?¹⁰⁰

Inexhaustible,

Are the scenes on the Stage of Youthful Festivity;

Indescribable,

Are the days and months in the Land of Drunkenness.¹⁰¹

Truly:

The autumn moon and the spring flowers¹⁰² are to be found everywhere;

Occasions for enjoyment and happy events¹⁰³ tend to occur then as well.

If one fails during one's hundred years to be drunk a thousand times;

All the hustle and bustle of one's life will simply amount to nothing.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 58

INSPIRED BY A FIT OF JEALOUSY

CHIN-LIEN BEATS CH'TU-CHÜ;

BEGGING CURED PORK THE MIRROR POLISHER

TELLS A SOB STORY

All alone within the embroidered bed curtains,
her thoughts are subdued;
A myriad reasons for new melancholy beset her,
both by day and by night.
A solitary goose calls after its mates, as it
crosses the autumn frontier;
A distracting cricket bemoans its sorrows, as
the moon hovers in the eaves.
Having lost her way en route to Blue Bridge,¹
she despairs of the red cord;²
Without anybody to share her golden boudoir,
she lets down the green blind.
Her fate can be compared to the bamboos that
grow along the Hsiang River;
That are to this day speckled with the tears
shed by those nymphs of old.³

THE STORY GOES that on that day Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking wine with his friends and relatives in the front reception hall until he became stinking drunk, after which he made his way toward Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound. Sun Hsüeh-o herself was in the kitchen at the time, overseeing the cleaning up of the utensils. When she heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing was headed for her place, she hastened back to it:

Covering two steps with every one.

The blind entertainer Big Sister Yü had been sitting on the k'ang in her quarters, and she hustled her off to spend the night with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü in the room with the k'ang in Yüeh-niang's quarters.

It so happens that, like the other women in the rear compound, Sun Hsüeh-o occupied quarters consisting of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor and two less well-lighted inner rooms, one of which was furnished with a bed, and the other with a k'ang. Hsi-men Ch'ing had not ventured into her quarters for more than a year. When she realized that he had come to see her today, on the one hand, she hastened forward to help Hsimen Ch'ing off with his clothes and provided a chair in the center of the parlor for him to sit on, while on the other hand, she wiped off the cool bamboo bed mat in her room, proceeded to:

Light incense and wash her private parts,

and then went back out to serve Hsi-men Ch'ing some tea. When they were finished with the tea, she helped him into her room and onto the bed, took off his boots, unfastened his girdle, and saw to it that he was resting comfortably. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day was the twenty-eighth, the actual date of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday. They had just finished burning some paper money in honor of the occasion when, lo and behold, who should appear but Hu Hsiu, a young man employed by Han Tao-kuo, who arrived at the front gate, dismounted, and had the attendants announce his arrival to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that he be ushered into the reception hall, where, after Hu Hsiu had kowtowed to him, he inquired about the whereabouts of the boatload of goods.

Hu Hsiu then proceeded to hand him a letter with a statement of account and told him how Uncle Han Tao-kuo had managed to purchase a cargo of ten thousand taels worth of silk goods in Hang-chou, how they had now gotten as far as the customs station in Lin-ch'ing but lacked sufficient silver to pay the customs duty, and how only after paying the duty would they be able to transship the merchandise and transport it into the city.

On the one hand, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had read the letter with the statement of account he was delighted and ordered Ch'i-t'ung, "See to it that some food is provided for Hu Hsiu to eat."

On the other hand, he directed Hu Hsiu to go over to kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place and report the news to him. It was not long before Hu Hsiu finished his meal and went off on this errand.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went inside and reported to Yüeh-niang, thus and so, saying, "Manager Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods has reached Lin-ch'ing, and he has sent his young man, Hu Hsiu, to deliver a letter with a statement of account. Right now, we'll have to sweep out the place across the street, store the goods there, find a manager to take care of it, construct an underground storehouse, and open up a shop for business."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said, "You'd better start looking for someone right away. It's not exactly early days yet, that would

allow you to take your time about it."

"Right now I'm just waiting for Brother Ying the Second to come by," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I plan to take up the matter with him, and get him to find someone as quickly as possible."

In due course, when Ying Po-chüeh showed up, Hsi-men Ch'ing joined him in the reception hall and said, "Manager Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods from Hang-chou has arrived, but I am in need of a manager to take charge of selling the merchandise."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you are to be congratulated. Not only is today your birthday, but your boatload of goods has arrived. You are sure to reap a tenfold profit in this enterprise, since this is a case of:

One happy event occurring on top of another.

Brother, if it's a sales manager you want, that's no problem. I know someone who is a friend of mine because:

When fathers associate, their sons are acquainted.

He was originally a salesperson in the silk trade who has been down on his luck for several years and is sitting idle at home. This year he is forty-some years old, truly, a man in the prime of life. That he has a good eye for judging the quality of silver goes without saying. He is proficient at writing and arithmetic, and a good hand at business transactions. This person's surname is Kan, his given name is Jun, and his courtesy name is Ch'u-shen. He is currently living in Stonebridge Alley and resides in a house of his own."

"If he is agreeable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "ask him to come see me tomorrow."

As they were speaking, who should appear but Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, all three of them, who prostrated themselves on the ground and kowtowed before getting up and standing to one side. Before long the tumblers and musicians all arrived, and preparations were made to feed them in an antechamber. Tables were set up and they were fed, along with Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng.

Who should appear at this juncture but the adjutant on duty, with a summons in hand, who came back and reported, "Among the singing girls that I was sent to summon, only Cheng Ai-yüeh is not coming. The madam of her establishment said that she had made her preparations and was all set to come when she was commandeered by a servant from the household of the distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second, who carried her off to perform there. Thus, I was only able to summon Ch'i Hsiang-erh, Tung Chiaorh, and Hung the Fourth, who have all gotten themselves ready and will be here before long."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that she was not coming, he said, "What nonsense! Why should she not come?"

He then called over Cheng Feng and asked him, "How is it that your younger sister, when I have called for her services, has refused to come? Is it really true that she has been commandeered by the household of Wang the Second?"

Cheng Feng knelt down in front of him and said, "I live apart from her and don't know anything about it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You may think that if she's gone off to Wang the Second's place to sing, that's that. No doubt you assume that, in that case, I won't be able to get hold of her."

He then called for Tai-an and, when he came forward, ordered him, "Take two orderlies with you, and one of my calling cards, and go to the residence of those distaff relatives of the imperial family surnamed Wang. When you see His Honor Wang the Second, tell him that I have invited some people for a drinking party, and that I engaged the services of Cheng Ai-yüeh for the occasion some two or three days ago and, whatever the case may be, would be obliged if he would let her come and fulfill her engagement. Should any objections be made to this, have her put in chains, along with the madam of her establishment, and lock them up in my gatehouse. How provoking can you get! Does she think that if she plays hard to get, I'll let it go at that?"

He then turned to Cheng Feng, and said, "You go along with him."

Cheng Feng did not dare to refuse and, going outside, appealed to Tai-an, saying, "Brother, when we get there you go on in, while I wait for you outside. If it is really true that His Honor Wang the Second sent for her, I imagine she may not have completed her preparations and gone over there yet. I'd be much indebted to you, Brother, if she hasn't left yet, if you'd contrive some way of persuading her to make the best of it and come along with us."

"If she's actually gone to Wang the Second's place," said Tai-an, "I'll take Father's calling card and try to get her. If she's still hiding out at home, on the other hand, you should go inside and tell her mother that she had better get herself ready and come along with us. If I put in a good word for her on your behalf, Father will let it go at that. You people don't seem to understand his temperament. He engaged her for this occasion while at His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's place the other day. If she failed to come, it's no wonder that he should be annoyed."

Cheng Feng, on the one hand, set off for the Cheng Family Establishment to investigate the situation, while Tai-an, with the two orderlies and the adjutant, followed after him.

To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Tai-an and Cheng Feng off on this errand, he turned to Ying Po-chüeh, and said, "How provoking can this little whore be? She's willing enough to sing at other people's places, but when I engage her services, she refuses to come."

"The little baggage!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "What does she understand? She doesn't yet know what you're capable of."

"I noticed at that drinking party," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that she had a way with words. I engaged her to come here and sing for a couple of days as a means of testing her. And she comes up with such a provoking response."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "these four painted faces that you've selected to perform today are conspicuous for the way in which they:

Stand out among their kind.

There are not any better to be found."

"You haven't even seen Ai-yüeh, have you?" said Li Ming.

"The last time I joined your master for a drink at her place," said Ying Pochüeh, "she was still a child. I haven't seen her for the last several years, so I don't know how she's developed."

"This little painted face," said Li Ming, "may have a good enough figure, but she's altogether too preoccupied with dolling herself up. Although she may be capable of singing a song, she can't do it even half as well as Kueichieh. What kind of a place does she think Father's is that she should be so presumptuous as not to show up? Were she to come, it could only redound to her advantage. How can

she be so:

Oblivious to the true value of things?"⁴

Who should appear at this juncture but Hu Hsiu, who came back and reported, "I've been to Master Ch'iao Hung's place, and he says that he will await your instructions."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Ch'en Ching-chi, "Go back to the rear compound and get fifty taels of silver; have Shu-t'ung write a letter and stamp it with my seal; and depute an adjutant to set out early tomorrow morning together with Hu Hsiu and deliver it to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh at the Lin-ch'ing customs station, requesting that, so far as the customs duties are concerned, he should:

Look upon the matter with favorable eyes."

In no time at all Ch'en Ching-chi fetched a packet of silver and turned it over to Hu Hsiu.

"I'm going to Uncle Han Tao-kuo's house to spend the night," reported Hu Hsiu.

He then took possession of the letter and customs statement, and left with the adjutant early the next morning. But no more of this.

Suddenly the sound of orderlies shouting to clear the way became audible, and P'ing-an came in to report, "Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh have arrived."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome them into the main reception hall. After they had exchanged the customary amenities, he invited them to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their python robes and sat down on two folding chairs that had been set out in the place of honor at the head of the chamber, while Ying Po-chüeh joined Hsi-men Ch'ing at the foot of the chamber in playing the role of hosts.

"Who is this gentleman here?" Eunuch Director Hsüeh inquired.

"You met him once before, last year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is your pupil's old friend Ying the Second."

"So it's that Mr. Ying who is so given to making a joke out of everything, is it?" said Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

Ying Po-chüeh bowed in his direction and said, "So you still remember, do you, sir? Your humble servant is that very one."

In no time at all tea was served and duly consumed.

Who should appear at this juncture but P'ing-an, who came in and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has sent a servant with a card indicating that he has another party to attend today and will consequently arrive a bit late. He says that you should start without him. There is no need to wait."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the card, he said, "I understand."

"Your Honor Hsi-men," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "who is it that's coming late today?"

"Chou Hsiu has another party to attend," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He has sent someone to say that we should go ahead and not wait for him, since he fears he may be a little late."

"Since he's sent someone to inform you," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "we might as well leave a place for him and proceed."

At this juncture, two page boys made their way to the upper end of the chamber and stood one to either side of the guests of honor, cooling them with their fans.

As the conversation proceeded, Wang Ching came in with two calling cards and announced that the two licentiates had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon glancing at the cards and seeing that one of them read, "Your devoted servant Ni P'eng," and the other, "Wen Pi-ku," realized that Licentiate Ni had come with the friend and fellow student whom he had recommended to him, and he hastened out to welcome them.

He saw that each of them was attired in the cap and gown of a scholar. Having ushered them inside, he did not bother to inspect Licentiate Ni but, turning his attention to Wen Pi-ku, or Pedant Wen, observed that he was not more than forty years old, was possessed of:

Bright eyes and white teeth,⁵

A three-forked beard,

An uninhibited demeanor,⁶ and

An elegant carriage.

If you don't know what he might be capable of,

You must observe what he does and does not do.

There are a few lines that describe him very well:

Though possessed of an unbridled talent,⁷

He is given to visiting unsavory places.

Having stumbled in his pursuit of success,

His heroic ambitions have turned to ashes.

His property having been allowed to dribble away,⁸

His spirit of nobility⁹ was the first thing to go.¹⁰

His literary efforts and Confucian principles,

Have all been handed back to Confucius himself.

He has taken the task of supporting the ruler and benefiting the people,

As well as the desire to glorify his ancestors and elevate his relatives,

And relegated them, in their entirety, to that great sea, the Eastern Ocean.

Concealing his light and following the crowd,¹¹

His only concern is for his own advantage.¹²

Conforming indifferently to square and round,¹³

He no longer takes shame to be significant.

Affecting both a high hat and a broad belt,

He acts as though no one else were present.¹⁴

In company his speeches are long and lofty,
But in his breast he harbors nothing at all.
For three years he has answered the roll call,
But failed to pass the entrance examination;
The cassia in the moon will forever remain beyond his reach.
Among convivial companions he enjoys his cups,
Undisturbed by his withdrawal from the world;
He is content to dwell as a recluse within his cliffside cave.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered his guests into the reception hall where they saluted each other, upon which they each presented him with the customary book and kerchief in honor of his birthday.

After they had bowed to each other and sat down in the positions of guest and host, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I have long been an admirer of the venerable Master Wen's great talents. May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?"

Licentiate Wen replied, "Your pupil's given name is Pi-ku, my informal name is Jih-hsin, and my courtesy name is K'uei-hsüan."

"Venerable Master K'uei-hsüan," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I also ask in which government school you are enrolled, and what classic you specialize in?"

"Though your pupil is deficient in talent," Licentiate Wen replied, "I am enrolled in the prefectural school and am engaged in a rudimentary study of the *I-ching*, or *Book of Changes*. I have long been an admirer of your household's great reputation but have not presumed to pay you a visit. Only because, the other day, my fellow student Ni P'eng brought up the subject of your surpassing virtue, have I ventured to ascend your hall in order to pay my respects."

"You do me too much honor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since you have taken the initiative in calling upon me, venerable sir, your pupil will not fail to return the favor when time allows. The fact is that your pupil, being but a military official, is too uncouth to comprehend the literary niceties and stands in need of someone qualified to handle his social correspondence for him. Because, some time ago, when visiting the home of a colleague of mine, I encountered the venerable gentleman, Ni P'eng, who praised you, venerable sir, for your great talent and surpassing virtue, I resolved to pay you a visit and seek your instruction. How could I have anticipated that you would condescend to drop in on me, and present me with such a handsome gift to boot?"

I will never be able to thank you enough."

"Your pupil," responded Licentiate Wen, "is possessed of but:

Paltry talent and meager virtue.

I am unworthy of such extravagant praise."

When they had finished their tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to the summerhouse, where Eunuch Director Hsüeh and Eunuch Director Liu were already seated.

"Pray invite the two venerable gentlemen to come in and divest themselves of their formal clothes," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly invited them to loosen their blue gowns. Once inside, they were as deferential as could be, before sitting down, one on either side, with lowered heads.

As they were chatting, Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Battalion Commander Fan Hsün arrived, exchanged greetings with the company, and sat down.

Before long, Tai-an, along with some fellow servants and Cheng Feng, came in and reported that the four singing girls engaged for the occasion had all been summoned.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Was she at Imperial Relative Wang's place or not?"

"I had to go to Imperial Relative Wang's place to call for her," said Tai-an, "but she had not made any preparations to leave. It was only when I threatened to truss up the madam of her place and have her locked up that she became flustered and consented to get into her sedan chair and come along with the others."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went outside and stood on the stylobate of the reception hall in order to observe the four singing girls as they came in together. Thereupon, each of them:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,

proceeded to kowtow to him.

Cheng Ai-yüeh was wearing a purple gauze blouse over a white gauze drawnwork skirt. On her head:

A phoenix hairpin is half askew,
The jewels in her chignon tinkle.¹⁵
Her slender waist is lissome,¹⁶
Resembling the lithe branches of the willow;
Her flowery face is pleasing,
With the voluptuousness of the lotus blossom.

Truly:

The myriad forms of her seductiveness¹⁷ are nowhere to be bought;
Even at a thousand taels for one night¹⁸ her like cannot be found.¹⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing, addressing himself to Cheng Ai-yüeh, said, "I engaged you for this occasion, so why did you fail to come? How provoking can you get? No doubt you thought I would be unable to get hold of you."

Cheng Ai-yüeh stood up after kowtowing to him, without saying a word in response, and merely smiled as she joined her companions in trooping off toward the rear compound. Upon arriving there, and kowtowing to Yüeh-niang and the rest of the company, they noticed that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh were already in attendance.

After greeting them with a bow, they remarked, "The two of you are here early."

"We haven't been home for the last two days," Li Kuei-chieh said.

She then went on to ask, "How come the four of you are so late?"

"It was Sister Cheng Ai-yüeh who prevented us from coming any earlier," said Tung Chiao-erh. "We were all ready and waiting for her, but she refused to start out."

Cheng Ai-yüeh merely covered her face with her fan and smiled, without saying a word.

Yüeh-niang then asked, "Whose establishment does this young lady belong to?"

"You may not know her," Tung Chiao-erh explained, "but she's the younger sister of Cheng Ai-hsiang. It's not even half a year since she was deflowered."

"She does indeed have a nice figure," said Yüeh-niang.

Tea was ordered for them to drink, and a table was set up for the purpose.

Meanwhile, P'an Chin-lien amused herself by lifting up Cheng Ai-yüeh's skirt and displaying her feet, saying as she did so, "It seems that you denizens of the quarter favor straight pointed toes to your shoes, rather than the turned up tips that we outsiders prefer. The shoes we outsiders wear have level soles, while you denizens of the quarter prefer high heels."

Yüeh-niang turned to her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, and said, "Just see how she insists on playing the role of the superior know-it-all. Why should she concern herself with such things?"

A little later, Chin-lien pulled a stickpin with a dangling goldfish out of Cheng Ai-yüeh's hairdo and asked her, "Where did you have this particular piece made?"

"It was designed by one of the silversmiths in the quarter," replied Cheng Ai-yüeh.

Before long, tea was served, and Yüeh-niang suggested that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh join the other four in partaking of the tea.

In no time at all, the six singing girls finished their tea, and Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh said to Tung Chiao-erh and the others, "Why don't you come and take a stroll in the garden with us?"

"We'll come join you," said Tung Chiao-erh, "after making another visit in the rear compound."

Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh then followed P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou out through the ceremonial gate that separated the front and rear compounds and into the garden. Because there were people in the large summer-house, they did not go that way, but, skirting it, enjoyed the flowery vegetation for a while and then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see Kuan-ko.

Kuan-ko was feeling somewhat out of sorts. He had awakened from a dream, crying from fright, and would not allow himself to be breast-fed. Li P'ing-erh was in the room, looking after him, and had not come out. When she saw that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, along with Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, had come in, she hastily invited them to sit down.

"Is little brother asleep?" Li Kuei-chieh asked.

"He's been crying for some time," said Li P'ing-erh. "Only after I put him down facing the interior of the bed just now, has he fallen asleep."

Meng Yü-lou said, "The First Lady told you to send for Dame Liu to take a look at him. Why don't you send a page boy right now to summon her?"

"Today is Father's birthday," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'll send for her tomorrow."

As they were talking, they saw the four singing-girls, along with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Hsiao-yü, come in.

"So this is where you all are," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "We've been looking for you in the garden."

"Since there are male guests being entertained in the garden," said Meng Yü-lou, "we didn't feel it right to linger there, but just took a look, and then came over here."

Li Kuei-chieh asked Hung the Fourth, "What were the four of you doing in the rear compound that delayed you in getting here for so long?"

"We were drinking tea in the Fourth Lady's quarters in the rear compound," explained Hung the Fourth, "and have been visiting there all this time."

When P'an Chin-lien heard this, she smiled meaningfully at Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh and said to Hung the Fourth, "Who told you to call her the Fourth Lady?"

"She asked us into her quarters for some tea," said Tung Chiao-erh. "When one of us enquired of her, saying, 'We haven't previously had the opportunity to kowtow to you, so we don't know which lady you are,' she replied, 'I am your Fourth Lady.'"

"Why the shameless concubine!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "If other people choose to address you that way, it's all right, I suppose. But whoever heard of anyone referring to herself as the Fourth Lady? Who is there in this entire household who deigns to show you any favor, or considers you to count for anything? Who is there who refers to you as the Fourth Lady? Merely because our husband spent a night in your room, you think that:

Having obtained some pigments,

You're ready to start up a dyer's establishment.

If it weren't for the fact that Sister-in-law Wu was staying overnight in the First Lady's room, Li Kuei-chieh was staying in the Second Lady's room, Aunt Yang was staying in the Third Lady's room, Wu Yin-erh was staying in Li P'ing-erh's room, and I had Old Mrs. P'an in my room, it never would have occurred to him to go into your room."

"You haven't even seen everything that happened," said Meng Yü-lou. "This morning, after sending Father off to the front compound, she made quite a spectacle of herself in the courtyard:

Summoning this one and calling for that."²⁰

"As the saying goes," said Chin-lien:

"Slaves should never be indulged, and

Children ought not to be humored."

She then proceeded to interrogate Hsiao-yü, saying, "I hear that your master told your mistress that she really ought to find a maidservant for her. Last night when he went into her quarters and saw that she hadn't finished cleaning things up, that little whore put

on quite a show, saying to your master, 'I didn't have the spare time yesterday to put the room in order, and now you've seen fit to come spend the night here at my place.' To which your master responded, 'That's not a problem. Tomorrow, I'll tell your mistress to find a maidservant for you.' Is that really what happened?"

"I don't know," said Hsiao-yü. "No doubt it was something that Yü-hsiao overheard."

Chin-lien explained to Li Kuei-chieh, "Except when there are visitors in each of our quarters, Father doesn't ordinarily go into her place in the rear compound. No doubt we may appear to be disparaging her behind her back, but the fact of the matter is that she is so:

Ignorant of the ways of the world,²¹
that she is constantly given to harming other people with that tongue of hers, so that the rest of us are not ordinarily on speaking terms with her."

As they were speaking, Hsiu-ch'un came in with some tea, and each person was served a cup of tea, flavored with fruit kernels.

While they were drinking their tea, all of a sudden, in the front compound:

Drums and music began to sound,
as Director-in-Chief Ching Chung and the other guests all arrived together. As soon as they had been seated and served with wine, Tai-an came to call for the four singing girls, and they duly trooped off to the front compound. Ch'iao Hung did not attend the party that day.

First there was a show by the tumblers, and vaudeville acts, while the musicians:

Played wind and percussion instruments and sang.

Then, after the ensemble dances were finished, a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen was performed. The chef then came in and presented the first course, along with soup and rice.

Who should appear at this juncture but Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who came in wearing his official cap and girdle. Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to welcome him into the chamber, where, after they had exchanged the customary amenities, Dr. Jen ordered his attendants to reach into his felt bag and extract a handkerchief embroidered with the character for long life, in which were wrapped two mace of silver, as a birthday gift for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Only yesterday," he said, "did Han Ming-ch'uan mention to me that today is your birthday. Please excuse your pupil for his tardiness."

"How could I presume to put you to the trouble of mounting your equipage on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And many thanks for your lavish gift. I am much obliged to you for the efficacious prescriptions you have provided in the past."

When they had finished saluting each other, Dr. Jen wanted to offer his host a drink, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "There is no need for that. The salutation you offered me just now is sufficient."

After Dr. Jen had divested himself of his outer garments, he was offered a seat at the fourth table setting on the left side, next to that of Wu K'ai. Soup and rice were served to him, and platters of viands were also provided for his servitors. Dr. Jen thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing for his hospitality, directed his servitors to take the food provided for them outside, and then sat down.

After the four singing girls had lined up to one side, struck up their instruments, and sung a birthday song in celebration of the occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered them to join the company and divide up the job of serving the guests with wine.

The performers at the foot of the chamber then came forward to where Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh were sitting and presented them with the program, from which they selected the tsa-chü drama entitled *Han Hsiang-tzu tu Ch'en Pan-chieh sheng-hsien hui* (Han Hsiang-tzu induces Ch'en Pan-chieh to ascend to the realm of the immortals).²²

Only one scene of this drama had been performed when they heard the sound of orderlies shouting to clear the way gradually approach, and P'ing-an came in to announce that His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome him. Before even exchanging formal greetings with him, he suggested to his guest that he divest himself of his formal outer garments.

"I have not come for any other reason," said Chou Hsiu, "than to offer my brother Ssu-ch'üan²³ a cup of wine."

Eunuch Director Hsüeh came forward at this point and said, "Your Honor Chou, there is no need to offer him a cup of wine. It will suffice to exchange salutations with him."

The two of them bowed to each other, after which Chou Hsiu went on to say, "Your pupil has arrived late. Forgive me. Forgive me."

Only after running through the customary amenities did Chou Hsiu divest himself of his outer garments, loosen his girdle, and salute the assembled guests. A goblet and chopsticks were provided for him at the third place setting on the left, after which he was supplied with soup and rice, and a new main course was served. In the presence of the gathering, two platters of snacks, two platters of baked meats, and two bottles of wine were provided for each of the servitors who had accompanied Chou Hsiu to tend the horses.

Chou Hsiu raised his hand in acknowledgment and thanked his host, saying, "You are too generous."

Only after calling in his attendants to take the proffered viands outside did he consent to sit down in his place, whereupon Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh each toasted him with a large bumper of wine.

The festivities lasted until:

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
accompanied by:

Song and dance and wind and string instruments,
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.

Truly:

The dancing continued till the moon in the pavilion amid the willows hung low;
The singing went on until the breeze underneath the peach-blossom fans expired.²⁴

The party continued until evening, when Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, because he lived outside the city gate, was the first to leave.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off, Dr. Jen asked him, "Is your venerable consort's ailment any better?"

"My humble housemate did feel appreciably better after taking your excellent prescription," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but during the last few days, for some reason or other, she is once again somewhat indisposed. I hope that you will come by another day, venerable

sir, in order to examine her."

When they had finished speaking, Dr. Jen said goodbye, mounted his horse, and went his way. Subsequently, Licentiate Ni P'eng and Licentiate Wen Pi-ku also got up to go.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing's repeated urgings that they should stay a little longer proved unsuccessful, he saw them out to the front gate, where he said to Wen Pi-ku, "On another day, I will pay you a visit to seek your instruction. Across the street from my humble abode, I have prepared a studio in which you may reside, venerable sir, along with your dependents, if that is convenient. Each month I will respectfully offer you a stipend to provide for your sustenance."

"I am much indebted to you for your gracious appreciation," said Licentiate Wen.

"I will never be able to thank you enough."

"This is an example, venerable sir," said Licentiate Ni, "of your civilized endeavor to support this culture of ours."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen the two licentiates on their way, he continued drinking with his guests until late at night before the party broke up. The four singing girls had returned to Yüeh-niang's apartment, where they sang for the entertainment of Yüeh-niang, Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, and the others. Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in the front compound, where he asked Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh to remain so they could sit down again and resume their drinking. They looked on as the musicians were supplied with food and wine, after consuming which they departed. The utensils from the party were all cleared away, and the fresh fruit and left over comestibles were divided up among the servants.

At this point, new saucers of delicacies were called for from the rear compound, and Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng played their instruments and sang for their entertainment, after which they were rewarded with large goblets of wine.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "at this feast that you put on in celebration of your illustrious birthday, everyone had a good time."

"This day," said Li Ming, "His Honor Hsüeh and His Honor Liu expended a good deal in the way of gratuities. And later, when they saw Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh come out, they provided each of them with a packet as well. The only thing is, His Honor Hsüeh, being younger than His Honor Liu, is more given to mischief."

It was not long before Hua-tung brought out the new saucers of delicacies. These consisted of candied deep-fried sweetmeats, hazelnut and pine nut kernels, red caltrops and snowy lotus roots, lotus seeds and water chestnuts, butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, candied plums frosted with crystallized sugar, rose-flavored pastries, and the like.

When Ying Po-chüeh set eyes on the two varieties of butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, one pure white and the other pink in color, and both of them flecked with gold, he selected one for himself and popped it into his mouth, whereupon:

Sweet dew suffused his heart, and

It melted on entering his mouth.

"These are really delicious!" he exclaimed.

"My son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's only appropriate that you should like them. Your Sixth Lady made them with her own hands."

"I see, they're a product of my daughter's filial sentiments," laughed Ying Po-chüeh.

Turning to Wu K'ai, he went on to say, "Venerable Brother-in-law, you must have one of these."

Whereupon, he selected one of them and put it into Wu K'ai's mouth. He also called Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng before him, and rewarded one to each of them.

As the drinking continued, Ying Po-chüeh turned to Tai-an, and said, "You go back to the rear compound and tell those four little whores to come out here. If they don't wish to oblige me, that's that, but they really ought to sing something for our venerable brother-in-law. If we wait any longer, they'll be ready to go home. They've scarcely earned their pay today, having sung no more than two song suites for us. We ought not to let them off so easily."

Tai-an did not stir from his place but said, "I've already called for them. They're in the rear compound, entertaining Sister-in-law Wu and the other ladies. They'll be here presently."

"You lousy little oily mouth!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Since when did you go back there. You can't fool me."

He then called up Wang Ching and said, "You go."

Wang Ching, also, refused to budge.

"Since I see that none of you are willing to go," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll go myself."

Thereupon, he started out toward the rear compound.

"You'd better not go in there," said Tai-an. "There's a dog in the rear compound who's really fierce. He's likely to bite you in the thigh."

"If I'm bitten," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll end up recuperating on your mother's k'ang."

Tai-an went back to the rear compound. After some time had elapsed, they became aware of a whiff of fragrance, accompanied by the sound of laughter, and the four painted faces came out, with their kerchiefs wrapped around their heads.

When Ying Po-chüeh saw them, he said, "My children, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? If you've already put your headgear on, it looks as though you think you're on the way out. You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it, hoping to get away without singing a single song for us. At the very least, the charge for your services, including the fare for your sedan chair, is four candareens of silver. That would suffice to buy a picul and seven or eight pecks of unhusked red rice, enough to feed you, your madam, and the entire staff of your establishment, great and small, for a month."

"Brother," said Tung Chiao-erh, "if you think our expenses for food and clothing are so low, you might as well become a licensed entertainer yourself."

"Your Honor," said Hung the Fourth, "by this time it must be almost the second watch of the night. You ought to let us go."

"Tomorrow," said Ch'i Hsiang-erh, "we have to get up early in order to attend a funeral outside the city gate."

"Whose funeral is that?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"It's someone from that household the door of which opens practically under our eaves," said Ch'i Hsiang-erh.

"Do you mean to say that it's someone from the household of Wang the Third?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "The other day, when you got into trouble on his account, it was only thanks to His Honor's intervention on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh that you, too, were spared. This

time:

The sparrow is no longer in that nest.²⁵

That's all there is to it."

"Why you crazy old oily mouth!" exclaimed Ch'i Hsiang-erh. "You're delirious. What nonsense you talk."

"You may scoff at me for being old," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "but what part of me is old?"

Though only half functional,

I'd have no trouble handling the likes of you four little whores."

"Brother," laughed Hung the Fourth, "as I see it, your ball-handling is not that great. All you can do is brag about it."

"My child," said Ying Po-chüeh, "when it comes to that:

I pay only what the performance is worth."

He then went on to say, "That lousy little whore from the Cheng Family Establishment seems to have gorged herself with the candied effigies of the Five Ancients,²⁶ thrones and all. Her mouth is so stuffed she can't get a word out. She has a distracted look about her. I dare say she's preoccupied with the thought of some customer back home."

"After listening to your braggadocio just now," said Tung Chiao-erh, "she's a little skittish about what may ensue."

"Skittish or not," said Ying Po-chüeh, "each of you must get your instruments out and sing a song suite for us. After that, you can go. I won't try to keep you."

"That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Two of you can serve us with wine, while the other two sing a song suite for him."

"Sister Cheng Ai-yüeh and I will sing for you then," said Ch'i Hsiang-erh.

At this, Cheng Ai-yüeh took up her *p'i-p'a*, and Ch'i Hsiang-erh her psaltery, as they seated themselves on a folding bench. Thereupon, the two of them:

Deftly extended their slender fingers,

Gently strummed the silken strings,

Opened their ruby lips,

Exposed their white teeth,

Interpreted the melodious tunes, and

Displayed their coquettish voices,

as they sang the song suite in the Yüeh-tiao mode, starting with the tune "Fighting Quails," that begins with the words:

Had you but gone by night and returned at dawn,²⁷

Your affair could have been as everlasting as Heaven and as enduring as Earth.²⁸

During the performance, Tung Chiao-erh served wine to Wu K'ai, and Hung the Fourth served wine to Ying Po-chüeh. As the party continued:

Exchanging cups as they drank,

Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,

Blue-green sleeves were raised assiduously,²⁹

Golden goblets were filled to overflowing.³⁰

Truly:

In the morning he attends feasts in Golden Valley,

In the evening he favors beauties in ornate houses.

But do not consider these to be occasions for joy,

Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.³¹

On this occasion, after:

Three rounds of wine had been consumed; and

Two suites of songs had been performed,

the four singing girls were allowed to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing still urged his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to stay a while and instructed Ch'un-hung to come forward and sing him a southern song. After which, he ordered Ch'i-t'ung to get a horse ready and take a lantern with which to see his brother-in-law home.

"Brother-in-law," said Wu K'ai, "there's no need for you to provide a horse. I'll just walk home together with Brother Ying the Second. It's gotten rather late."

"There's no reason for you to refuse," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But in that case, I'll still have Ch'i-t'ung take a lantern and see you to your home."

Thereupon, after a song suite had been performed, Wu K'ai and Ying Pochüeh got up and took their leave, saying, "We've imposed egregiously on your hospitality."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw them off as far as the front gate, where he said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Tomorrow, whatever else you do, make sure to contact that manager Kan Jun that you recommended, and have him come to see me, so we can sign a contract. I've already agreed with my kinsman Ch'iao Hung to get the house over there ready, so that we can unload the merchandise within the next couple of days."

"Brother," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "there's no need for you to instruct me. I know what to do."

So saying, he took his leave and departed together with Wu K'ai, while Ch'i-t'ung lighted them on their way with a lantern.

Along the way, Wu K'ai asked him, "What house is that which my brother-in-law spoke of getting ready just now?"

Ying Po-chüeh then told him the whole story of how Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods had arrived, how Hsi-men Ch'ing was in need of someone to take charge of selling the merchandise, how he intended to open a silk goods shop, how he was getting the house across the street ready for that purpose, and how he had asked him to recommend a manager to whom he could entrust the enterprise.

"When do you suppose they will open for business?" asked Wu K'ai. "We relatives and friends must surely not fail to provide artificial flowers, red bunting, and boxes of candied fruit in celebration of the occasion."

Before long, they emerged onto Main Street and arrived at the mouth of the little alley on which Ying Po-chüeh lived.

Wu K'ai told Ch'i-t'ung, "Take the lantern and see your uncle Ying the Second to his home."

Ying Po-chüeh demurred, saying, "Ch'i-t'ung, you see Brother-in-law Wu to his home. I don't need a lantern. My place is just inside the alley."

So saying, they said goodbye to each other and went their separate ways, with Ch'i-t'ung escorting Wu K'ai.

Hsi-men Ch'ing took care of paying Li Ming and company the fees for their performance, locked the gate, went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound, and retired for the night.

The next day, sure enough, Ying Po-chüeh brought Kan Jun over, dressed in black livery, to meet Hsi-men Ch'ing. After discussing business with him for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Ts'ui Pen and sent him to confer with Ch'iao Hung about getting the house ready for the unloading of the merchandise, and the construction of an underground storehouse and shop front, so that they could settle on a date for the opening of the business.

Ch'iao Hung said to Ts'ui Pen, "In the future, with regard to all things, great and small, I am content to let our kinsman decide. There is no need to consult me about it any further."

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing signed a contract with Kan Jun, which established Ying Po-chüeh as his guarantor, and determined that as far as the profits of the enterprise were concerned, Hsi-men Ch'ing was entitled to 50 percent, and Ch'iao Hung to 30 percent, with the remainder to be divided evenly among Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, and Ts'ui Pen. It was also decided that they should lay in the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone, proceed with the construction of an underground storehouse and shop front, and design a plaque for the door of the establishment, so that when the cartloads of merchandise arrived, they would be prepared to accommodate them.

Space in the rear was also set aside as a studio in which Licentiate Wen Pi-ku could reside as his private tutor, or social secretary, who would take responsibility for dealing with his employer's correspondence with his peers, in return for a stipend of three taels of silver per month, and appropriate gifts on festival occasions. It was also arranged that Hua-t'ung would wait on him for half of every evening, in order to provide for his food and drink, and fetch water for his inkstone, and, if he should go out to visit his friends, accompany him in order to carry his card case. It was also expected that when Hsi-men Ch'ing entertained guests he would be invited to help keep them company as they drank their wine, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

On the same day, Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday being over, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i was invited to come examine Li P'ing-erh and prescribe appropriate medications for her, while Hsi-men Ch'ing dealt with the alterations being made to the house across the street. Aunt Yang was the first to go home, but Li Kueichieh and Wu Yin-erh had not yet done so. Wu Yüeh-niang purchased some crabs for three mace of silver and had them cooked at noontime, when she invited Sister-in-law Wu, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and the rest to enjoy them in the courtyard of the rear compound, where they gathered round to consume them. While they were still eating, Dame Liu, whom Yüeh-niang had engaged to come and see Kuan-ko, arrived, and, after she had been served with tea, Li P'ing-erh accompanied her to her quarters in the front compound.

"Little brother has suffered from a fright," said Dame Liu, "and is rejecting his milk."

She provided several doses of medicine, after which Yüeh-niang gave her three mace of silver and sent her on her way.

Meanwhile, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, together with Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, set up a small table under the flower arbor, covered it with a strip of felt, and amused themselves by playing dominoes for forfeits of wine. Whoever lost a hand had to consume a large cup of wine. Sun Hsüeh-o lost seven or eight times to the others and had to down as many cups of wine. Consequently, she did not dare to continue playing and, after sitting a while longer, took herself off. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was engaged in overseeing the preparations in the house across the street, was drinking there along with Ying Po-chüeh, Ts'ui Pen, and his new manager, Kan Jun, and sent a page boy back home to fetch some food for them. This threw Sun Hsüeh-o into such a state of consternation that she felt compelled to bustle off to the kitchen to take care of it, leaving Li Chiao-erh to take her place in the game of dominoes.

At this point, Chin-lien said to Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh, "Why don't you sing us that song suite celebrating the evening of the seventh day of the seventh month."

Thereupon, accompanying themselves on the *p'i-p'a*, they sang the song suite in the Shang mode that begins with a song to the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests":

Summer is just beginning to recede, as the star Antares gradually moves toward the west.
The handle of the Dipper is moving toward the Northern Palace.

A single leaf of the phoenix tree³² flutters down,
And everywhere a hint of autumn can be detected.

The evening clouds float idly as the stridulation of the cicadas resounds;
The nighttime breeze is gentle as the coruscating fireflies begin to fly.
On the Celestial Stairs the coolness of the night is as clear as water;

Most appropriately, paintings of the Maggie Bridge³³ are suspended on high.

In golden basins five sprouts are planted;³⁴

In alabaster towers banquets are prepared.³⁵

That day the sisterhood of womenfolk continued drinking until evening, when Yüeh-niang filled their gift boxes and saw Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh off on their way home.

P'an Chin-lien was completely inebriated by the time she returned to her quarters. Because she observed the frequency with which Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and that he had once again invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine her that very morning, her heart was filled with rancor. She was also aware that her rival's child was not well.

As she entered her courtyard:

As providence would have it,

amid the dark shadows, she stepped into a pile of dog shit with one of her feet. As soon as she got inside, she had Ch'un-mei light a lamp to examine the damage and saw that the entire vamp of her brand new scarlet silk shoe had been soiled. Immediately, she:

Pricked up her willow brows,

Opened wide her starry eyes,³⁶

called for Ch'un-mei to bring a lantern, locked the postern gate, picked up a big stick, and proceeded indiscriminately to beat the offending dog, beating him until he howled outlandishly.

Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, sent Ying-ch'un over to say, "My mistress says to tell you that the baby has just taken Dame Liu's medicine and fallen asleep, and asks that the Fifth Lady refrain from beating the dog any longer."

Chin-lien sat down and had nothing to say for some time, after which, she beat the dog a little more, opened the gate, and let him out. She then turned her attention to finding fault with Ch'iu-chü. When she examined her shoe, she was:

Angry on the left, and

Angry on the right.

Calling Ch'iu-chü before her, she said, "If you consider the matter, by this time of day, the dog ought to have been let out. What were you keeping him in here for, anyway? I suppose, slave that you are, he serves you as a clandestine lover. By not letting him out, you caused him to leave his shit all over the place, so that by stepping into it, this brand new pair of shoes of mine, which, including today, I haven't worn for more than three or four days, is all covered with shit. You knew I would be coming home and should have lit a lantern and come out to meet me. How can you expect to get away with:

Pretending to be both deaf and dumb,³⁷
and playing the fool this way?"

"I told her some time ago," said Ch'un-mei, "you ought to take advantage of the fact that Mother isn't home yet to feed him and put him out in the back courtyard. But she pretended to be deaf and paid me no attention at all, even giving me a dirty look."

"There you are!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "The lousy, audacious, death-defying slave! How is it that she's so reluctant to get her ass in motion? I'm aware that you think you're the boss around here. As they say, you're such a hardened convict that a beating no longer means anything to you."

Thereupon, she called her up in front of her and told Ch'un-mei to bring a lamp over so she could see better, saying as she did so, "Just look at the filth on my shoe. It's a shoe that I just made, and one that I really liked, and now it's been ruined by a slave like you."

Having tricked her into lowering her head in order to see better, she took up the shoe by its heel lift and slapped her right in the face several times with the sole. She hit her so hard that Ch'iu-chü's lips were broken, and, rubbing away the blood with her hand, she stepped out of reach.

"You lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her. "Trying to get away, are you?"

"Drag her over here, and make her kneel down," she said to Ch'un-mei. "Fetch the riding crop, and strip off her clothing for me. I'll give her a good thirty strokes with the whip before I'm through. Merely grabbing hold of her and giving her a few random strokes will hardly do the job."

Ch'un-mei accordingly stripped off Ch'iu-chü's clothing. The woman then told Ch'un-mei to tie her hands, after which she swung the riding crop into the air, and the strokes of the whip began to fall on Ch'iu-chü like rain. She whipped the slave girl until she:



P'an Chin-lien Beats a Dog at the Expense of a Human Being

Howled like a stuck pig.

In the adjacent quarters, Kuan-ko had just closed his eyes in sleep when he was startled back awake, and Li P'ing-erh once again sent Hsiu-ch'un over to say, "My mistress respectfully requests that the Fifth Lady let Ch'iu-chü off for now, and stop whipping her. She's afraid that the commotion will startle the baby awake."

When Old Mrs. P'an, who was lying on the k'ang in the inner room, heard Chin-lien whipping Ch'iu-chü until she screamed, she hastily crawled to her feet and admonished her from the sidelines, but Chin-lien paid no attention.

Later, when she saw that Li P'ing-erh had sent Hsiu-ch'un over to plead with her, she stepped forward and attempted to pry the whip from her daughter's hand, saying, "My child, spare her a few strokes. You've annoyed the young lady next door into complaining. I'm afraid you may frighten the baby.

You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,

So long as you don't injure the redbud tree."³⁸

When Chin-lien, who was already in a state of rage, heard her mother admonish her with these words, it was just as though a torch had been applied to her heart.

In an instant her whole face was purple.

Giving her a shove with one hand, she very nearly knocked Old Mrs. P'an down.

"You crazy old baggage!" she cried. "What do you know about it? Get out of my way and sit down somewhere. It's none of your business. What the fuck are you trying to admonish me for? What's all this about the redbud tree, and taking a switch to the donkey? Whose side are you on, anyway, with this two-faced interference of yours?"

"Why you lousy death-bound short-life!" expostulated Old Mrs. P'an. "How can you call me two-faced? I come to visit you in the hope of picking up a few morsels of cold food, and you treat me as roughly as this!"

"Tomorrow," said Chin-lien, "you can just squeeze your old cunt between your legs and take it out of here, for all I care. It's not as though any one in this house would dare to:

Stew me in a pot and eat me."

When Old Mrs. P'an heard the way in which her own daughter defied her, she went back into the inner room, and gave way to:

Sobbing and wailing,³⁹

while the woman continued to whip Ch'iu-chü. She gave her a good twenty or thirty strokes with the riding crop and then finished her off with ten crisscross strokes of the cane. She beat her until:

The skin was broken and the flesh was split,

before letting her up. She also used her sharp fingernails to gouge the cheeks of her face until they were a bloody mess.

All Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, could do was to cover the baby's ears with both hands, while tears of distress rolled down her cheeks.

Though she dared to be angry,

She dared not speak.

Who could have anticipated that on that day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's drinking party in the house across the street broke up, he went straight to Meng Yü-lou's quarters and spent the night.

The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu invited him to a belated drinking party in honor of his birthday, so he was not at home.

Li P'ing-erh observed that, though Kuan-ko had taken Dame Liu's medicine, it had produced no visible effect, and that the fright he had been subjected to during the night had caused his eyeballs to roll up and remain dangling there out of sight. Because Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang were about to go home that day, she took a pair of silver lions that were used to hold her bedspread in place from her room and went to see Yüeh-niang, proposing that Nun Hsüeh be commissioned to arrange the printing of copies of the *Fo-tinghsin t'o-lo ching* (Dhāranī sutra of the Buddha's essence),⁴⁰ in time for the Mid-Autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, so that they could be distributed at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak.

Nun Hsüeh was about to take them, and go on her way, when Meng Yü-lou spoke up from one side, saying, "Reverend, hold on a minute. First Lady, you ought to send a page boy to call in Pen the Fourth so he can weigh these lions and determine what they're worth, and then accompany her to the sutra printing shop and settle on the number of copies to be printed, the cost per copy, the amount we're willing to contribute, and the date by which the job will be done. That's the right way to do it. If you send Reverend Hsüeh off to do it all by herself, how can we be sure that she will be able to handle it correctly?"

"What you say is right," said Yüeh-niang.

She then dispatched Lai-an, saying, "Go see if Pen the Fourth is at home or not, and get him to come here."

Lai-an went straight off on this errand, and, before long, Pen the Fourth showed up and bowed to Yüeh-niang and the others. When he put the two silver lions on the scale, they turned out to weigh forty-one taels and five mace.

Yüeh-niang then instructed him, "Accompany Reverend Hsüeh to the sutra printing shop and request them to print the appropriate number of copies."

Chin-lien thereupon said to Meng Yü-lou, "Why don't we see the two reverends off, and, while we're at it, we can drop in on Hsi-men Ta-chieh and see if she is still in her room making shoes."

The two of them then took each other by the hand and set off for the front compound, while Pen the Fourth, along with Lai-an, accompanied Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang on their way to the sutra printing shop.

When P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou arrived in front of the main reception hall, they saw that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was sitting under the eaves at the door of her anteroom on the east side of the courtyard, with her sewing basket, engaged in stitching a shoe. Chin-lien picked it up to take a look and saw that the upper was made of sand-green Lu-chou silk.

"Young lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "you really ought not to use this red chain stitching. The fact is, it would be more dignified to use blue thread. And, when the time comes, you can attach a scarlet heel lift."

"I already have a pair with scarlet heel lifts," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "For this pair, I intend to use blue heel lifts. That's why I'm chain stitching this one with scarlet thread."

After Chin-lien had looked over her handiwork, the three of them sat down on the stylobate of the reception hall, and Meng Yü-lou asked Hsi-men Tachieh, "Is your husband in your room, or not?"

"He's had a couple of cups of wine, I don't know where," said Hsi-men Tachieh, "and he's sleeping it off in the room."

Meng Yü-lou then said to Chin-lien, "Just now, if I hadn't intervened from the sidelines, that muddleheaded baggage, Sister Li, would simply have turned her silver over to the nuns in order to get some copies of a sutra printed. The sutra might never have been printed, and, legless crab of a creature that she is, if they chose to hide out in some prominent household, where would she ever find them? Luckily, after I intervened, Pen the Fourth was summoned to accompany them."

"Look here," said Chin-lien. "If I were asked to do it, where such a wealthy sister is concerned, if I didn't make something out of it, I'd be a fool. It would be no more than:

Plucking a single hair from the body of an ox.

If your child is not fated to live, quite aside from donating sutras, if you were to donate the entire realm, with its:

Myriad leagues of rivers and mountains,⁴¹

it would be of no avail. Truly:

Though you may have money enough to worship the Northern Dipper,

Who is able to buy a guarantee that nothing untoward will happen?

Right now, in this room of hers, she carries on like the magistrate who:

Authorizes himself alone to ignite fires,

But won't let the rest of us light lamps.⁴²

Young lady, listen to what I'm saying. You're not an outsider.

She's painted herself so white that she won't take on any other color.

You think that you alone can get away with being:

So flippant in your hundred ways.

At the crack of dawn, she inveigles our husband into calling in the doctor to examine her. Well, she can do what she wants because she knows that we won't dare to interfere.

"Whenever she's in front of other people, she is forever protesting her own virtue. 'I'm not in the mood for it,' she says. 'Father is constantly coming into my quarters, pretending that he only wants to see the baby, and then pestering me to sleep with him. Who can be bothered? I end up having to urge him to go and sleep in someone else's quarters.' In front of us, she puts on such a show of virtue, while behind our backs, she engages in bad-mouthing us. And our eldest sister insists on paying heed to her one-sided words.

"If you claim not to be competing with the rest of us for his favors, how is it that the other day, when our husband did not come into your room, you sent your maidservant out to the postern gate to waylay him, allegedly to see the baby? And then, because you were taking medicine, you actually went so far as to arrange for him to spend the night in the other room with Wu Yinerh, thereby showing just how clever you are at getting your husband to like you. And our eldest sister has nothing to say about it.

"Last night, when I came back to my room, I soiled my shoe by stepping into a pile of dog shit, and when I beat the maidservant and drove the dog out, she got upset and sent her maidservant over to complain that I was frightening her baby. My mother, the old baggage, who didn't understand the situation, having scrounged something to eat from her in the past, elected to play the role of her lackey, and admonished me by saying:

'You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,

So long as you don't injure the redbud tree.'

I was already annoyed at her:

Simpleminded officiousness,

so, when she continued to argue with me, I told her off in no uncertain terms, and, today, she has gone home in a huff.

"Her departure caused me to say to her, 'His household does not feel over-burdened by such poor relatives as yourself, and will not feel diminished without you. If you're so quick to lose your temper, in the future, you might just as well stay away. If you're afraid that someone in this house might:

Stew me in a pot and eat me,

just let me handle it for myself.'"

"What an ill-bred offspring you are!" laughed Meng Yü-lou. "How can you talk that way to your own mother?"

"That's not it at all," said Chin-lien. "What really annoys me is the fact that:

She may be a brown cat, but she's got a black tail.

She's so two-faced about things, always taking the other person's side, on the principle that:

If you've eaten a bowl and a half of someone's food,

You're obligated to do whatever they want you to do.⁴³

If she manages to pick up so much as a sweet date from someone, she'll sing her praises a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. From the very outset, once she'd borne this child, she has manipulated our husband to such effect that it's just as though he's taken root in her place. He treats her the same way he would if she had been formally raised to the status of legitimate wife, while she can hardly wait for the chance to trample the rest of us into the mud.

"But today, thanks to the fact that:

Heaven also has eyes,⁴⁴

your child has fallen ill. As I have said all along:

The sun may be at high noon,

But the time will come when it will pass its zenith."⁴⁵

As they were speaking, who should appear but Pen the Fourth and Lai-an, who had been to the sutra printing shop to hand over the silver lions and had returned to report to Yüeh-niang. When they saw that Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were sitting on the stylobate of the reception hall, they came to a halt outside the ceremonial gate, hesitating to come inside.

Lai-an stepped forward and said, "Ladies, get out of the way if you please. Pen the Fourth is here."

"You crazy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "Tell him to go ahead in. It's not as though we've never seen him before."

When Lai-an repeated this to him, Pen the Fourth lowered his head and went straight back to the rear compound, where he reported to Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh, saying, "I took the aforementioned silver lions, weighing forty-one taels and five mace, and, in the presence of the two nuns, turned them over to Chai Ching-erh, or Sutra Chai, the proprietor of the sutra printing shop. He agreed to print five hundred copies of the *Dhāranī* sutra with damask bindings, for five candareens apiece, and a thousand copies with plain silk bindings, for three candareens apiece, which comes to a total of fifty-five taels of silver. In addition to the forty-one taels and five mace which he has already accepted, he is still due thirteen taels and five mace, in return for which, he promises to deliver the sutras on the morning of the fourteenth."

Li P'ing-erh promptly went back to her quarters and returned with a silver incense burner, which, when she had Pen the Fourth put it on the scale, turned out to weigh fifteen taels.

"You take it to him," said Li P'ing-erh, "and keep the surplus over what he is due in order to cover your expenses when the sutras are distributed at the temple fair on the fifteenth. That way you won't have to come and ask me for anything more."

Pen the Fourth, thereupon, took the incense burner and headed out the door, while Yüeh-niang told Lai-an to see him out.

"Brother Four," said Li P'ing-erh, "I'm much indebted to you."

Pen the Fourth bowed deferentially and said, "How could I presume?"

He then went back to the front compound, where Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou once again called him to a halt and asked him, "Did you turn the silver lions over to the sutra printing shop?"

"It's all been properly settled," said Pen the Fourth. "They agreed to print one thousand five hundred copies of the sutra for a fee of fifty-five taels of silver. In addition to the forty-one taels and five mace that they have already received, the Sixth Lady, just now, has provided this silver incense burner."

Meng Yü-lou and Chin-lien looked it over but had nothing to say, after which Pen the Fourth continued on his way home.

Turning to Chin-lien, Meng Yü-lou said, "Sister Li in carrying on this way is simply wasting her money. If he is really destined to be your child, even a blow with a cudgel would not kill him. If he is not destined to be your child, no matter what you do in the way of donating sutras and creating effigies, it will not preserve him. She puts too much faith in these nuns, who are capable of anything. Just now, if I hadn't intervened, she would have simply turned these things over to them to take away. It was better to send someone from our household to accompany them, wasn't it?"

"Even if they made something out of the transaction," said Chin-lien, "it wouldn't amount to much."

The two of them chatted for a while and then stood up.

"Let's go out to the front gate," proposed Chin-lien.

She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "Will you go out with us?"

"I won't go," Hsi-men Ta-chieh replied.

P'an Chin-lien then took Meng Yü-lou by the hand, and the two of them went and stood just inside the main gate.

They then asked P'ing-an, "Have the renovations in the house across the street been completed yet?"

"By this time?" said P'ing-an. "Yesterday, Father was over there supervising the work, and the place has been properly swept out. The merchandise is going to be temporarily stored on the upper floor of the building in the rear. Yesterday he had the yin-yang master come to preside over the ceremony of breaking ground. They are constructing a three-roomed underground storehouse beneath the building in order to store the silk goods and are opening up an eighteen-foot-wide frontage of three rooms in a row, to serve as the shop front. Artisans have been engaged to repaint and varnish the interior, pave the floor, and put up shelving, so that they can open for business next month."

Meng Yü-lou went on to inquire, "Have the dependents of that secretary, Licentiate Wen, moved in yet, or not?"

"They moved in yesterday," said P'ing-an. "And this morning Father directed that the summer bedstead in storage in the rear compound should be allocated to them, and that two tables and four chairs should be moved over for them to sit on."

"Did you happen to notice what his wife looked like?" asked Chin-lien.

"She was sitting in a sedan chair in the dark shadows," said P'ing-an. "Nobody got a good look at her."

As they were speaking, what should they hear in the distance but the *ssu-lang-lang* sound made by an old gentleman as he came along shaking the distinctive mirror polisher's clapper by means of which he alerted housewives to his presence.

"The mirror polisher is coming this way," said Chin-lien.

She then said to P'ing-an, "You call him to a halt so that he can polish our mirrors for us. My mirrors, these last few days, have gotten tarnished. I told you, jailbird that you are, to be on the lookout for him, but you haven't done anything about it. And now, how does it happen that we haven't been standing out here any time at all, and the mirror polisher shows up?"

P'ing-an, accordingly, called the mirror polisher to a halt. The old man set down his load of equipment, and, seeing that there were two women standing just inside the gate, stepped forward to salute each of them with a bow and then stood to one side.

Chin-lien then asked Meng Yü-lou, "If you're planning to have your mirrors polished too, why not have the page boy bring them out as well, so we can have them all polished at the same time?"

Thereupon, she directed Lai-an, "Go to my quarters, and get your sister Ch'un-mei to find my large face mirror, my two small mirrors, and also the large rectangular dressing mirror; then bring them all out here so that he can give them a good polishing."

Meng Yü-lou instructed Lai-an, "Go to my quarters, and get Lan-hsiang to find my mirrors, so you can bring them out to me."

Lai-an had not been gone for long, when he came out, carrying eight mirrors in all, the ordinary mirrors, large and small, in his two hands, and the rectangular dressing mirror hugged against his breast.

"You lousy little piece!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You can't handle them all. You should have made two trips out of it. How can you manage to bring them all out at once this way? If you should happen to dent one of my mirrors, what then?"

"I haven't seen this large mirror of yours before," said Meng Yü-lou. "Where did it come from?"

"Someone left it at the pawnshop," said Chin-lien. "I like it because it's so bright. I've put it in my room and use it to look at myself both day and night."

She then went on to say, "Only three of these mirrors actually belong to me."

"And only two of them, one large and one small, are mine," said Meng Yü-lou.

"Then who do these other two belong to?" asked Chin-lien.

"Those two belong to sister Ch'un-mei," said Lai-an. "She sent them out in the hope that he would be able to polish them too."

"The lousy little piece!" said Chin-lien. "She leaves her own mirrors hidden away, unused, while picking up my mirrors to look at herself all the time. No wonder they've gotten so tarnished."

All eight mirrors, large and small, were turned over to the old mirror polisher, who was told to polish away. Thereupon, he fastened them to his workbench, applied mercury to their surfaces, and, in less time than it takes to eat a meal, polished them until they:

Shone brightly enough to dazzle the eyes.⁴⁶

When Chin-lien picked one up and examined her flowery countenance, it was like gazing into:

A stretch of limpid autumn water.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

When the lotus blossom and the caltrop-patterned mirror confront each other,
The breeze blows, the countenance is disturbed, and the image becomes blurred.
Exposed to the limpid autumn water of her gaze, the lotus blossom reveals itself,
Resembling the appearance of the Goddess Ch'ang-o in the Palace of the Moon.
With turquoise sleeves she wipes away the dust, as the frosty tarnish recedes,
When she breathes upon it with her ruby lips, the azure clouds thicken.

If, in their flight, the powdered butterflies come to impinge upon it,
One will believe that the blossom's fragrance resides in the picture.

When the old mirror polisher, in no time at all, finished polishing the mirrors, he turned them over to the women to look over, and they, in turn, entrusted them to Lai-an to take back inside and put away. Meng Yü-lou told P'ing-an to ask manager Fu Ming, who was tending counter in the shop, for fifty candareens to give to the mirror polisher. That oldster took the money in one hand but remained standing where he was, without leaving.



P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou Patronize a Mirror Polisher

Meng Yü-lou told P'ing-an to ask the old man, "Why aren't you going? No doubt you think the money is insufficient."

Before they knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow from his eyes, as he started to weep.

"My mistress wants to know why you are so distressed," said P'ing-an.

"There is no reason to deceive you, Brother," said the old man. "I have led a futile existence for sixty years. Early on, I was left with a son by my first wife, who is now twenty-one years old and is not yet married. All he does is scrounge around like a dog looking for garbage, rather than trying to make a living. I have to go out every day and labor for the money with which to support him, while he, on the other hand:

Is not the sort to abide by his lot,
and is constantly gambling with the knockabouts on the street. The other day, he got himself into trouble and was trussed up with his companions and taken before the commandant's yamen, where he was arraigned for petty larceny, and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo. When he came home, he took all of his stepmother's skirts and jackets and pawned them, which upset his stepmother

so much that she came down with convulsions and was confined to her bed for half a month. When I said a few words of criticism to him, he simply took off and stopped coming home, so that I now spend every day looking for him, but so far without success. I'm tempted to vent my spleen by giving up on trying to find him at all, but I'm already an old man, and he is my only son, so that, in the future, I would have no one to support me in my old age. But if he were at home, and I saw that he was not turning out to be a decent human being, that would only upset me further. The way things are, he's simply my karmic encumbrance, and all I can do about it is to:

Suffer injustice and harbor resentment,
with no place to lodge a complaint. That's why:

The tears flow from my wounded heart."⁴⁷

Meng Yü-lou said to P'ing-an, "You ask him, 'How old is your second wife this year?'"

"This year she has led a futile existence for fifty-four years," said the old man. "She has neither a son nor daughter of her own, and, now that she has just recovered somewhat from her convulsions, I lack the means to properly nurture her. She has her heart set on a chunk of cured pork, and I have spent the last two or three days scouring through ten or more streets and alleys but have been unable to find any. It's really enough to make one sigh in despair."

"That's no problem," said Meng Yü-lou with a smile. "I've got a chunk of cured pork in a drawer in my quarters."

She then said to Lai-an, "You go speak to Lan-hsiang about it. There are also two leftover scones. Get her to give them to you as well."

Chin-lien then called to the old man, asking him, "Does your old lady eat millet gruel, or not?"

"Why wouldn't she eat it?" said the old man. "That would be just the thing for her."

Chin-lien then called over Lai-an and said, "Tell Ch'un-mei to measure out two pints of that new millet that my mother brought the other day, and also bring out two pickled cucumbers, to give to his old lady to eat."

Lai-an had not been gone for long when he brought out half a leg of cured pork, two scones, two pints of millet, and two pickled cucumbers and called out, "Come over here, old man. You're in luck. If your old lady isn't craving these things because of illness, no doubt she's recuperating from childbirth and feels the need for a 'heart stabilizing potion.'"⁴⁸

The old man promptly received these things with both hands, stowed them in his load, bowed to Meng Yü-lou and Chin-lien, and then, shouldering his burden and shaking his clapper, proceeded nonchalantly on his way.

"You two ladies," remarked P'ing-an, "ought not to have given him all those things. The old oily mouth has contrived to cheat you out of them. His old lady is a go-between, whom I happened to notice walking by on this very street just yesterday. Since when is she convalescing at home?"

"You lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "Why didn't you tell us any earlier?"

"Leave it alone," said P'ing-an. "Let him have his piece of luck. It was just a coincidence that you two ladies had come out, called him to a halt, and patronized him with all those things."

Truly:

Having nothing better to do, they came out and idled at the gateway,
Just as the old codger happened to come by shaking his clapper.
Not only can even the most trivial things be of help to people,
But if you lack the affinity, a drop of water will prove hard to get.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 59

HSI-MEN CH'ING DASHES "SNOW LION" TO DEATH;

LI P'ING-ERH CRIES OUT IN PAIN FOR KUAN-KO

As the sun sets, the rivers flow, returning
 ever from west to east;
So long as the glory of spring is not over,
 the willows will endure.
In the temple of the Goddess of Witch's Mountain,¹
 they bend to hold the rain;
Before the gate of Sung Yü's residence,
 they flutter in the wind.
There is no comparing the color of elm pods
 to their blue-green hues;
One is profoundly moved by the way they set off
 the red of the apricot blossoms.
On the Pa River in Han-nan there are a thousand
 or ten thousand willow trees;²
How many travelers have plucked their branches
 as they said their farewells?³

THE STORY GOES that Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were still standing at the front gate after sending the mirror polisher on his way, when they suddenly saw a man coming toward them from the east, wearing a large hat and eye shades, and riding a mule. He rode at a fast clip right up to the gateway and dismounted, which sent the two women scurrying inside. When he took off his eye shades, it turned out to be Han Tao-kuo reporting back home.

"Have the cartloads of merchandise arrived, or not?" P'ing-an hastily inquired.

"They're already inside the city," replied Han Tao-kuo. "I've come to ask Father where to unload them."

"Father isn't at home," said P'ing-an. "He's attending a party at the residence of His Honor Chou Hsiu. Space has already been prepared for the merchandise to be unloaded on the second floor of the building across the street. Please go ahead inside."

Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi came out and accompanied Han Tao-kuo to the rear compound, where he reported to Yüeh-niang and then came back outside to the reception hall, brushed the dust of the journey off his clothes, and asked Wang Ching to take his baggage and wallet home for him. Yüeh-niang meanwhile sent something out for him to eat.

It was not long before the cartloads of merchandise arrived. Ch'en Ching-chi took the keys and opened the door to the building across the street, whereupon the carriers who had been hired to unload the carts took their tallies and carried the merchandise, one box at a time, to unload on the second floor of the building. There were ten large cartloads of silk goods, as well as some wine and rice for the use of the family, so the unloading process lasted right up till lamplighting time. Ts'ui Pen also assisted by supervising the completion of the unloading, checking to see that the numbers tallied, locking the door, sealing it with a strip of paper, paying off the carriers, and seeing them off the premises.

While this was going on, Tai-an had gone to Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence to report the news to Hsi-men Ch'ing. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the goods were being unloaded at home, he drank several more cups of wine before leaving and arrived home somewhat after lamplighting time. Han Tao-kuo was sitting in the reception hall waiting for him and gave him a complete recital of the events of the trip, from beginning to end, both going and coming.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "When the letter I sent to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh was delivered, did he respond favorably to my request, or not?"

"Thanks entirely to your letter to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh," replied Han Tao-kuo, "we saved a good deal in the way of customs duties. By treating two crates as one, I got away with reporting no more than two-thirds of the merchandise, which I also passed off as consisting merely of tea leaves and mirabilite for the making of incense. As a result, when it came time to compute the charges, for all ten large cartloads of goods we were only assessed thirty taels and five mace of silver in the way of customs duties. And when His Honor accepted the affidavit, he did not send any customs officers to inspect the merchandise but merely waved the cartloads of goods on their way."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was utterly delighted and said, "In the future we must purchase a substantial gift to thank His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh for his pains."

Thereupon, he ordered Ch'en Ching-chi to keep company with Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pen and also had some food sent out from the rear compound, so that they could have a drink together before breaking up and going home.

When Wang Liu-erh heard that Han Tao-kuo had returned, and that Wang Ching had brought his baggage and wallet home for him, she promptly took charge of the luggage and asked, "So your brother-in-law is back, is he?"

"Brother-in-law is supervising the unloading of the goods," said Wang Ching, "and is waiting to see Father before coming home."

The woman told her maidservants Ch'un-hsiang and Chin-erh to prepare some good tea and good food for the occasion. That night, when Han Tao-kuo finally returned home, he paid his respects before the family shrine, took off his traveling clothes, and washed his face, before husband and wife exchanged accounts of the events that had transpired during their separation. Han Tao-kuo told his wife

how pleased he was with the way his business had gone, and his wife observed how heavy and ponderous the silver in his wallet felt.

When she asked him about it, he said, "I also picked up some two or three hundred taels worth of goods, including wine and rice, for myself. I've unloaded it in the shop across the street, and we can sell it off for silver at our leisure."

His wife was utterly delighted by this and went on to say, "I've also heard Wang Ching report that His Honor has found someone named Kan Jun to act as sales manager, and that we will divide a share of the profits with him and Ts'ui Pen, which is good news. I hear that the shop is slated to open for business next month."

"He may have engaged someone to act as sales manager here," said Han Tao-kuo, "but someone will still be needed down south to set up an office and take charge of purchasing at that end. I think His Honor is almost certain to appoint me to that post."

"You've got a good eye for evaluating merchandise," said his wife. "It's always been true that:

The abler you are, the more is demanded of you.⁴

Look you, if you weren't good at this business, would His Honor entrust it to you? As the saying goes:

Unless you are prepared to exert yourself to the utmost;

You will never make any money off the men of this world.⁵

It will probably entail your being away from home for three years. But if you're reluctant to go, I'll speak to His Honor and have him send Kan Jun and Laipao to take care of the outside business, and let you stay at home as the sales manager. That ought to do it."

"I'm already habituated to being away from home," said Han Tao-kuo. "Let's leave it at that."

"There you are," said his wife. "As far as you're concerned:

When the physiognomist has lost his touch,

It's all one whether he stays home or not."

When they had finished speaking, she served some wine, and the two of them, husband and wife, drank several cups to celebrate their reunion, after which, they cleared up the utensils and went to bed. That night, they:

Indulged in pleasure without restraint,

but there is no need to describe this in detail.

The next day was the first day of the eighth month. Han Tao-kuo arrived early, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had him join Ts'ui Pen and Kan Jun in supervising the provision of the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone for the construction of the underground storehouse. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having already overseen the unloading of the merchandise, and having nothing to occupy him at home, suddenly bethought himself that he would like to pay a visit to the house of Cheng Ai-yüeh. With this end in view, he surreptitiously sent Tai-an to deliver three taels of silver and a set of silk clothing to her. When the madam of the Cheng family bordello heard that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing was coming to engage the services of one of her girls, she felt:

Just as though he had fallen from Heaven.

Making haste to take charge of the presents, she blurted out to Tai-an, "Express my utmost gratitude to His Honor, and tell him that both of my girls will await him here, and urge him to drop in as soon as possible."

Tai-an went back home and reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing in his studio. Early that afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an to prepare a wickerwork sedan chair for him. He then donned a Tung-p'o hat on his head, a long gown of jet moiré with a muted mandarin square woven inconspicuously into the fabric, and white-soled black boots.

He first went to the house across the street and watched the progress on the construction of the underground storehouse for a while, after which he stood up, took his seat in the wickerwork sedan chair, and let down the speckled bamboo blinds. He arranged for Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to accompany him, left Wang Ching at home, taking only Ch'un-hung to carry his dispatch case, and headed straight for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. Truly:

The Weaving Maid, positioned at her loom, adjusts the fragrant silk;
Injecting his hand, he manages to tear off a bolt of the snowy fabric.
Not satisfied to seek the ford leading to the Peach Blossom Spring;
He prefers to come to the Moon Grotto for a liaison with Ch'ang-o.⁶

To resume our story, Cheng Ai-hsiang, sporting on her head a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree with plum-blossom-shaped ornaments, fastened in place all round with gold filigree pins; made up in such a way as to enhance her:

Powdered face and glossy hair,

Flowery visage and moon-like features;⁷

wearing a blouse of pale lavender silk above, and a beige skirt below; upon seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing arrive, stood just inside the open upper half of the doorway⁸ with a broad smile on her face, ushered him inside to the parlor, and saluted him with a bow.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down and instructed the page boy Ch'in-t'ung, "Take the sedan chair home with you now, and come back to get me with a horse this evening."

Ch'in-t'ung accordingly went home with the sedan chair. But no more of this. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept only Tai-an and Ch'un-hung to wait upon him.

After some time, the madam came out to pay her respects and said, "The other day, at your place, my girl put you to a lot of trouble. No doubt Your Honor was bored silly at home and has simply come here in search of diversion. What need was there for you to worry about sending any gifts? But, many thanks for the clothing you have provided for my girl."

"When I engaged her services for that day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't she come? Is it that you only recognize the household of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second?"

"We are still upset," explained the madam, "that Tung Chiao-erh and Li Kuei-chieh failed to inform us that it was Your Honor's birthday that their services were being engaged for. They each had presents for the occasion, while only my girl had not prepared anything. If I had known it was your birthday, I certainly would never have agreed to let her go perform at Wang the Second's place but would have had her go to Your Honor's residence first, despite the fact that the engagement for her to sing at Your Honor's place was

made later. My girl was just getting herself ready to start out when someone from Wang the Second's household showed up and proposed to make off with her costume bag. Right after that, Your Honor sent someone here, along with her elder brother Cheng Feng, who said, 'If you don't go to his place, His Honor will be moved to anger.' This threw me into such a fluster that I hustled my girl out the back door and into her sedan chair behind the back of the servant from the Wang household."

"The other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while I was attending a party at the residence of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, I engaged her services. If she had failed to show up for the occasion, needless to say, I would have been annoyed. How is it that on that day she conducted herself:

Without saying anything or uttering so much as a word,

Conveying the clear impression that she was not happy?⁹

Really, how do you account for it?"

"The little baggage!" responded the madam. "Ever since she was deflowered, she has been reluctant to go out and perform in public. When she found herself in Your Honor's residence and saw all the people there, who knows how frightened she may have been? Ever since she was a child, she has been sparing of words and has been spoiled enough to get away with it. Look how late in the day it is already, and she has just gotten up. I pressed her several times, saying, 'His Honor is coming today, you ought to get up and get yourself ready,' but she paid me no heed and continued to lie in bed to this hour."

Before long, a maidservant brought in some tea, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came forward to serve it.

When they had finished the tea, the madam said, "Will Your Honor please come into the interior and have a seat."

It so happens that Cheng Ai-hsiang's establishment consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. Just inside the hanging screen, there was a fence of woven bamboo splints, behind which there was an eighteen-foot-wide courtyard, with four anterooms ranged along either side. The main suite at the far end of the courtyard consisted of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor, and two less well-lighted inner rooms, and was the dwelling place of Cheng Ai-yüeh. The quarters in which her elder sister Cheng Aihsiang lived were located further back, in the fourth courtyard.

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that:

The screens and lattices were redolent of incense.

As he entered the parlor, he saw that there was a hanging scroll depicting Kuan-yin of the Ocean Tides in the place of honor on the facing wall, while on the walls to either side there were hung four scrolls depicting beautiful women in the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, inscribed with the poetic lines:

Concerned for the flowers, one rises early in spring.
Enamored of the moon, one goes to sleep late at night.
Scooping up water, one finds the moon in one's hands.
Fondling the flowers, fragrance infuses one's clothes.¹⁰

Above everything was suspended a couplet that read:

Rolling up the blind, one invites the moon to look in;

Tuning the cithara, one waits for the clouds to enter.

At the head of the room there were arrayed four Tung-p'o chairs,¹¹ and on either side were placed two wide benches finished with translucent varnish of the kind used in the making of zithers.¹² Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down and saw that there was a plaque over the room inscribed with three characters in formal script designating it as "The Moon-loving Studio."

After he had waited for what seemed like half a day, he suddenly became aware of the rustle of the portiere as Cheng Ai-yüeh came in. She was not wearing a fret but had done up her hair in a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style. Her raven locks were combed in such a way as to set off their blackness and glossiness. Two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple. Her cloudy locks were piled up in disarray, suggesting a range of effects from light mist to dense fog, and were further enhanced with judiciously placed gold-flecked trinkets, and plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, fastened in place all round with gold filigree pins neatly stuck into the hair behind her temples.

A phoenix hairpin was half askew.

Her ears were adorned with pendant amethyst earrings. Above, she wore a blouse, fit for an immortal, of pale lavender silk that opened down the middle. Below, she wore a skirt of purple chiffon, decorated with turquoise figures:

Beneath which there peeked out a pair of tiny shoes,

The points of which bore the beaks of red phoenixes.

On her breast there was suspended a necklace of sculpted jade stones that tinkled when she moved. On her face she wore three turquoise beauty patches that served to enhance the lotus blossom of her painted face. All around her:

There floated a fragrant aura;¹³

serving to set off:

Her willowlike slender waist.¹⁴

Truly:

If she is not the image of a portrait of Kuan-yin by Wu Tao-tzu;¹⁵

She must be the subject of a painting of a beauty by Mao Yen-shou.¹⁶

After having faced in his direction and:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

made a bow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she concealed her powdered face behind a gold-flecked fan and sat down next to him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Focused his eyes on her with a fixed stare,

and felt that she appeared even more stunning than when he had seen her for the first time. Involuntarily:

His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,

to such an extent that:

He was unable to control himself.

Before long, a maidservant brought in another serving of tea, at which the painted face:

Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,

Slightly exposed her slender fingers,

brought a cup of tea over to him, brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup, and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing with both hands. After this, she and Cheng Ai-hsiang each took a cup for themselves and kept him company as they drank it together. When the tea was finished, and the cups and raised saucers had been taken away, they suggested that he loosen his outer garments and take a seat in the inner room.

Hsi-men Ch'ing called Tai-an to come forward, help him off with his black silk outer garment, and put it on a chair for him; after which he entered into the painted face's bedroom. Behold:

Because the green windows were curtained with white gauze,

The pale moonlight barely invaded them;

Because the brocade hangings were exposed to the night light,

They glowed with an auspicious luster.¹⁷

Inside the room there was a black lacquer bedstead with incised gold ornamentation:

The curtains of which were of embroidered brocade;

The coverlet of which concealed a patterned quilt.

To one side there was a low table of carved red lacquer, and a small Po-shan incense burner,¹⁸

From which the aroma of aloeswood and sandalwood assailed the nostrils.¹⁹

On the wall there hung a brocade bag that held a "Tinkling Spring" zither;²⁰

In a silver vase there were displayed blossoms of "Purple Shoots" camellia.²¹

In front of the bed there stood two low chairs with embroidered cushions;

Beside which there hung a pair of brocaded curtains of mermaid silk.

Upon a mica screen, was depicted a landscape in varying shades of ink;

On a shelf of the nuptial couch, was a pile of ancient and modern books.²²

When Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down, he felt that:

An exotic aroma invaded his person;²³

As refined and elegant as could be.²⁴

It was just what is conventionally described as:

A grotto palace of spirits and immortals,²⁵

A destination inaccessible to human feet.²⁶

As they engaged each other in conversation,

While laughing and joking with each other,

who should they see but a maidservant, who came in and set up a small table, on which she laid out four small turquoise saucers containing exquisitely prepared julienned vegetables, shredded celery, minced and marinated sturgeon, phoenix entrails and puree. After this, she brought out two servings of:

Perfectly round,

Like the bright moon,

Thin as paper,

White as snow,

Fragrant, sweet, and delectable,

Butterfat and honey,

Sesame, pepper, and salt flavored,

Thin lotus-blossom pancakes.

Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded with their own hands to make selections of the various shredded meats and vegetables, wrap them in the pancakes into spring rolls, place them in small gilded saucers, and present them to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. To one side, cups of gold-inlaid cloisonné were filled with strong cinnamon and osmanthus flavored tea.

Before long, after the two sisters had joined him in consuming the spring rolls, and the utensils had been put away, and the table wiped off, a madder red strip of felt was placed over a bed table, a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes was extracted from a sandalwood box decorated with carved lacquer, and the two of them proceeded to play dominoes with Hsi-men Ch'ing. In due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing melded the combinations known as "Heaven and Earth Separated"²⁷ and "Ten Pricks with a Sword,"²⁸ Cheng Ai-hsiang melded the combinations known as "Earth"²⁹ and "Flowers Blossom and Butterflies Fill the Branches,"³⁰ and Cheng Ai-yüeh melded the combinations known as "Man"³¹ and "Mounts a Ladder to Gaze at the Moon."³²

After a while, they put the dominoes away, and wine was served. Behold:

Platters are piled with exotic fruits,

The wine overflows with golden ripples.

The table was spread with goose, duck, chicken feet, fried dragon, and roasted phoenix.

The scarce fruits were:

Seldom seen in this world;³³

The rare repast was:

Unmatched in Heaven itself.³⁴

Truly:

Their dancing waylays the bright moon into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in;
 Their singing diverts the moving clouds into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u.³⁵
 In mandarin duck goblets,
 And turquoise wine cups,
 They drink the jade hued liquids,
 And carnelian nectars of the gods.

The two sisters plied him with wine and then positioned themselves to one side, where Cheng Ai-hsiang, with:

 The bridges on her psaltery ranged like wild geese,
 Gently strummed the silken strings.

Thereupon, with Cheng Ai-hsiang playing the psaltery, and Cheng Ai-yüeh playing the *p'i-p'a*, they sang the song suite, beginning with the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent," that opens with the words:

 Insistently he comes into my mind.³⁶

Truly:

 When words emerge from the mouth of a beauty,³⁷

 They have a timbre that causes rocks to split and lingers around the rafters.

When they had finished singing, another twelve saucers of assorted nuts and other delicacies were served, and the two sisters:

 Moving their seats closer together,³⁸

got out a dicebox with twenty dice and fell to playing "Competing for the Red"³⁹ and guess-fingers with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After they had been drinking for some time, Cheng Ai-hsiang, alleging that she had to go to the bathroom, disappeared, leaving Cheng Ai-yüeh alone to continue drinking with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

To begin with, Hsi-men Ch'ing reached into his sleeve and pulled out a white satin handkerchief with a double-patterned border, to one end of which was attached a chatelaine with three pendant charms, including a toothpick, and, to the other end, a cylindrical gold pillbox.

Cheng Ai-yüeh assumed that it contained breath-sweetening lozenges and wanted to open it, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It doesn't contain breath-sweetening lozenges, but a restorative medication that I use every day. My breath-sweetening lozenges are not kept there but are wrapped in a paper packet."

Thereupon, he reached into his sleeve, pulled out a packet of cinnamon-flavored breath-sweetening lozenges, and handed it to her.

Cheng Ai-yüeh, who was still unsatisfied, stuck out her hand to grope inside his other sleeve and discovered a purple crepe handkerchief, with a low-grade gold toothpick attached to it, which she held in her hand to admire, saying, "I've noticed that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh both have handkerchiefs like this. So it was you they got them from."

"They were part of my boatload of goods that just arrived from Yang-chou," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If they didn't get them from me, who else could they have gotten them from? If you like it, you can have it, and tomorrow I'll send another like it to your sister."

When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing swallowed a dose of the medication in his cylindrical pillbox, washed it down with a cupful of wine, and took the painted face onto his lap. The two of them then passed the same cup back and forth between them as they drank and sucked each other's tongues.

There was no length to which they would not go.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then stuck out his hand and proceeded to fondle her fragrant breasts, which were:

 Tight and squeezey,

and as smooth as sesame seed glutinous rice dumplings. Opening up her blouse to take a look at them, he saw that they were:

 Pale and fragrant,

and as lustrous as jade. After he had played with them for some time, his:

 Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused,

and the organ that lay between his loins abruptly sprang to life. Loosening his pant strings, he suggested that she grasp it with her slender fingers.

When the painted face saw how long and thick it was, she was so perturbed she stuck her tongue out in fear and, putting her arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck, said, "My darling, since this is our first tryst, please bear with me, and only insert it halfway. If you stick it all in, it will be the death of me. That must have been an aphrodisiac you took to make it as big as this. Otherwise, how on earth could you ever have produced anything so monstrous, deep red, and purple? It's really enough to give one the creeps."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and said, "My child, get down on your knees and suck it for me."

"What's the hurry?" said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "After all:

 There are as many days ahead of us as there are leaves on the trees.

This is our first tryst today.

 We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.⁴⁰

If you come again, I'll suck it for you."

When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing sought to take his pleasure with her.

"Do you not want any more wine?" asked Cheng Ai-yüeh.

"I've had enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's go to bed."

Cheng Ai-yüeh then called for a maidservant to move the table at which they had been drinking out of the way and help Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his boots, while she went inside to relieve herself and wash her private parts. When Hsi-men Ch'ing's boots had been removed, he rewarded the maidservant with a piece of silver, after which, he got into bed while the maidservant lit some incense and put it in the burner.

After a while, the woman came back into the room and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Would you like some tea, or not?"

To which Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "I don't want any."

She then closed the door to the room, let down the satin chiffon bed curtains, put a handkerchief under the bedding, took off her clothes, and got into bed. The two of them then proceeded to cavort like:

Mandarin ducks upon the pillow,
Water birds under the coverlet.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that when the painted face took off her clothes, her skin was delicate and fine, and her vagina was clean and devoid of pubic hair, as soft and delectable as a white steamed bun. When he embraced her waist, it was hardly a handful. In truth, she was just like:

Soft jade and warm incense;⁴¹
Not to be bought for a thousand pieces of gold.⁴²



Hsi-men Ch'ing Exposes His Organ and Startles Cheng Ai-yüeh

Thereupon, he wrapped her two fresh, white, tender legs, like bars of silver, around his waist, fastened the clasp on his organ, and plunged it into the heart of the flower. His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before the knob of his glans was submerged. Cheng Ai-yüeh knitted her brows together and gripped the pillow with both hands, finding her distress hard to bear.

Her starry eyes grew dim and she pled with him, "Pray spare your Cheng Ai-yüeh today."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then hoisted her two golden lotuses over his shoulders and devoted himself to retracting and thrusting:

Unable to contain his pleasure.⁴³

Truly, it is a case of:

When spring touches the apricot and peach trees, their new buds burst into red flower;
When the breeze plays among the willow fronds, they are made to bend their green waists.⁴⁴
There is a poem about the flowering crab apple that testifies to this:

Bearing raindrops, shrouded in mist, this sapling is remarkable;
Beguiling in stance, it appears to be unable to support itself.
Its red reminds one of the matchless blooms of the West Park;⁴⁵
In spring it wins first place among the flowers of Ho-yang.⁴⁶
Its gaudy coloring inspires comparison with that of Master Cheng;⁴⁷
The skill demonstrated belies analogy with the work of Wang Wei.⁴⁸
Replete with feeling, it deliberately keeps its heart in check;
Holding onto the east wind to prevent it from returning home.⁴⁹

On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing dallied with Cheng Ai-yüeh until the third watch before going home.

The next day, Wu Yüeh-niang, after seeing him off to the yamen, remained seated in the master suite along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li Chiao-erh. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in to fetch a gift box for bolts of fabric and the like, in which to deliver the birthday presents for Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, consisting of four varieties of fresh delicacies, a jug of wine, and a bolt of brocade.

Yüeh-niang took advantage of the occasion to ask Tai-an, "Whose place was it that your father took a sedan chair to go drinking at yesterday and remained drinking so late before coming home? I imagine he must have gone to Han Tao-kuo's house to look in on that wife of his. You lousy jailbird! It seems that you keep me in the dark all the time, while abetting him in these tricks behind my back."

"That's not the case," said Tai-an. "After all, her husband has come home. How could Father do anything like that?"

"If he didn't go there," said Yüeh-niang, "where did he go?"

Tai-an did not reply but merely smiled, picked up the gift box, and went off to deliver the presents.

"Mother," said Chin-lien, "there's no point in your asking that lousy jailbird anything. He'll never tell you the truth. But I've heard that that southern page boy also accompanied Father on his expedition yesterday. The thing to do is to call in that southern page boy and ask him about it."

She then proceeded to summon Ch'un-hung into their presence.

"When you accompanied your father's sedan chair yesterday," said Chin-lien, "whose place did he go drinking at? If you tell the truth, we'll leave it at that. But if you fail to tell the truth, the First Lady will see that you get a beating on the spot."

Ch'un-hung knelt down and said, "Mother, don't beat me. I'll tell you all about it, that's all. Your servant, along with Tai-an and Brother Ch'in-t'ung, the three of us, accompanied Father in going through a great gateway, after which we traversed several streets and alleys and came to a house with a door, inlaid with a sawtooth pattern, only the lower half of which was closed, inside which there stood a lady who was all made up in a flashy fashion."

When Chin-lien heard this, she laughed, saying, "The jailbird! He doesn't even recognize the horizontal half-doors of the licensed quarter, and he refers to a painted face as a lady."

"And what did that lady look like?" Chin-lien went on to ask. "Did you recognize her or not?"

"I didn't recognize her," said Ch'un-hung. "She looked like a veritable Bodhisattva and was wearing a fret on her head just like the ones you ladies wear. When we went inside, an old crone with white hair came out and saluted Father with a bow, after which we were invited into the interior, which was protected by a fence of woven bamboo splints. Once inside, another young lady appeared, who was not wearing a fret, but had a silver salver face, shaped like a melon-seed, and whose lips were daubed with red. She kept Father company while he drank."

"And where were you allowed to sit all this time?" asked Chin-lien.

"Tai-an, Brother Ch'in-t'ung, and I," replied Ch'un-hung, "were entertained in the room of the old crone, who provided us with wine and pork dumplings, and kept us company as we consumed them."

This caused Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou to laugh without restraint.

They then went on to ask, "Did you recognize this lady, or not?"

"It seemed to me that she has performed at our place," replied Ch'un-hung.

"Then it must have been Li Kuei-chieh," laughed Meng Yü-lou.

"So it seems that's where he snuck off to," said Yüeh-niang.

"Our establishment doesn't have horizontal half-doors," said Li Kuei-chieh. "And it doesn't have a fence woven of bamboo splints either."

"I fear you may not know about it," said Chin-lien. "Perhaps your place has recently put in horizontal half-doors."

After they had interrogated Ch'un-hung for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen and then set out for the residence of Hsia Yen-ling to celebrate his birthday.

To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien kept a white long-haired leonine cat in her quarters, whose entire body was pure white, except for a streak of tortoiseshell-patterned black fur on its forehead. It was named "Coal in the Snow"⁵⁰ and was also called "Snow Lion," and it could pick up handkerchiefs and fans in its mouth. When Hsi-men Ch'ing was not in her quarters, the woman would go to sleep with the cat cuddled in her arms underneath the quilt, and it never soiled her garments with urine or feces. When the woman ate, it would often perch on her shoulder and allow her to feed it.

When summoned, it would come;

When dismissed, it would go.⁵¹

The woman commonly referred to it as "Snow Bandit." Its daily diet consisted, not of calves' liver or dried fish, but of half a pound of raw meat, as a result of which, it was as fat and sturdy as could be, and its fur was so thick you could hide an egg in it. She was extremely fond of it and petted it on her lap all day long, but not with benevolent intent. Knowing that Li P'ing-erh's child, Kuan-ko, had previously shown a fondness for cats, she would frequently, when no one else was around, wrap the meat in a piece of red silk and

encourage the cat to pounce on it, tear it open, and eat it.

This was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

Kuan-ko had not been feeling very well. For some days he had been taking the medications prescribed by Dame Liu, and he felt a little better. Li P'ingerh had dressed him in a shirt of red chiffon and put him on a little sleeping mat on the k'ang in the outer room to play. Ying-ch'un was looking after him, while the wet nurse was holding a bowl in her hand and eating to one side. Unexpectedly, this "Snow Lion" from Chin-lien's quarters, which had been perched on the bedrail, upon seeing Kuan-ko lying on the k'ang dressed in a red shirt and fidgeting as he played, was reminded of the way in which its meat was customarily prepared for it, and suddenly pounced down onto Kuan-ko's body and tore at him with its claws.

All that could be heard was:

The sound of a gurgling cry,

as Kuan-ko choked up and then fell silent, while his hands and feet went into convulsions. This threw the wet nurse into such consternation that she dropped her rice bowl, picked Kuan-ko up and cuddled him on her lap, while devoting herself to prophylactic spitting, in the endeavor to exorcise the fright. Meanwhile the cat continued to claw at him until Ying-ch'un drove it out of the room. Ju-i expected that the child would merely undergo a fit of convulsions, and then be all right, but who could have anticipated that they went on continuously, one fit being succeeded by another.

Li P'ing-erh was back in the rear compound at the time, so Ju-i sent Yingch'un there to fetch her, saying, "Little brother is unwell and is suffering from convulsions. Mother had better come quickly."

Nothing might have happened if Li P'ing-erh had not heard this, but having heard it, truly:

The shock affected all six of her vital organs, including liver and lungs;

The fright damaged the three bristles and seven apertures of her heart.⁵²

Yüeh-niang also was thrown into such consternation that:

Covering two steps with every one,

she too rushed straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. What they found when they got there was that the convulsions had caused the child's eyeballs to roll straight up so that their black pupils were completely invisible, white foam was dribbling from his mouth, he was making inarticulate sounds like the chirping of a young chick, and his hands and feet were moving spasmodically. Li P'ing-erh no sooner saw this than she felt as though her heart were being lacerated with a knife.

Hastily picking him up and holding him in her arms, she brushed her cheek against his mouth and wept loudly, saying, "My little child, you were doing fine when I went out. Why should you have gone into convulsions?"

Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse then told her all about how he had been frightened by the cat from the Fifth Lady's quarters.

Li P'ing-erh wept all the more, saying, "My little child, you have simply failed to live up to the expectations of your father and mother. And today, there's no gainsaying the fact that there's no other road for you to take."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said not a word, but sent for Chin-lien and interrogated her, saying, "They say that it was the cat from your quarters that frightened the child."

"Who says so?" demanded Chin-lien.

Yüeh-niang indicated that it was the wet nurse and Ying-ch'un who had said so.

"Just look at the goggle-eyed way the old woman is staring at me," said Chin-lien. "My cat is happily asleep in my room, isn't it. You're talking nonsense. How could it have frightened the child? You'd better not try to blame it on me:

Snitching only those melons whose stems are soft.⁵³

It seems that only the inhabitants of my quarters are fit to be taken advantage of."

"What was her cat doing in this room?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"It constantly comes over here to play," said Ying-ch'un.

Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "It's a good thing you said that. If it's constantly over here, why hadn't it scratched him before, instead of picking on this particular day to start scratching him? You slavey! You're just following in her footsteps, what with your:

Knitted brows and staring eyes,

and your:

Ridiculous blatherskite.

Take it easy, will you! There's no call for you to:

Pull your bow all the way taut,⁵⁴

like that. I guess we're just doomed to be out of favor."

Whereupon, she took herself off to her quarters in a huff.

Gentle reader take note: As the saying goes:

Flowering branches, beneath their leaves, conceal their thorns;

How can one know for sure the human heart contains no poison?⁵⁵

This P'an Chin-lien, having been aware for some time that ever since Li P'ingerh had borne Kuan-ko, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been:

Obedient to her every whim,

that:

Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold,

and that every day she was:

Contending in beauty and competing for favor.⁵⁶

had developed feelings of jealousy and anger in her heart over this favoritism. On this day, therefore, she had deliberately set this secret plot in motion, training her cat for the purpose, out of a desire to frighten her rival's child to death, and thereby diminish Li P'ing-erh's

favor, and cause Hsi-men Ch'ing to resume his intimacy with her. It was just like the way in which, in ancient times, T'u-an Ku trained his dog, Shen-ao, with the intent to murder the grand councilor, Chao Tun.⁵⁷ Truly:

Azure Heaven, in its profundity,⁵⁸ cannot be deceived;⁵⁹
Before intentions are even formed it is aware of them.⁶⁰
Say not that timely retribution seems not to occur;
From ancient times until today⁶¹ who has been spared?⁶²

When Yüeh-niang and the rest of them saw that the child was continuing to suffer from convulsions, on the one hand, they decocted some ginger extract and poured it into his mouth, while, on the other hand, they sent Laian off to summon Dame Liu as quickly as possible.

Before long, Dame Liu showed up, examined his pulse, and then, stamping her feet in frustration, said, "This time the fright he has been subjected to is serious. It has resulted in a case of tetany, which is difficult to cure."

She urgently directed them to prepare a decoction of bog rush, field mint, and honeysuckle, after which she pulled out a bolus of gold foil and dissolved it in a cup of the decoction. The baby's jaws were tightly closed, but Yüeh-niang promptly extracted a gold pin from her hair and pried his mouth open with it in order to pour the decoction into his mouth.

"If this proves effective," said Dame Liu, "that will be that. But, if it does not, as I've already told you, Madame, we'll have to resort to moxabustion at several points before there will be any hope of recovery."

"Who would be willing to take responsibility for that?" said Yüeh-niang. "We'll have to wait until his father gets home, and consult with him about it. Otherwise, if we go ahead with the moxabustion on our own, he's likely to raise a hue and cry when he gets home."

"First Lady, his life is at stake," said Li P'ing-erh. "If we wait till he gets home, it may be too late. If his father should get abusive about it, I'm willing to take the heat."

"It's your child, after all" said Yüeh-niang. "Proceed with the moxabustion if you like. I won't presume to take a stand on the issue."

Thereupon, Dame Liu proceeded to apply moxabustion to the glabella between his eyebrows, the nape of his neck, the wrists of his two hands, and his precordium, five points in all, after which he was put down to sleep. The child, who was:

Both torpid and comatose,⁶³
slept right up until the time when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home that evening, without waking up.

When Dame Liu saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, she took the five mace of silver that Yüeh-niang paid her for her services and disappeared through the enclosed passageway in a puff of smoke.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived back in the master suite, Yüeh-niang told him how the child had fallen ill and suffered from convulsions. He immediately went out to the front compound to see for himself and observed that Li P'ing-erh's eyes were red with weeping.

"What caused the child to go into convulsions?" he asked.

Li P'ing-erh's eyes brimmed over with tears, but she did not have a word to say. When he asked the maidservant and the wet nurse, they did not dare to reply. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the spots on Kuan-ko's hands where the skin had been torn off, and the scars that the moxabustion had left on the other parts of his body, he became furious and strode back to the rear compound to question Yüeh-niang about it. Yüeh-niang felt unable to conceal the facts and told him how the cat from Chin-lien's quarters had frightened the child.

"Dame Liu had no sooner examined him," she explained, "than she said that it was an extreme case of tetany, that if we did not resort to acupuncture and moxabustion it was doubtful if he would recover, and that if we waited until you got home, it might be too late. His mother decided in favor of moxabustion, and it was applied to five points on the child's body, after which he was put down to sleep. It's been half a day now, and he hasn't yet waked up."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:

The spirits of his Three Corpses became agitated;
The breaths of his Five Viscera ascended to Heaven.⁶⁴
Anger flared up in his heart, and
Malice accrued in his gall.

Heading straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters:

Without permitting any further explanation,
he sought out the cat and, dangling it by one foot, strode out to the veranda, took aim at the stone stylobate, swung the cat up into the air, and dashed it against it. All that could be heard was:

A single resounding report,
at which:

The contents of its brain burst into ten thousand peach blossoms;⁶⁵
Its mouthful of teeth were reduced to scattered fragments of jade.⁶⁶

Truly:

No longer able in the world of light to capture rats or mice,
It reverts to the abode of the dead to become a fox fairy.⁶⁷

When P'an Chin-lien saw that he had taken her cat out and dashed it to death, she sat on her k'ang:

Without turning so much as a hair,
and waited until he had vacated her quarters, muttering to herself, as she cursed him, saying, "You lousy death-defying ruffian! If you had only dragged me out and killed me, it would have been more heroic of you. Did the cat really get in the way of your shit-eating business so much that you felt compelled to barge in here, like a madman, and dash it to death? When it comes before the authorities in the nether world, it's likely to demand your life in compensation. What are you so exercised about? You'll come to a bad end, you lousy fickle ruffian!"

Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and berated the wet nurse and Ying-ch'un, saying, "I instructed you to take special care of the child. How could you have allowed the cat to frighten it so, and even claw the skin off its hands? And how could you have had such confidence in that old whore, Dame Liu, as to allow her to subject him to such a course of moxabustion, for no good reason? If he recovers, that will be that; but if he doesn't, I'll have that old whore dragged off to the yamen and subjected to a finger-squeezing or two."

"Look you," expostulated Li P'ing-erh, "the child's life was at stake, and yet you carry on this way. After all, compassion is a prerequisite for medical practitioners. She was as concerned for his welfare as anyone."

From that time on, all Li P'ing-erh could do was to hope for the child's recovery. Unexpectedly, however, the effect of the moxabustion had been to internalize the disorder so that it became a case of chronic mild convulsions of the stomach and intestines, and the discharge of both urine and feces. The stools that he extruded were variegated in color, his eyes opened and closed irregularly, he remained torpid and comatose all day long, and he would not allow himself to be breast-fed.

Li P'ing-erh became panicked about the situation. Everywhere she could think of:

The gods were besought and diviners consulted,
but the results of these prognostications were all:

Ominous and inauspicious.⁶⁸

Yüeh-niang, behind Hsi-men Ch'ing's back, once again invited Dame Liu to come and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of Kuan-ko. She also invited a licensed pediatrician to come and examine him.

He recommended that they try a powdered nasal decongestant on him, saying, "If it causes him to sneeze when insufflated into his nostrils, he may recover; but if no mucus is dislodged, all you can do is keep vigil over him and hope that the good deeds you have done in secret will avail."

Thereupon, they insufflated the powder into his nostrils, but he remained:

Insensibly oblivious.⁶⁹

without so much as a sneeze. As a result, Li P'ing-erh kept vigil over him day and night, even more assiduously than before, while:

Weeping and sniffing unceasingly,
and even reducing her food and drink to a minimum.

As the fifteenth day of the eighth month gradually approached, Yüeh-niang, on account of Kuan-ko's indisposition, decided to abandon the celebration of her own birthday. Even those relatives who had sent presents to her were not invited for the occasion. The only people in the house to keep her company were Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the abbess of Kuan-yin Nunnery.

Meanwhile, Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang were engaged in a dispute over the division of the profits they had reaped on the money Li P'ing-erh had provided to the sutra printing shop and were hurling angry accusations at each other.

On the fourteenth, Pen the Fourth and Nun Hsüeh went to the shop to demand the promised delivery, and all fifteen hundred copies of the sutra were carried back to the house. Li P'ing-erh also donated a string of cash for the purchase of paper money, incense, and candles. Early on the morning of the fifteenth, Pen the Fourth accompanied Ch'en Ching-chi to the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak to present the incense and paper money and oversee the disposition of the sutras, all of which were duly distributed, and then came back to report to Li P'ing-erh.

The family of Ch'iao Hung sent Auntie K'ung over every day to see how Kuan-ko was doing and also recommended a pediatrician named Dr. Pao, who came to examine him and said, "This is a case in which the baleful star Tiao-k'o, or Condoler, has been offended. No cure is possible."

Li P'ing-erh gave him five mace of silver and sent him on his way. When she tried to pour the medication he had prescribed into Kuan-ko's mouth, he rejected it and spit it up. Keeping his eyes closed, he cried out in such a manner that the edges of his teeth chattered against each other. Li P'ing-erh:

Without taking the trouble to undress,⁷⁰

held him on her lap day and night, weeping the while, so that:

Her tears never dried.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also abstained from all social engagements, coming in to see the child every day as soon as he arrived home from the yamen.

At this time, one day in the final decade of the eighth month, Li P'ing-erh was lying on her bed, holding Kuan-ko in her arms, while a silver lamp burned on the table. The maidservants and the wet nurse were all fast asleep. Observing that:

The window was illuminated by moonlight,⁷¹

While the clepsydra dripped interminably,
and that her child was comatose, and:

Oblivious to human affairs,⁷²

she felt for some time as though:

Her sorrow-laden bowels were tied in a myriad knots,⁷³

While her fears of separation took a thousand forms.

Truly:

When one confronts happy events, one's spirits are exhilarated;⁷⁴

When melancholy invades one's bowels, one is prone to nod off.⁷⁵

Behold:

The silver river shines resplendent;⁷⁶

The jade clepsydra drips unendingly.⁷⁷

The bright moon penetrates the window, blazing with cold light;

The cool breeze infiltrates the door, blowing its night breath.

The cries of the wild geese resonate,
Disturbing the dreams of men of talent who sleep alone.
The chirring of crickets is desolate,
Embittering the feelings of beauties in solitary slumber.
The watch-marking drums on the watchtower,
Before a single watch is done with, sound a new one;
The laundry bats in an adjacent courtyard,
Before a thousand blows are finished, strike up another.
Before painted eaves, the ding-donging of the wind chimes,
Causes wellborn young ladies to break their hearts;
On silver lampstands, the glimmering of the lamplight,
Succeeds merely in illuminating the beauty's sighs.
Her sole concern is with the welfare of her child;
Who could foresee that sorrow comes often in a dream.⁷⁸

At this juncture, Li P'ing-erh was lying on her bed:

Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,⁷⁹

when she dreamed that Hua Tzu-hsü came in the front door, dressed entirely in white, and looking just as he did while still alive.

When he caught sight of Li P'ing-erh, he condemned her in a harsh voice, saying, "You lousy wanton whore! How could you have misappropriated my property and turned it over to Hsi-men Ch'ing? Right now I'm on my way to lodge a formal complaint against you."

Li P'ing-erh grasped the sleeve of his garment with one hand and pled with him, saying, "Good Brother, pray forgive me."

But Hua Tzu-hsü broke loose, causing her to:

Wake up with a jerk,⁸⁰

revealing it to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch.⁸¹

When she woke up, what she was grasping in her hand was the sleeve of Kuan-ko's garment.

After gasping several times, she said, "How strange! How strange!"

When she listened, she heard the watchman striking the third quarter of the third watch. Li P'ing-erh was so disturbed that:

Her whole body broke into a cold sweat,⁸²

and her hair stood on end.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her quarters the next day, she told him about her dream.

"Who knows where he has gone after his death," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This is just a case of your:

Remembering your former situation in a dream.

Just set your mind at rest, and pay no attention to it. There's no reason for you to be upset. Under the circumstances, I'll send a page boy with a sedan chair to fetch Wu Yin-erh, so she can keep you company at night. And I'll summon Old Mother Feng to come and wait on the two of you."

Tai-an, accordingly, went to the licensed quarter and brought Wu Yin-erh back with him. Even before the sun began to set in the west, Kuan-ko, whom the wet nurse was holding on her lap, began to breathe irregularly.

This threw the wet nurse into such consternation that she called to Li P'ing-erh, saying, "You'd better come and see. The black pupils of Little Brother's eyes have rolled out of sight, and in his mouth, he is:

Only breathing out, but

Not breathing in."⁸³

Li P'ing-erh came over, embraced the child in her arms, began to cry, and called out to the maidservant, saying, "Quickly, go and fetch Father. Tell him that the child is about to stop breathing."

It so happened that, just at this juncture, Ch'ang Shih-chieh had come to visit Hsi-men Ch'ing in order to tell him that he had found the house he was looking for, that it had a twelve-foot-wide frontage and a second floor, making four rooms in all, both large and small, and that the price was only thirty-five taels of silver.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the news from the interior that Kuan-ko was in serious condition, he sent Ch'ang Shih-chieh on his way, saying, "I won't bother to see you off. I'll send someone with the silver to go look at the house with you another day."

He then urgently made his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Yüeh-niang and the others, including Wu Yin-erh and Sister-in-law Wu, were all in the bedroom looking at the child, who was breathing only irregularly, clasped in his mother's arms. Hsi-men Ch'ing could not bear to see it and went into the parlor, where he sat down on a chair, giving vent to:

Long sighs and short breaths.⁸⁴

As for Kuan-ko, after less time than it would take to drink half a cup of tea:

Alas and alack;

He stopped breathing and died.

At the time it was 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the eighth month. He had lived a scant one year and two months.

All the members of the household, from top to bottom, started to cry out loud, while Li P'ing-erh:

Grasping her ears and scratching her cheeks,⁸⁵
in consternation, threw herself on the floor and wept until she fainted away.

It was some time before she recovered consciousness, whereupon she embraced Kuan-ko and gave vent to loud weeping, saying, "My child, have you no saving star? You've broken my heart. It would have been better if I could have died with you. I also am:

Not long for this world."⁸⁶

My darling, you're abandoning me to my fate, forsaking me only too cruelly."

The wet nurse, Ju-i, and Ying-ch'un, who were in attendance upon her, also wept until they were:

Unable to speak, and

Unable to move.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, ordered the page boys to clean out an anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard, and set up two wide benches in it, intending to have the child, along with his bedding, carried out there for his laying out. But Li P'ing-erh placed herself over the child's body, hugging it in both arms, and was unwilling to relinquish it.

She continued to protest, again and again, crying out, "My heartless enemy, who lacks a saving star! My darling son! You've ripped my innards out and taken them with you. You've forsaken me, so that all the pains I've taken on your behalf have been in vain.

I've suffered everything for nothing.⁸⁷

I'll never be able to see you again, my darling!"

Yüeh-niang and the others wept with her for a while and tried to admonish her to look after herself without success.

Hsi-men Ch'ing came over and, seeing that she had scratched the skin open on her face and rolled on the floor until her:

Jeweled chignon had been disheveled,⁸⁸

Leaving her raven locks in disarray,

said, "Think of him as an alien rascal. Seeing that:

He is not fated to be our child,

we have raised him in vain. Since he was fated to die an early death:

Weep for him a couple of times and forget it.⁸⁹

Why continue crying that way?

You can't cry him back to life again.⁹⁰

Your health is more important. I want to have him carried out now so that I can send a page boy to summon the yin-yang master to come and assess his situation. What time was it that he died?"

"It was around 4:00 o'clock," said Yüeh-niang.

"Just as I suggested before," said Meng Yü-lou, "he was sure to wait for that time before slipping away. He was born at 4:00 PM, and he died at 4:00 PM; and even the dates are the same. Both events occurred on the twenty-third. Only the months were different. He lived exactly a round one year and two months."

When Li P'ing-erh observed that the page boys were waiting on either side to take him away, she wept again, saying, "What need is there to carry him out so hastily? First Lady, reach out your hand and feel him. His body is still warm."

Then she cried out, saying, "My son! How can I bear to let you go? You're treating me too cruelly!"

She then threw herself down on the floor once again and gave vent to her tears. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

I utter a single cry,
"Oh Azure Heaven,
How can you so ruin my life?"
I call out, "My darling boy,
If only with this one cry,
I could get you to respond.

It is all due to an earlier affinity from a previous life,⁹¹
In which incarnation I must have owed you a love debt that I have failed to repay.

And now it transpires that, in this life in this world,⁹²
The tears I shed over you will never come to an end."

Every day I have been on tenterhooks,
Doing everything I could think of.

From the very beginning, I have never done anything to hurt or to harm anyone else.
"Azure Heaven, how can you so fail to keep your eyes open?"

"It's not that you and I had no affinity,
It must simply be that I am fated to be unlucky.

Your abandonment of me has left me on the ground on all fours;⁹³

The fallen tree no longer provides shade.⁹⁴

I am reduced to trying to dip up water with a bamboo basket;⁹⁵
All my labors are in vain."

I call out, "My heartbreaking darling boy,
I am more than willing to travel with you along the road to the shades."

At this juncture, after Li P'ing-erh had wept for a while, Kuan-ko was carried out to the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard for his laying out.

Yüeh-niang consulted with Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "We also ought to send word to our kinfolk, and to the abbess at the Kuan-yin Nunnery."

"We can send word to the abbess tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

On the one hand, he sent Tai-an to convey the news to the members of Ch'iao Hung's household, and, on the other, he sent someone to invite Yinyang Master Hsü to come and interpret his divinatory texts about Kuan-ko's fate. In addition, he produced ten taels of silver and gave them to Pen the Fourth, instructing him to go immediately to acquire a set of deal planks and have artisans construct a little coffin out of them as quickly as possible, so that it would be ready for the encoffining.

No sooner was the news conveyed to Ch'iao Hung's household than his wife set out in a sedan chair to offer her condolences, and she began to weep as soon as she came in the door. Yüeh-niang and the others joined her in lamenting grievously for some time and told her about the preceding events. Before long, it was announced that Yin-yang Master Hsü had arrived.

After surveying the situation, he said, "So the child passed away at exactly 4:00 PM."

Yüeh-niang instructed him to proceed with consulting the *Black Book*⁹⁶ about his fate.

Master Hsü:

Calculated on the joints of his fingers,
consulted his esoteric yin-yang texts for a while, and pronounced:

The eight characters that determine the child's horoscope indicate that he was born at 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the *ping-shen* year of the Cheng-ho reign period; and died at 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the *ting-yu* year of the same reign period. The fact that his death took place during a *ting-yu* month on a *jen-tzu* day indicates a conflict between the celestial stems and earthly branches that portends a double bereavement. The members of his immediate family should abstain from crying, although relatives by marriage need not do so. On the day of the encoffining ceremony, it would be auspicious if people born in the year of the snake, the year of the dragon, the year of the rat, and the year of the hare would stay out of the way. Moreover, the *Black Book* says that those who die on a *jen-tzu* day are governed by the zodiacal palace Precious Vase⁹⁷ above, which corresponds to the area of Shantung below. In his former life, he was the scion of a family named Ts'ai in Yen-chou. Relying on his influence, he seized other people's property, drank away his inheritance, failed to revere Heaven and Earth as well as his six relations, became implicated in a criminal offense, caught a chill, was confined to his bed for some time, and died in his own filth. In this life, while still an infant, he became epileptic, and, ten days ago, he was frightened out of his wits by a domestic animal. Moreover, because the Earth Spirit and Year God⁹⁸ were offended, his soul was extracted from his body, resulting in a premature death. He will be reborn as the scion of a family named Wang in Cheng-chou, will rise to the rank of battalion commander, and will live to the age of sixty-seven before dying.

A little later, after once again consulting his *Black Book*, Master Hsü enquired, "Your Honor, do you wish to remove his body from the premises for either burial or cremation tomorrow?"

"How can we send him away tomorrow?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Sutras will need to be recited for him on the third day, and we will escort him out to the family graveyard for burial on the fifth day."

"The twenty-seventh is a *ping-ch'en* day," said Master Hsü. "The horoscopes of the entire family will not create any conflicts on that day. It would be appropriate for the interment to take place at 12:00 noon."

When Master Hsü had finished interpreting his texts, and they began to prepare for the encoffining, it was already the third watch at night. Li P'ingerh, weeping as she went, returned to her quarters to fetch his little Taoist robe, his Taoist cap, his shoes and stockings, etc., and put them into the coffin with him. The "longevity nails" were driven into the lid of the casket, and all the members of the household, from top to bottom, wept for a while, after which the yin-yang master was sent on his way.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing was too busy to go to the yamen. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling heard the news, he came to offer his condolences after the morning session of the court was over and presented the customary consolatory contribution to the funeral expenses. Hsi-men Ch'ing also sent someone to inform Abbot Wu of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor and arranged for eight monks from the Buddhist Temple of Kindness Required to come and recite sutras on the third day. Abbot Wu of the Taoist temple and the household of Ch'iao Hung each contributed the cost of a table with portions of the three sacrificial animals, the cow, the sheep, and the pig, for the funeral oblation.

On the third day, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Mr. Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Mr. Han, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, from outside the city gate, and Hua the Elder all contributed offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals and came to burn paper money. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, Li Chih, and Huang the Fourth all clubbed together to make a joint contribution and came to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company during the overnight wake. When the monks had been sent on their way, a troupe of puppeteers was engaged to entertain the company. After the ritual sacrifice before Kuan-ko's spirit tablet had been performed, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over a feast for his guests in the large reception hall. On the day in question, the three houses of Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh in the licensed quarter also sent people to bring gifts and burn paper money in honor of the occasion.

Li P'ing-erh, in her grieving over Kuan-ko, grew sallow by the day and was disinclined to take either tea or nourishment. Whenever the subject came up, she gave herself over to weeping and sniffing until her voice grew hoarse. Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid that in her grief for her child she might resort to the foolish way out of suicide, so he gave orders that during the day the wet nurse, maidservants, and Wu Yin-erh should keep her company:

Without ever leaving her side.⁹⁹

As for the evening hours, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent three successive nights in her room, trying as best he could to comfort her in her distress.

Nun Hsüeh also kept evening vigil with her, reciting the *Surangama Sutra*,¹⁰⁰ and a spell for dispelling enmity, and urging her to cease her weeping.

"As it is well said in the sutras," she remarked:

"The head is altered and the face replaced, as the wheel of transmigration turns;

It is unavailing to consider what awaits you in the predestined life to come.¹⁰¹

In the life to come:

He is not fated to be your child.

He is your:

Enemy or creditor,¹⁰²

from a previous existence, who has been reborn in order to seek restitution by defrauding you of your property. He may die in his first year, he may die in his second year, he may die in his third, sixth, or ninth year.

In the space of a single day and a single night,¹⁰³

Men die and are reborn by the tens of thousands.¹⁰⁴

As it is well said in the *Dhāraṇī Sutra*:

In former days there was a woman who constantly adhered to the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo ching*,¹⁰⁵ and made offerings to the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin every day without fail, but who, three incarnations ago, had poisoned someone to death. This enemy of hers had never departed from her side but sought a means by which he might accomplish his revenge by committing matricide. Thus he was reincarnated in her body and so squeezed his mother's entrails that when the time came for her to give birth, the parturition was so difficult that her life was imperiled.¹⁰⁶ On emerging from the womb, he was appropriately well formed, but in less than two years he died. His mother was stricken with grief, and, giving vent to loud lamentation, threw her child into the river. Three times in a row, he was reincarnated in his mother's womb and sought a means by which he might terminate his mother's life. The third time, he was reincarnated in his mother's womb as before and did his best to squeeze his mother's entrails, in order to imperil her life,¹⁰⁷ causing her to faint away and cry out during childbirth, only to emerge from the womb as handsome as could be, with all his features intact. But, once again, in less than two years he died. When his mother saw this, she could not help weeping out loud, "What sort of evil karma has resulted in this?" As before, she took her child right up to the river bank but hesitated for some time, unable to bear the thought of abandoning him. Her grief so moved the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin that she transformed herself into the guise of a monk, dressed in his patched cassock, came straight to the river bank, and addressed the woman, saying, "There is no need for you to weep. This is not your child, but your enemy from three incarnations ago. He has been reincarnated three times, seeking to gain revenge by killing his mother, but has been unable to do so. It is because you have constantly recited the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo*

ching, and made offerings to the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin without fail, that he has been prevented from killing you. If you wish to see this enemy of yours, just look in the direction to which I point.” When she had done speaking, she used her superhuman powers to point with her finger, at which the child was transformed into the guise of a yaksha, standing in the water, who said to her, “Because you murdered me, I have come with the intent to exact revenge. However, because your heart is set on supreme enlightenment, and you constantly adhere to the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo ching*, good devas have protected you day and night, so that I have been unable to kill you. I have now been converted by the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin and, from now on, will forever cease to be your enemy.” When he had finished speaking, he plunged into the water and disappeared. The woman, as two streams of tears crisscrossed her face,¹⁰⁸ paid obeisance to the bodhisattva, went home, and devoted herself even more fervently to good works. In the end, she lived to the age of ninety-six before dying and was transformed by reincarnation from a woman into a man.¹⁰⁹

Although it may be inappropriate for me to say so, this son of yours must surely have been:

An enemy of yours from a previous existence,¹¹⁰ who was reborn in order to seek restitution and wished to do you bodily harm. It is only because of your meritorious deeds in making offerings and adhering to the doctrine, as well as donating the cost of reproducing fifteen hundred copies of this sutra, that he was unable to kill you. Now that he has left your side, it is only when you give birth to another child in the future that it will truly be your own child.”

When Li P'ing-erh heard this, in the end:

Her love affinity was not broken,
so that, every time the subject came up, she wept and sniffled unceasingly.

In no time at all, five days passed by. On the morning of the twenty-seventh, eight young professional mourners were hired, who were dressed in black robes with white caps. The coffin was encased in crimson lacquer ornamented with gold tracery and was accompanied in the funeral procession by a heraldic pennant and cloud-adorned baldachin, replete with the artificial floral embellishments known as “jade plum blossoms” and “snowy willows,”¹¹¹ and preceded by a crimson banner inscribed with the words, “Casket of the Eldest Son of the Hsi-men Family.” Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor also sent twelve black-robed young Taoist acolytes to recite the *Sheng-shen yü-chang* (Jade Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits)¹¹² during the procession, and perform sacred music on the way to the funeral.

The relatives and friends of the family, dressed in white mourning-clothes, all accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing in the funeral procession. It was only after they had walked as far as the east end of Main Street and were approaching the city gate that they got onto their mounts for the rest of the journey. Hsimen Ch'ing feared that Li P'ing-erh would be overcome by grief if she went to the grave site, so he forbade her to go. Only Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in five sedan chairs, accompanied Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu K'ai's wife, Li Kuei-chieh, Cheng Aiyüeh, and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, to the family graveyard. Sun Hsüeh-o, Wu Yin-erh, and Nun Hsüeh were left at home to keep Li P'ing-erh company.

When Li P'ing-erh realized that she would not be allowed to go and saw the coffin starting on its way, she accompanied it as far as the front gate.

Approaching the coffin, she broke into loud lamentation, crying out again and again, “My ungrateful son, who will never come home again!”

She continued crying out this way until her voice broke, upon which, without knowing what she was doing, she fell down underneath the gateway:

Breaking the skin on her powdered forehead, and

Scattering her gold hairpins on the ground.¹¹³

This threw Wu Yin-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o into such consternation that they came forward to help her to her feet and persuaded her to return inside. When she arrived back in her quarters and saw that the k'ang was desolately empty, and that only the toy clapper-drum decorated with the portrait of the God of Longevity that her child had been accustomed to play with was still hanging on the bedstead, she was reminded of him and couldn't help crying out again.



Li P'ing-erh on Seeing the Clapper-Drum Grieves for Kuan-ko

There is a full-length song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

When I come into the room,
 Quiet reigns on all sides,
 And I can't help sighing quietly.
 When I think of my darling boy,
 I weep until the energy in my vitals is completely exhausted.
 "I remember how, in giving birth to you,
 I suffered a thousand trials and a myriad tribulations."¹¹⁴
 Not to mention the nights when I moved you to the dry spots while I occupied the wet,¹¹⁵
 All the livelong day, I was preoccupied with looking after you.
 It is aggravating enough to break my heart,
 That you and I should end up as antagonists.
 I really expected that as you developed you would stand up for me,
 That we would remain together for a long time.
 Who could have known that Heaven should be so blind,
 As to bring what was left of your life to an end;
 Leaving me betwixt and between,
 Unable to reach the village ahead,
 Or make it back to the inn behind?"¹¹⁶
 I am aware that before long I am doomed,
 To end up underneath the Yellow Springs.
 The two of us, mother and son, are reduced to,
 Reposing together in the Gateway to the Shades.¹¹⁷
 I call out, "My darling sweetheart,

It is because you lacked karmic affinity in your past life, that this life of yours has been cut short."

Wu Yin-erh, who was standing by her side, took her hand and endeavored to comfort her, saying, "Mother, try not to cry. Little Brother has already forsaken you. You can hardly cry him back to life again. You must assume the responsibility for dealing with your own distress. You mustn't simply give way to your grief."

"After all, you're still:

In the springtime of your youth,"¹¹⁸

said Sun Hsüeh-o. "Surely there is no reason to fear that you won't be able to have another child in the future. But hereabouts:

Walls have cracks,

Fences have ears,

so we've got to be careful what we say. As far as she's concerned:

Those who devote their every thought to scheming,

Only end up bringing calamity on their own heads.¹¹⁹

Who doesn't know that she resented the fact that you gave birth to this child? If she really is responsible for doing him in, surely, in the life to come, since:

Every act brings its own retribution,¹²⁰

he will demand her life in return. Who knows how many times she has done her best to bury the rest of us alive? She is never content unless she is able to monopolize the attentions of our husband. But if he chooses to spend the night in anyone else's room, she gets:

So angry she scarcely cares whether she is dead or alive.

Fortunately you are all aware that in the past our husband seldom ventured into my place in the rear compound. But when he happened to do so on one occasion recently, you all saw the way in which she was all of a heap engaging in chitter-chatter at my expense with those singing girls behind my back. Does she think she can simply:

Wrap it up in a paper bag?

I may not say anything about it, but every day, I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where she's concerned. Who knows what sort of a bad end that whore will come to in the future?"

"That's enough of that," said Li P'ing-erh. "Though I'm still here, I've contracted an ailment that is likely to kill me, if not today, then some day soon. I can't contend with her any longer. Let her do as she pleases."

As she was speaking, who should appear but the wet nurse Ju-i, who came forward and knelt down before her, saying in a tearful voice, "I have something to say that I hardly dare mention to you, Mother. The fact that Little Brother has died is also a misfortune for me. I'm afraid that in the days to come Father and the First Lady will dismiss me. My husband is dead, and I'll have nowhere to go."

When Li P'ing-erh heard what she had to say, she felt a pang of sympathy in her heart and thought to herself, "As long as I've got that dear enemy of mine around, I might as well make use of him. I can't imagine he would threaten such a thing."

"You crazy woman," she said to her, "you can relax on that score. Although the child is dead, I'm not dead yet. And even if I should die tomorrow, you've served me well, and I'll see to it that no one will show you the gate. In the future, if the First Lady should give birth to a son or a daughter, you would be able to take over the nursing of the child, just as you've been doing for me. So what are you so agitated about?"

Only then was Ju-i content to say no more about it.

After some time had elapsed, Li P'ing-erh, once again, was overcome by her grief and broke into tears. To the same tune as before:

Yearning for my darling boy,

I yearn for you until,

I am all topsy-turvy.¹²¹

Gazing after my darling boy,

Unless it be in dreams, you will no longer appear.

During the day, when I see your things I am distressed,¹²²

As though a knife were disemboweling me;

And at night, when I awake from sleep I no longer find you,

Safely embraced in my arms.

I can't prevent the pearly tears from falling from my eyes.

No longer will you lie playing on my ornate bed with its gold tracery;

No longer will you let me lift you in my hands and induce you to smile;

No longer will you come and cuddle up against my breast.

You have managed to inflict a stab wound in my ardently beating heart.

I have suffered in vain on your behalf,

And it has all proven to be effort expended for nothing.

Though you may have satisfied the wishes of another,

You have left me with no future in sight.

Sun Hsüeh-o and Wu Yin-erh remained by her side and attempted to console her, saying, "You really ought to have something to eat, rather than merely continuing to cry this way."

Hsiu-ch'un went to the rear compound and brought some food back for her, setting it out on a table and helping her to eat. But Li P'ing-erh could hardly swallow anything and, after eating only half a bowl, put it down and refused to eat anything more.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing, at the family graveyard, asked Yin-yang Master Hsü to determine the proper geomantic orientation of the grave and then had Kuan-ko buried next to the grave site of his first wife, née Ch'en, so that she could hold the infant in her arms, as it were. That day Ch'iao Hung and the other relatives all assembled at the grave side and offered sacrifices, after which they were entertained in the newly erected summerhouse, where they enjoyed a libation for the rest of the day.

When the funeral party arrived home, Li P'ing-erh kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Sister-in-law Wu and, weeping as she did so, addressed herself to Ch'iao Hung's wife, saying, "My kinswoman, who could be compared to me in raising such an unlucky child, who has died before his time? Now that he has died, your daughter will be a virgin widow, and all that you have done turns out to have been:

Labor expended in vain.¹²³
Please don't hold it against me."

"Kinswoman, how can you say such a thing?" protested Ch'iao Hung's wife. "Every child has a predetermined number of years to live. Who can be sure of what the future holds in store? As the saying goes:

A betrothal, once made, should not be altered.¹²⁴
And moreover, Kinswoman, you are not old. There is no reason to worry about not being able to have children and grandchildren in the future. You must take it easy, Kinswoman, and not distress yourself so."

When she had finished speaking, she took her leave and went home.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in the front reception hall, arranged for Yin-yang Master Hsü to scatter ashes around the premises to prevent the soul of the departed from coming back, and to paste pollution-dispelling spells on all the doors, which read:

The baleful spirit of the departed is thirty feet high and is headed in a northeasterly direction. If it encounters the Wandering Day Spirit, it will be forced to return and be unable to escape. If it is executed, all will be well. Relatives of the departed need not avoid the site.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then brought out a bolt of muslin and two taels of silver with which to thank Master Hsü for his services and then escorted him to the gate.

That evening, he went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and slept with her. During the night, he said everything he could think of to comfort her. He noticed that Kuan-ko's playthings were still in evidence and, fearing that Li P'ing-erh would be distressed on seeing them, ordered Ying-ch'un to take them all back to the rear compound. Truly:

Thinking of her darling boy, she weeps both by day and by night;
Her heart feels lacerated¹²⁵ so much that her life hangs by a thread.
Of the ten thousand things that create grief in this human world;
Nothing exceeds the severance of death and separation of the living.¹²⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 60

LI P'ING-ERH BECOMES ILL

BECAUSE OF SUPPRESSED ANGER;

HSI-MEN CH'ING'S SILK GOODS STORE

OPENS FOR BUSINESS

The marriage affinity bound with red cord¹
is over, without hope of renewal;
When one's luck runs out for no good reason,²
whom does one presume to blame?
Her lingering tears, alarmed at the advent
of autumn, fall with the leaves;
Her alienated soul, trailing after the moon,
is slow to approach the window.
As the metallic autumn wind brushes her face,
she yearns for her son;
When the jade candle burns itself to ashes,
her doleful tears fall.
Even if her viscera should be fashioned
out of iron or stone;
Though unable to engender sorrow, yet they
would engender sorrow.

THE STORY GOES that on that day Sun Hsüeh-o and Wu Yin-erh stayed by her side and endeavored to comfort Li P'ing-erh for some time, thus and so, before returning to the rear compound.

When P'an Chin-lien saw that the child was no more, and that Li P'ing-erh had lost her son to death, every day she plucked up her spirits and expressed her gratification in a hundred different ways.

Pointing at one of the maidservants, she railed away at Li P'ing-erh by indirection, saying, "You lousy whore! As I have said all along:

The sun may be at high noon,
But the time will come when it will pass its zenith.
When the turtledove has dropped its egg:
It has no recourse but to pout.³
When the bench's back is broken:
You have nothing left to lean on.
Like Dame Wang who sold her grindstone:
You've no way to grind your axe anymore.
Like the old procuress whose painted face has died:
You've nothing more to hope for.

How do you like it, now that you're no better off than I am?"

Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, overheard all this invective but did not dare say anything in response. All she could do was to shed tears behind Chin-lien's back. Suffering from this:

Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,
on top of her accumulated vexation and sorrow; gradually:
Her heart and spirit were disoriented, and
Her dreaming soul turned topsy-turvy.⁴

With every day her intake of tea and food diminished.

The day after the funeral party returned from the graveyard after burying Kuan-ko, Wu Yin-erh went back to her establishment, and Old Mother Feng brought in a twelve-year-old maidservant, whom she sold to Sun Hsüeh-o for five taels of silver, and whose name was changed to Ts'ui-erh. But no more of this.

As for Li P'ing-erh, in the first place, because she was longing for her child, and in the second place, because she was afflicted with suppressed rage, her former ailment reappeared, and, as before, her menses flowed unceasingly from her lower body. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine her and obtained a prescription from him, but when she took it, it was about as effectual as if she had:

Attempted to irrigate a stone with water.⁵
The more of his medication she took, the worse the hemorrhaging became. In the space of less than half a month:
Her countenance lost color,

Her flesh became emaciated,⁶
 and her radiant good looks were no longer what they used to be. Truly:
 Her flesh and bones shrunk to no more than a handful;
 How could she hope to sustain such a load of sorrow?⁷
 One day, in the first decade of the ninth month, when:
 The weather becomes threatening, and
 The autumn wind begins to sough,
 Li P'ing-erh was sleeping by herself at night.
 The pillow was cold within her silver bedstead,
 The moonlight flooded her gauze-covered window.



Li P'ing-erh Dreams of Hua Tzu-hsü Demanding Her Life

She couldn't help thinking of her child and gave herself over to prolonged sighs.

Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,
 she became indistinctly aware of the noise made by someone tapping on the window frame. Li P'ing-erh called to her maidservants, but they were both fast asleep and did not respond. Consequently, she got out of bed herself:

Scuffed around with her slippers on backwards,
 Tried to put her brocaded gown on upside down,
 opened the door to the room, and went outside to see who was there. She seemed to see Hua Tzu-hsü, holding Kuan-ko in his arms,

and calling out that he had found a new abode, and that she should join him in going there to live. Li P'ing-erh was not yet ready to relinquish Hsi-men Ch'ing and refused to go with him, but she reached out with both hands to embrace the child, at which Hua Tzu-hsü gave her a shove that knocked her to the ground, causing her to:

Wake up with a jerk,
revealing it to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch.
She was so frightened that:

Her entire body broke into a cold sweat,⁸
and she gave way to:

Sobbing and wailing,
continuing to cry until dawn. Truly:

In possessing emotions we are surely all alike, but
To be fixated on appearances is to delude oneself.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Slender, slender, is the new moon as it shines on the silver screen;
While the woman in the secluded boudoir is about to break her heart.
Regretting ever more that romantic ardor is often not sufficient;
She is increasingly aware that affection may be the root of sorrow.⁹

At that time, Lai-pao's boatload of goods from Nanking also arrived, and he sent the young employee Wang Hsien ahead to get the silver for the cartage fee. Hsi-men Ch'ing wrote a letter and deputed his young employee Jung Hai to take it, together with a hundred taels of silver, and the customary gifts of mutton, wine, and satin brocade, to the secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of the Lin-ch'ing customs station, requesting that, so far as the customs duties were concerned, he should:

Look upon the matter with favorable eyes.

Meanwhile, at home, the preparations for the new shop were completed, and he selected the fourth day of the ninth month for the grand opening. On that very day, the goods were unloaded, consisting of twenty large cartloads, including personal baggage.

On the day in question, the relatives and friends who brought boxes of candied fruit and congratulatory red banners to celebrate the occasion numbered more than thirty persons, and Ch'iao Hung engaged twelve musicians, as well as acrobats, to perform for the company. On Hsi-men Ch'ing's part, the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Ch'un, were engaged to play their musical instruments and sing. The managers, Kan Jun and Han Tao-kuo, worked behind the counter, selling the merchandise, one of them taking charge of the cash, and the other bargaining with the customers, while Ts'ui Pen was responsible for handling the goods. Whoever showed up, whether they were businessmen or customers, were ushered inside and offered two cups of wine.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was dressed in a crimson robe and his official cap and girdle, had finished the ceremony of burning paper money, and his friends and relatives had all presented their boxes of candied fruit and toasted him with a drink, fifteen banquet tables were set up in the rear reception hall, replete with the customary:

Five appetizers, five dishes,
Three soups and five courses;

a new round of drinks was served, and, as the guests took their places:

Drums and music resounded to the heavens.

That day, the household of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling sent someone to deliver a present and the customary red bunting in honor of the occasion, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent the messenger back with a gift in return. Among those present were Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzuyu, Brother-in-law Shen, Han Ming-ch'uan, Abbot Wu, Licentiate Ni P'eng, Licentiate Wen Pi-ku, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh.

With regard to the latter, it so happens that, in recent days, Hsi-men Ch'ing had given him fifty taels of silver, of which he had spent thirty-five taels for the mortgage on a house, while setting aside fifteen taels as the capital with which to open a small general store in his home, which enabled him to make ends meet. But no more of this.

On the present occasion, he had joined the others in making a contribution toward the cost of the celebration and had come along with them to congratulate Hsi-men Ch'ing. In addition, there were Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Fu Ming, and the other entrepreneurs and managers, along with the neighbors in the area, all of whom filled the seats at the banquet tables. The three boy actors came before the feast and performed a song suite in the Nan-lü mode, beginning with the tune "Red Jacket," the first line of which was:



Hsi-men Ch'ing's Silk Goods Store Opens for Business

When primordial chaos first engendered the supreme ultimate,¹⁰

etc., etc. It was not long before:

Five rounds of wine had been consumed; and

Three main courses had been served.

By the time that the musicians below the hall had done performing, and the acrobatics and vaudeville acts were concluded, atop the banquet tables:

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.

On that day, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta outdid themselves in raising large goblets, as they:

Passed their winecups back and forth.

The drinking continued until sunset before the party broke up.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Shen, Licentiate Ni, Wen Pi-ku, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to remain, and new tables were set up for another round of drinks. On that day when the new shop opened for business, the managers did a quick job of reckoning the accounts and found that they had sold more than five hundred taels worth of goods, which delighted Hsi-men Ch'ing no end. After the shop closed that evening, he invited Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Fu Ming, Ts'ui Pen, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join the party. After the musicians had performed for some time, they were allowed to go home, and only the three boy actors were retained to entertain the company.

Ying Po-chüeh, who had been drinking all day, was already inebriated and came out to the front compound to relieve himself. On

the way, he called over Li Ming and asked him, "Whose place is that boy actor with the clear-cut appearance and his hair done up in a topknot from?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know, Master Two?" said Li Ming. Then, discreetly covering his mouth with his hand, he said, "He's Cheng Feng's younger brother. The other day, when Father was in the licensed quarter drinking at their establishment, he engaged the services of his elder sister Cheng Ai-yüeh."

"Really?" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "No wonder, the other day, she contributed toward the burning of the paper money, and attended the funeral ceremony."

Thereupon, rejoining the party, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, you are once again to be congratulated. You've managed to pick up another little brother-in-law."

"You crazy dog!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't talk such nonsense."

He then called over Wang Ching and said to him, "Pour Master Two another large cup of wine."

Turning to Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Venerable Brother-in-law, what do you think? I'm being fined this goblet of wine for no stated reason."

"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm fining you for:

Violating protocol by speaking out of turn."

Ying Po-chüeh lowered his head to consider this and then laughed, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll drink it. I'll drink it. After all:

It's not going to kill me."

He then went on to say, "But I've never been able to abide drinking wine without a song to accompany it. Only if you get Cheng Ch'un to come up here and sing a song for me, will I go along with it."

At this, the three boy actors all came forward and offered to play their instruments and sing.

Ying Po-chüeh dismissed Li Ming and Wu Hui, saying, "I don't want the two of you. I only want Cheng Ch'un to provide a solo accompaniment on the psaltery, and sing a short song, to help me get down the wine."

"Cheng Ch'un," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "come over here and do as Master Two says."

"I've already explained the rules to Beggar Ying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"For every song, he must down a goblet of wine."

Thereupon, Tai-an proceeded to fetch two large silver goblets and place them in front of Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ch'un:

Gently strummed the silver psaltery,

and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "Clear River Prelude":

A young lady of fifteen or sixteen,
Sees a pair of butterflies playing together.
Leaning against the wall with her fragrant shoulder,
Her slender fingers brush away her tears.
She calls out, "Maid servant,
Chase them away to fly somewhere else."¹¹

When Cheng Ch'un had finished singing this song, he invited his auditor to have a drink, and no sooner did Ying Po-chüeh down it, than Tai-an poured out another cup for him. Cheng Ch'un then proceeded to sing another song to the same tune:

Skirting the carved balustrade, he catches sight of her,
Leaning against the rose-leaved raspberry trellis.
Coily adjusting her phoenix hairpin,
She says nothing of last night's events,
But, smiling ingratiatingly,
Plucks a blossom and tosses it at him.¹²

When Ying Po-chüeh had finished drinking his cup of wine, he made haste to push the responsibility for continuing onto Hsieh Hsi-ta, saying, "That's enough. I can't handle any more. I can't handle any more. These two large goblets have done me in."

"You clever beggar!" exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta. "When you can't handle any more, you try to push the responsibility onto me. Do you take me to be a pushover of an encunted southerner like that wife of yours?"

"Clever beggar, is it!" responded Ying Po-chüeh. "If I become a senior official someday in the future, you'll be in line to take my place with her."

"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you ever get an official post, it will only be that of a ceremonial dancer."

"My clever child!" laughed Ying Po-chüeh. "If I ever become a ceremonial dancer, I'll cede the position of senior official to you, that's all."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and ordered Tai-an, "Give this lousy beggar a whack with the slapstick."

Hsieh Hsi-ta surreptitiously gave him a sounding rap on the head, saying, "You beggar! The venerable Licentiate Wen is here, and yet you continue to spout such rubbish."

"The venerable Mr. Wen," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is a man of culture, who doesn't concern himself with such trivial affairs."

"You two gentlemen," said Licentiate Wen, "are obviously on good terms with our venerable host. If one were really to prohibit this kind of badinage at a drinking party, it wouldn't be any fun. When pleasure resides in the heart, it is appropriate that it find external expression, and before one knows it, one finds oneself:

Miming it with one's hands, and

Dancing it with one's feet,¹³

just like this."

Among those present, Brother-in-law Shen turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Brother-in-law, this is not the way to do it. Why don't you invite your senior brother-in-law Wu K'ai to take charge of the situation by choosing a game of forfeits. The outcome could be determined by throwing dice, by playing at guess-fingers, or by playing cards; or it could be by reciting poems, lyrics, songs, or

rhapsodies; or playing the game of 'thimble-stitching' in which lines of verse are joined together by beginning each new line with the last word of the preceding one;¹⁴ or even by reciting tongue twisters. Whoever fails at his task would have to drink a cup of wine as a forfeit. That would be more evenhanded, and less likely to create disputes."

"Brother-in-law, your suggestion is just the thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he proceeded to pour a cup of wine and present it to Wu K'ai to initiate the proceedings.

Wu K'ai picked up the dice box and said, "I'll start things off then, and if I get anything wrong, I'll pay the penalty by drinking a cup of wine. I'll begin with only a single die, after which I'll use a pair. If I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I'll pay the forfeit.

- 1: Amid the *hundred* myriads of men, the *white* flag is furled.
- 2: As for the heroes under *Heaven*, few *men* recognize them.
- 3: The Prince of *Ch'in* has executed Generalissimo Yü;
- 4: Having *curled* him for not providing a *horse* for him to ride.
- 5: This so frightened me that *I* lack the *mouth* to respond.
- 6: The *seething* crowds on the street remove his *clothes*.
- 7: The black-clad *lictors* haven't any *white* hair on their heads.
- 8: After *splitting* up the corpse, they leave their *knives* behind.
- 9: There is a *bolus* of good medicine, but no one wants a *dab* of it.
- 10: A *thousand* years of accomplishment is negated with a single *stroke*."¹⁵

When Wu K'ai had finished throwing the dice, two of his throws corresponded to the numbers in the lines, and he drank the penalty cups of wine accordingly.

It was then the turn of Brother-in-law Shen to call the game, and he said, "I will throw a pair of dice six times, and if I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I'll pay the forfeit

The image of Heaven is a double six; the image of Earth is a pair of twos;
The image of Man is conveyed by the red pair of ones and the double four.
A double three suggests Witch's Mountain; a double five evokes plum blossoms;
Few indeed are those who really understand the import of these symbols."

When he played, one of his throws resulted in a red double four, and he drank his cup of wine accordingly. He then turned the dice box over to Licentiate Wen.

"Your pupil will propose a game," said Licentiate Wen. "For each of the six numbers I will name an appropriate flower, and follow it with a line from the *Four Books*,¹⁶ that begins with the last character of the flower named above.

- 1: Spot of Red.¹⁷ 'The red plum blossom confronts the white plum blossom.'¹⁸
- 2: Double-headed Lotus. 'Amid the ripples, mandarin ducks play.'¹⁹
- 3: Willow of the Three Springs. 'Under the willow one does not adjust one's hat.'²⁰
- 4: Principal Graduate's Red.²¹ 'Red and violet coloured silks were not used for informal dress.'²²
- 5: Wintersweet Blossom. 'Blossoms brush against sword pendants as the stars begin to sink.'²³
- 6: Sky Full of Stars.²⁴ 'The stars and other heavenly bodies are so distant.'²⁵

Licentiate Wen was only required to drink one cup of wine, after which it was the turn of Ying Po-chüeh to call the game.

"Your humble servant can hardly recognize a single character," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so I'll recite a tongue twister:

A hurrying-scurrying housewife,
Holding a basket of soybeans in her left hand,
And a sack of cotton in her right hand,
Was only intent upon forging ahead,
When she ran into a yellow and white spotted dog,
Which took a bite out of the sack of cotton.
At which the hurrying-scurrying housewife,
Put down the basket of soybeans in her right hand,
And tried to beat off the yellow and white spotted dog.
But I don't know whether her hand overcame the dog,
Or whether the dog overcame her hand."

"You god-damned louse!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing derisively. "You'll bust your gut coming up with such nonsense. Who would ever undertake to beat off a dog with his hand without getting bitten for his pains?"

"Who would have anyone take on a dog without a stick in hand?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'm in the same boat as:

The beggar who has misplaced his stick:
I have to confront the rancor of a dog."²⁶

"Your Honor," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Notice how the beggar has acknowledged his own downfall by describing himself as a beggar."

"He ought to be made to drink a penalty cup," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "His effort is hardly up to snuff. Hsieh Hsi-ta, it's your turn now."

"This tongue twister of mine is better than his," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If I don't get it right, I'll drink a penalty cup.

On top of the wall there is a broken tile.
Below the wall there is a mule.
The broken tile falls down,
And lands on the mule.
I don't know whether the broken tile wounded the mule,

Or whether the mule stamped the broken tile to pieces.”

“You ridiculed my tongue twister as inferior,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “as though this broken tile of yours were any better. That wife of yours, Sister Liu, may be a mule, and I may be a broken tile, but the two of us are as well matched as a broken millstone and a lame donkey.”

“As for that wife of yours, née Tu,” said Hsieh Hsi-ta, “old whore of a southern hag that she is, she’s just like a handful of black beans, fit only to feed to a pig. Even a dog would turn up his nose at her.”

The two of them sparred verbally with each other for a while, after which each of them was made to drink a cup of wine.

It was then the turn of Manager Fu Ming, who said, “I’ll call a game current on the rivers and lakes. If I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I’ll pay the forfeit. I’ll begin with a single die, and later switch to a pair.

Aboard a single boat with a pair of oars,
Three men row out into a waterway in the
Province of the Four Rivers.
Employing the five notes and six semitones,²⁷
Seven men sing together a song about the Eight Taoist Immortals.
The nine times ten days of springtime²⁸ are all equally enjoyed.
During the eleventh and twelfth months we celebrate primal harmony.”²⁹

When he had done, none of his throws corresponded to the numbers in the lines that he recited.

“None of the other games proposed have come up to this game of Manager Fu’s,” opined Wu K’ai. “It’s more appropriate to the occasion than any of the others.”

“In that case,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “he ought to drink a ‘Cup of Peace,’ rather than a penalty cup.”

Thereupon, he got up from his place, poured out a cup, and gave it to Fu Ming to drink, after which he said, “It’s now the turn of Manager Han.”

“Since Your Honor is present,” said Han Tao-kuo, “how could I presume to precede you?”

“After all of you have done,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I’ll call a game of my own.”

Thereupon, Han Tao-kuo said, “I propose a game in which the first line must contain the name of a flying fowl, the second line the name of a fruit, the third line the name of a domino, and the fourth line the name of an official, all of which must be strung together in such a way as to make some kind of sense. If I throw a number that corresponds to that in any of the following six quatrains, I’ll drink a penalty cup in front of the company.

From up in the sky there flies down an immortal crane,
Which alights in the garden and eats a fresh peach.
But it ends up being apprehended by a solitary goose,
And then taken to be presented to an education-intendant.

From up in the sky there flies down a sparrow hawk,
Which alights in the garden and eats a red cherry.
But it ends up being apprehended by a pair of nuns,
And then taken to be presented to a senior official.

From up in the sky there flies down an aged stork,
Which alights in the garden and eats water chestnuts.
But it ends up being apprehended by ‘The Three Bonds,’
And taken to be presented to an assistant prefect.

From up in the sky there flies down a turtledove,
Which alights in the garden and eats a pomegranate.
But it ends up being apprehended by a red foursome,
And taken to be presented to a noble marquis.

From up in the sky there flies down a golden pheasant,
Which alights in the garden and eats bitter bamboo.
But it ends up being apprehended by the Five Peaks,
And taken to be presented to an imperial minister.

From up in the sky there flies down a pelican,
Which alights in the garden and eats an apple.
But it ends up being apprehended by the six spots,
And taken to be presented to a record keeper.”

When he had finished with his game, it was the turn of Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“I’ll just make four throws,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “and if any of them correspond to the numbers in any line of the following quatrain, I’ll drink a penalty cup

All six mouths convey a single touch of glowing sunset clouds,
Not to mention the colors of spring displayed by plum blossoms.
I elect to embrace red Hung-niang and give her a kiss,
Leaving the double-named Ying-ying to grieve by herself.”

When he recited the line about the red Hung-niang, sure enough he threw a red four.

When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, he said, “Brother, this coming winter you are bound to be promoted to a higher office. This throw of a lucky red four indicates an impending cause for celebration.”

Thereupon, he poured out a large cup of wine and gave it to Hsi-men Ch’ing to drink, while, at the same time, summoning the three

boy actors, Li Ming and company, to play and sing for their entertainment in honor of the occasion. The party continued until the late watches of the night before breaking up.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the boy actors off and then looked on as the servants cleared things away. He gave directions that Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Ts'ui Pen, and Lai-pao should take turns staying overnight in the newly opened shop, and he admonished them to be careful who they let into the house, after which, he returned to his own residence across the street. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

To resume our story, the next day Ying Po-ch'üeh brought Li Chih and Huang the Fourth with him to turn over some of the silver they owed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"On this occasion," they reported, "we only received a payment from the authorities of one thousand four hundred and fifty or sixty taels, which is not enough to meet all our obligations. So we have only been able to set aside these three hundred fifty taels of silver toward the payment of our debt to Your Honor. When we receive the next payment from the authorities, we should be able to pay off what is left of our obligation to you and will not dare to be remiss."

Ying Po-ch'üeh, from the sidelines, also put in a good word on their behalf. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly took the proffered silver and directed Ch'en Ching-chi to bring the steelyard and weigh it out properly, after which he sent Li Chih and Huang the Fourth on their way. The silver remained lying on the table.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Ying Po-ch'üeh, "Brother Ch'ang the Second tells me that he has found the house he has been looking for, consisting of four rooms in all, front and back, and that the owner is willing to sell it for only thirty-five taels of silver.³⁰ When he came to speak to me about it, it happened to be just the time when I learned that the illness of my little boy was at a crisis stage, and I was too flustered to deal with it and sent him away. I don't know whether he has mentioned this to you or not."

"He did speak to me about it," said Ying Po-ch'üeh, "and I said to him, 'You approached him at a bad time. His son was in critical condition, and he was all flustered about it. How could he have spared the attention to listen to what you had to say? You ought to hold the owner off until I have a chance to speak to our elder brother about it.'"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "That's all right then. You have something to eat, and then I'll entrust you with a sealed packet of fifty taels of silver. Today is an auspicious day for an undertaking of this kind. You can take this money and go with him to close the deal on the house, and tell him to use what is left over to open a limited-capital business in the front of his new house. The income he can realize every month ought to be enough for the two of them to get by on."

"This is a case of Brother's condescending to help him out in a scrape," said Ying Po-ch'üeh.

Before long, a table was set up, and a meal was laid out upon it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing partook of the repast with him and then said, "I won't detain you any longer. You can take the silver, and take care of this job for me."

"You ought to depute one of your servants to accompany me in delivering this silver," said Ying Po-ch'üeh.

"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you have to do is put it in your sleeve and get on with it."

"It's not that," said Ying Po-ch'üeh. "It's just that today I've got another little obligation to take care of. The fact of the matter is, Brother, that today is the birthday of my cousin Tu the Third, and when I sent a present to him this morning, he sent a servant back to invite me over for a visit this afternoon. So I won't be able to report back to you on the completion of my errand. If you send a servant to accompany me, after the deal on the house is closed, I can send him back to report to you."

When he had finished explaining the situation, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "In that case, I'll have Wang Ching go with you."

He then summoned Wang Ching, and he set out with Ying Po-ch'üeh for the home of Ch'ang Shih-chieh. Ch'ang Shih-chieh was at home, and when he saw that Ying Po-ch'üeh had come, he invited him to come in and have a seat.

Ying Po-ch'üeh accordingly brought out the silver and showed it to Ch'ang Shih-chieh, saying, "His Honor, thus and thus, asked me to go with you today in order to close the deal on your house. But I don't have much free time because I've been invited for a drink by my cousin Tu the Third. Right now, as soon as I've finished with this business of yours, I'll have to go. That's why His Honor's servant has come with me. Once the deal on the house is concluded, I won't be able to report back to His Honor, but his servant will be able to report back to him instead."

"Quick. Bring some tea," Ch'ang Shih-chieh called out to his wife, and then he remarked, "Who could there be as magnanimous as our elder brother?"

As soon as they had finished their tea, he contacted the housing agent, and they set out together for New Market Street to weigh out the silver for the seller of the house, and draw up the deed of ownership. Ying Po-ch'üeh then told Wang Ching to take the deed and go home and show it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he confirmed to Ch'ang Shih-chieh that he was authorized to hold on to the remaining silver. Having done so, he took leave of Ch'ang Shih-chieh and went off to his engagement at the home of Tu the Third. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had looked over the deed for the house, he sent Wang Ching to give it back to Ch'ang Shih-chieh to keep. But no more of this. Truly:

If you seek help from someone, you must do it from a man of mettle;

If you want to help someone, you must do it when he needs it the most.³¹

Everything else among the myriad possibilities must be adjudged inferior;³²

But who is there who understands that secret acts of virtue are the best?

Truly:

The three luminaries cast shadows, but who can catch them;

The ten thousand things have no roots, they just arise of themselves.³³

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 61

HAN TAO-KUO PREPARES AN ENTERTAINMENT FOR HSI-MEN CH'ING; LI P'ING-ERH PAINFULLY OBSERVES THE DOUBLE YANG FESTIVAL

Last year on the Double Yang Festival
my sorrow knew no limit;
When the memory arises in my mind I am
ever more brokenhearted.
The autumn colors and the setting sun
are both pallid and wan;
My tear-traces and my lonely thoughts
are equally desolating.
The migrating geese fly in formation
but bear me no letter;
The yellow chrysanthemums lack feeling
but are still fragrant.
I am all too aware that recently I have
become quite emaciated;
And often gaze into the phoenix mirror
to examine my features.¹

THE STORY GOES that one day in the evening, when Han Tao-kuo's job in the silk goods store was over, he went home and slept until the middle of the night, when his wife, Wang Liu-erh, opened a discussion with him.

"You and I have been patronized by him," she said. "And, on this occasion, we have made so much money out of it. Don't you think we should throw a party and invite him over for a visit? Not to mention the fact that he has just lost a child, and we ought to help him recover from his depression; it will hardly cost us a great deal to entertain him for half a day. Not only will it put us on a better footing with him, but our young employee, who will probably be headed south any day now, will observe that we are on more intimate terms with our employer than anyone else."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," said Han Tao-kuo. "Tomorrow is the fifth, which is an unlucky day.² But on the sixth we can hire a cook to prepare a feast, and engage the services of two singing girls. If we write out a formal invitation, I can go to his residence to deliver it in person, and invite His Honor to come for a visit and let us help him dispel his melancholy. In the evening I'll go to spend the night in the shop."

"What's the point of engaging any singing girls for no good reason?" said Wang Liu-erh. "I'm afraid, after he's had something to drink, he may want to come into this room here for a visit, and they'll be in the way. There's a girl named Second Sister Shen who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. She's a young woman, dresses stylishly, and can sing the songs that are popular these days. We ought to arrange for her to come sing for us. Then, in the evening, when the drinking is over, if His Honor comes back into this room, I can simply send her next door."

"That's a good suggestion," said Han Tao-kuo.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Han Tao-kuo went to the shop, where he asked Licentiate Wen Pi-ku to write out an invitation for him, and then went across the street to see Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After greeting him with a bow, he said, "If Your Honor doesn't have any other engagements tomorrow, we've prepared a cup of watery wine at our place and would like to invite Your Honor, if you have nothing else to do, to deign to visit with us for a while in the hope of dissipating your melancholy."

He then handed the invitation to him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read it, he said, "Why should you have put yourself to so much trouble? It happens that I have no other engagements tomorrow, so, after I come back from the yamen, I'll come to your place."

Han Tao-kuo took leave of him and went out the gate and over to the shop, where he carried on his business as usual.

The next morning, he took out some silver, gave it to his young employee, Hu Hsiu, and told him to take a basket and go out onto the street to buy some chicken feet, goose and duck, fresh fish, and other comestibles appropriate for a drinking party; and engaged a cook to take care of preparing the food in his home. He also sent a page boy ahead of time to hire a sedan chair and go to fetch Second Sister Shen. Wang Liu-erh, for her part, along with her maidservants, prepared a supply of:

Fine tea and fine water,
swept out the parlor, dusted the chairs and tables, and awaited Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival.

She waited until the afternoon, when Ch'in-t'ung came to deliver a jug of grape wine. Only after that did Hsi-men Ch'ing show up, riding in an open sedan chair, accompanied by Tai-an and Wang Ching. When he arrived at the door and alighted from his sedan chair, he was wearing a "loyal and tranquil hat"³ on his head, a long gown of jet moiré, and white-soled boots.

Han Tao-kuo ushered him into the parlor and, after exchanging the customary amenities, said, "We are most grateful to Your Honor for the wine you have bestowed upon us."

At the upper end of the room there was placed a single folding chair, upon which Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat.

Before long, Wang Liu-erh came out, dressed in formal attire. On her head she wore a fret of silver filigree and a kingfisher blue crepe headband with purpled gold-spangled edging, held in place all around with gold-encrusted cricket-shaped stickpins. She was wearing a white blouse of Hang-chou chiffon that opened down the middle, with a vest of jade-colored moiré, over a gosling-yellow drawnwork skirt. On her feet she wore shoes of raven-black iridescent silk with high heels and gold-spangled toes. From her ears dangled a pair of clove-shaped pendant earrings. It was evident that she had taken pains to adorn herself as elegantly as possible.

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder, she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times and then went back to the rear of the house to see to the tea.

Before long, Wang Ching came out carrying two teacups in raised saucers of red lacquer with gold tracery, containing tea steeped with osmanthus and cured green soybeans, further enhanced with eight precious ingredients. Han Tao-kuo first took one of the cups and, raising it up respectfully, presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which he took the other cup for himself and sat down to one side in order to keep him company. When they had finished drinking it, Wang Ching came in and took away the teacups.

Han Tao-kuo then initiated the conversation by saying, "Thanks to Your Honor's patronage:

My obligations to you are so great, they cannot be described. I have been away from home for some time, during which you have favored my insignificant wife with your attentions and promoted Wang Ching to the position of a servant in your household.

My gratitude for your kindness is not shallow.⁴

Today, in consultation with my wife, although we have nothing adequate to express our filial respect, we have prepared a cup of watery wine and invited Your Honor for a visit. The other day, when our little brother passed away, although I was able to be there, my wife, because she was suffering from a cold, was unable to come to your residence to offer her condolences and feared that you might be annoyed with us. Today we have invited you over in the hope that we may be able to help dispel your grief, on the one hand, and that you may forgive our negligence, on the other."

"It doesn't amount to anything," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear I've put the two of you to a lot of trouble."

As he spoke, what should he see but Wang Liu-erh, who sat down on a low stool by his side and, turning to Han Tao-kuo, said, "Have you mentioned it to His Honor, or not?"

"No, I haven't mentioned it to him yet," said Han Tao-kuo.

"What is it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He thought that today we should engage the services of two girls from the licensed quarter to entertain Your Honor," she explained. "But we were afraid that Your Honor might not find them satisfactory, so we didn't venture to do so. However, there is a girl surnamed Shen, who goes by the name Second Sister Shen, who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. Her repertory includes every kind of currently popular song, both long and short, and she can even perform *shu-lo*, or recitatives.⁵ When I visited your residence on a former occasion, I had a chance to hear that performer named Big Sister Yü, but her singing was only mediocre, not as good as that of Second Sister Shen. For that reason, I've invited her to come sing for Your Honor today, but I don't know what you may think of the idea. If she meets with your approval, you can engage her to come to your residence and entertain your womenfolk. She is constantly busy performing at various houses, so if you wish to engage her services, you should do so several days in advance, and she will not presume to let you down."

"Since you've engaged the girl, that's fine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Ask her to come out, so I can have a look at her."

At this juncture, Han Tao-kuo said to Tai-an, "Why don't you go over and help His Honor off with his formal clothes."

Meanwhile, a table was set up for their repast, and Hu Hsiu brought in the appetizers to go with their wine, which consisted of preserved duck, dried shrimp, seafood, spareribs, and the like.

Thereupon, Wang Liu-erh, who had opened the wine and heated it, stood to one side with flagon in hand, while Han Tao-kuo first proffered a cup to Hsi-men Ch'ing and then sat down to preside over the feast. Only after this was Second Sister Shen summoned into their presence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at her.

Her cloudy locks were enclosed in a lofty chignon,⁶

Held in place with a modest selection of ornaments,

And an inconspicuous display of combs and hairpins.

Underneath her green blouse and crimson skirt,

Appeared the upturned points

of her golden lotuses;

Atop her peach-colored cheeks and painted face,

There were depicted a pair of

delicate spring peaks.

A pair of lapis lazuli pendant earrings
dangled beneath her ears;
Silver teeth, as white as glutinous rice,
gleamed between her lips.

Facing in his direction:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times.

"Please stand up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "May I ask how old you are at present?"

"I'm twenty years old," said Second Sister Shen.

"And how many songs are there in your repertory?" he went on to ask.

"I have committed to memory any number of songs and song suites," replied Second Sister Shen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Han Tao-kuo to provide her with a seat at their side. Second Sister Shen came forward and bowed once again before venturing to sit down.

She started out by taking up her psaltery and performing the song suite that begins with the tune "Decorous and Pretty," the first line of which is:

Just now I was enjoying myself in the
Autumn Fragrance Pavilion.⁷

When she had finished, a course of soup and rice was consumed and was replaced with another course, whereupon she went on to perform the song suite that begins with the tune "Powdery Butterflies," the first line of which is:

Five thousand rebel troops.⁸

By the time she finished, the wine had run out, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed a servant to take away her psaltery and hand her the *p'i-p'a*, saying, "Have her sing a few current popular songs for me."

Second Sister Shen, who was only too happy to show off the fact that she was:

A practiced performer and an accomplished singer,
thereupon:

Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Gently strummed the silken strings,

and:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
with her instrument tuned to a low pitch, performed a song to a medley version of the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

For some time now,
I have not met my lover face-to-face.
My innermost feelings,
Are hard to deliver, hard to transmit.
But, in my heart, I sincerely yearn for you.
On my account, you are totally preoccupied.
In our relations with each other,
We make no distinctions between us.⁹
Our promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
Are fixed firmly in our minds.
You are just like a reincarnation
of Ts'ui Ying-ying.¹⁰
But, unfortunately, I am not in that
temple in P'u-tung.¹¹
I could not help myself after once having caught sight
of your amorous glance.
Come!
Your jade features evoke an air of spring.
Your flowery countenance is beyond compare.
Once having heard the sound of your seductive voice,
I try to penetrate the eastern wall with my gaze,
And tire of loitering in the western bower.

To the same tune:

As for my loved one,
The two of us are totally preoccupied.
What obsesses me is that we are unable,
To exchange looks with eyes and eyebrows.
Once you departed, I have only my lonely pillow.
The pillow is cold, the coverlet remains;
Alone I confront my jasper-inlaid zither.
My sick body is like a stick of kindling,¹²
My waist has become emaciated.
I realize that it is difficult for you
to leave your mother's side,

But this waiting only makes my heart
feel the more inebriated.
I am all on tenterhooks as I keep company
with this unfeeling lamp.
Come!
On hearing the sound of the wind rustling the bamboo,
I assume that my loved one has come,
And hastily step out of my study.
But it is only the gentle swaying of the flower shadows,¹³
In the moonlight that is as limpid as water.¹⁴

When she had finished singing these two songs to the tune “Sheep on the Mountain Slope,” there was a call for something to drink, and Han Tao-kuo asked his wife to prepare some more wine.

After filling a cup to the brim and offering it to Hsi-men Ch’ing, he then went on to say, “Second Sister Shen, you know some more good songs to the tune ‘Shrouding the Southern Branch.’ Why don’t you sing a couple of them for His Honor?”

Second Sister Shen then switched modes and sang a song to the tune “Shrouding the Southern Branch”:

When we first met,
That girl of my dreams,
Was in the springtime of her youth,
no more than twenty.
Her raven locks took shape as two black clouds;
Fragrant red defined a single daub of ruby lips.¹⁵
Her cheeks were like glowing peaches
or tender bamboo shoots.
If she had been born into painted bowers
or orchid-scented halls,¹⁶
She would surely have been fated
to be a lady.
Alas, she has ended up in the licensed quarter,
Serving in a low-grade occupation.
If she were only able to marry
out of her profession,
It would certainly be better than abandoning
the old to welcome the new.¹⁷

To the same tune:

When we first met,
That captivating wench,
With her moonlike face and flowerlike countenance,¹⁸
was a rare commodity in the demimonde.
The handful of her slender waist deserved a painting;
Her clever disposition was altogether inimitable.
My only regret is that I did not
meet her sooner.
My only wish is that at the festive board,
before the flowing cup,
We might sip wine and croon softly,¹⁹
locked in each others’ arms;
Each glance conveying true devotion,
Every look satisfying our hunger.
Though it should provide but half a moment
of gratification,
It would suffice to dissipate melancholy
and dispel sorrow.

As Hsi-men Ch’ing listened to these two songs to the tune “Shrouding the Southern Branch,” he was reminded of his first visit to Cheng Ai-yüeh, and his heart was filled with delight. He was also impressed by the fact that his hosts had engaged a performer who understood music so well.

Wang Liu-erh, standing at his side, filled another cup of wine to the brim and offered it to him with an ingratiating smile, saying, “Father, enjoy the wine at your leisure. This sample of what Second Sister Shen can do is just a drop in the bucket. She knows a great many more songs than this. In the future, when you have the time, you can send a sedan chair for her, and let her entertain your womenfolk.”

She then went on to say, “As for that singer that I’ve run into at your residence?”

“That would be Big Sister Yü,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “She has been performing at my place for quite some years now.”

“I guarantee,” pronounced Wang Liu-erh, “that if Second Sister Shen were to sing at your place, she would be certain to outperform her. Father, if you wish to engage her services at some future date, let me know beforehand, and I can send a servant to pick her up with a sedan chair and deliver her to your residence.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then said, “Second Sister Shen, if I were to send someone for you on the Double Yang Festival, would you be able to come or not?”

“Your Honor,” said Second Sister Shen, “how can you talk that way? You have but to call for me, and I would hardly dare to turn you down.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw that she had a way with words, he was utterly delighted.

Not long afterwards, while they were:

Exchanging cups as they drank,

Wang Liu-erh began to feel that they were not able to express themselves freely in her presence, so, after having her perform several more song suites, she quietly said to Han Tao-kuo, "Get our servant Chao-ti to escort her over to Yüeh the Third's place for the night."

As she was about to go, and respectfully took her leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he groped a packet containing three mace of silver out of his sleeve and gave it to her with which to buy replacement strings for her instruments. Second Sister Shen hastily responded:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,

by kowtowing to him in order to express her gratitude.

Hsi-men Ch'ing reminded her of their agreement, saying, "On the eighth, I'll send someone to fetch you."

"Father," said Wang Liu-erh, "just send Wang Ching to speak to me about it, and I'll send my servant after her."

Second Sister Shen then bade farewell to Han Tao-kuo and his wife and, with Chao-ti escorting her, went next door. When Han Tao-kuo had seen Second Sister Shen on her way, and informed his wife of the fact, he went off himself to spend the night at the shop, leaving his wife to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company.

When they had played dice and continued drinking for a while, they began to hunger after each other. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on the pretext of the need to relieve himself, went into the woman's bedroom, where the two of them proceeded to lock the door and enjoy themselves. Wang Ching, thereupon, took the lamps and candles out to the side room in the front courtyard, where he fell to drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung.

Meanwhile, at some point in the evening, the young man, Hu Hsiu, had gone back to the kitchen and stolen a few cups too many of wine. After the hired cook had been dismissed, he went into the anteroom for the display of Buddhist effigies and ancestral tablets that was adjacent to Wang Liu-erh's bedroom, put a mat down on the floor, and went to sleep. After sleeping there for a while, he got back to his feet.

It so happened that there was only a board partition between the room where he was and the bedroom next door. All of a sudden, he heard the woman in the other room making a commotion. Hu Hsiu noticed that there was lamplight visible through a crack in the partition and assumed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had left, and that Han Tao-kuo was in the bedroom sleeping with his wife. Surreptitiously extracting a hairpin from his head, he used it to poke a hole in the paper that had been pasted over the crack and proceeded to peek through it. He saw that the other room was brightly lit with lamps and candles, and that, unexpectedly, it was Hsi-men Ch'ing who was there with the woman, and that they were just in the thick of things.

Clearly and distinctly,²⁰

he could see that the woman's two legs were suspended by her foot bindings from the top of the bed, and that Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing only a satin jacket on the upper part of his body, while the lower part was completely exposed. The two of them were busy on the edge of the bed, where:

One comes, the other goes;

One moves, the other rests.²¹

As he slammed away at her:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

Everything conceivable in the way of:

Obscene noises and lascivious words,²²

issued from her mouth as the two of them struggled to make themselves one.

After a while, he heard the woman say, "My own daddy! If you want to burn moxa on this whore of yours, you can burn me wherever you like. This whore of yours would not presume to stop you. After all, the body of this whore of yours is yours to command. What is there to worry about?"

"My only fear is that your husband might object," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That cuckold!" the woman said. "How could he muster the:

Seven heads and eight galls,

to object to anything you did? Who does he depend on for his livelihood, after all?"

"Since you're so irrevocably committed to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "after I've made enough silver off the existing consignment of goods, I'll send him, along with Lai-pao, for a long sojourn in the south, where he can set up an office and act as my purchasing agent. I've got Manager Kan Jun here at home to take care of sales, so all I lack is a buyer to take charge of acquiring the merchandise at that end."

"After he's come back from this second trip of his," said the woman, "send him off again by all means. What's the point of keeping him idle at home? He says himself that he's habituated to being away from home and would be happy to go on the road. He's been acquainted with life on the rivers and lakes since his childhood, and there's little he doesn't know about business and merchandising. If you choose to patronize him, that would be just fine. And when he returns, I'll find another bedmate for him. I don't need him anymore now that I've committed myself completely to you. You can stick him anywhere you want as far as I'm concerned. If anything I say is false, may the worthless body of this whore of yours rot completely away!"

"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there's no need for you to swear oaths like that."

Who would have thought that every last thing that occurred between the two of them was so clearly overheard by Hu Hsiu that he might well have ejaculated:

"Is it not delightful?"

Earlier that evening, while Han Tao-kuo was still at home, he had been unable to find Hu Hsiu and assumed that he had gone to the shop to sleep. When he arrived at the silk goods store and asked about it, the young employees, Wang Hsien and Jung Hai, said that he had not come there. Han Tao-kuo, thereupon, returned home, called for someone to open the door, and looked everywhere for Hu Hsiu, without finding him, though he noticed that Wang Ching was drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung in the front courtyard. When Hu Hsiu, recognizing his voice, realized that he had come home, he hastily lay down again on the mat and pretended to be asleep. In due course, Han Tao-kuo, having lit a lamp and made his way into the Buddhist chapel, found Hu Hsiu lying on the floor, where he was snoring loudly through his nostrils.

Kicking him awake with his foot, he cursed him, saying, "You lousy wild dog of a condemned jailbird! Why aren't you up and about? I assumed that you had already gone to the shop to sleep, but it turns out that you were here all the time, happily sacked out. Get up, and come along with me."

Hu Hsiu, thereupon, got to his feet, made a show of rubbing his eyes, and pretended to be stupefied with drink as he followed Han Tao-kuo back to the shop.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing's bout with the woman continued for nearly two hours before coming to a conclusion. In the process, he burnt moxa on the middle of Wang Liu-erh's chest, the top of her mons veneris, and her tail-bone, three places in all.²³ The woman finally got up, put on her clothes, called for a maidservant to dish up some water, and washed her hands. Thereupon:

More warmed wine was served, and

Further dainties were provided,

as they continued to engage each other in flirtatious conversation.

Only after drinking a few more cups of wine did Hsi-men Ch'ing mount his horse and set off for home, attended by Tai-an, Wang Ching, and Ch'in-t'ung. By the time they arrived, it was already the second watch of the night, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

Li P'ing-erh was lying in her bed, and when she saw how drunk he was when he came in, she asked him, "Whose place have you been drinking at today?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained at length how, "Han Tao-kuo and his wife invited me to their place out of a desire to help dispel my depression over the loss of our child. With this end in view, they engaged the services of a professional female singer named Second Sister Shen, who's still a young woman, and really knows how to sing. In fact, she's better than Big Sister Yü. Tomorrow, on the eve of the Double Yang Festival, I'm going to send a servant with a sedan chair to bring her here so she can sing for all of you for a day or two, and help relieve your depression. Even though you may remain heartsick about it, you oughtn't to let it preoccupy your attention to such an extent."

When he had finished speaking, he wanted to call for Ying-ch'un to help him off with his clothes so he could sleep with Li P'ing-erh, but she said, "Don't you suggest any such thing. I am hemorrhaging all the time down below, and my maidservant is engaged in preparing my medicine over the fire. You go and spend the night in someone else's room. Haven't you noticed what a fine state I'm in all day long? I've hardly got a breath of life left in me, and you still want to pester me this way."

"My darling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can't do without you. What would you have me do?"

Li P'ing-erh gave him a sidelong glance and laughed, saying, "Who would believe that:

Specious mouth and throwaway tongue,

of yours? Do you expect me to believe that when I die in the near future, you won't be able to do without me?"

"In any case," she went on to say, "you can wait until I'm feeling better before coming to spend the night with me. It won't be any too late then."

After sitting with her a while longer, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "That's enough of that! Since you don't want me to stay here, I'll go over and spend the night with P'an the Sixth."



Hsi-men Ch'ing While Drunk Burns Moxa on a Mons Veneris

"That's right," said Li P'ing-erh, "you go ahead and do that! It will spare you the need to sacrifice your desires. After all, she's burning up waiting for you over there, like:

A fire within a fire.²⁴

Why should you neglect her by insisting upon barging into my place to pester me?"

"If that's the way you're going to talk about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't go."

"I was only kidding," said Li P'ing-erh with a smile. "You go ahead and go."

With that, she succeeded in sending Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way.

Li P'ing-erh then got up and sat on the edge of the bed, while Ying-ch'un helped her to take her medicine. As she took up the medicine, she couldn't prevent a cascade of tears from pouring, with a gush, over her fragrant cheeks, and she gave vent to a long sigh before downing the cup of medicine. Truly:

The unlimited tribulations that produced

the sorrow in her heart,²⁵

Were all turned over to the yellow oriole

to express in its cries.

We will say no more, at present, about how Li P'ing-erh took her medicine and lay down to sleep, but return to the story of Hsi-men

Ch'ing. When he arrived at the quarters of P'an Chin-lien, she had just told Ch'un-mei to cover the lamp and had gotten into bed to go to sleep.

Unexpectedly, Hsi-men Ch'ing pushed open the door and came in, saying, "My child, I see you've already gone to bed."

"Well, what a surprise!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "What wind has blown you into this room of mine?"

"And whose place have you been drinking at today?" she went on to ask.

"Manager Han Tao-kuo," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "upon coming back from his trip to the South, and seeing that I had lost my child, on the one hand, in order to help relieve my depression, and, on the other hand, to express his gratitude for my patronage in sending him on this expedition, invited me over to his place for a visit."

"While he was abroad," remarked Chin-lien, "you certainly took advantage of the opportunity to patronize his wife."

"You're talking about the household of my own manager," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could there be any such thing?"

"Where the household of an employee is concerned," pronounced Chin-lien, "there could well be just such a thing. I suppose you've kept a cord wrapped around your waist, lest you might be tempted to violate that boundary! You think you can be up to your tricks, while keeping me in the dark, do you? I know all about it, and I'm fed up with you, to boot. During the celebration of your birthday, that lousy whore showed up here, didn't she? You had surreptitiously slipped her one of Li P'ing-erh's pins in the shape of the character for long life.

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail.

By so doing, you enabled her to wear it here in order to show off where she stood. The First Lady, Meng the Third, and the whole household all noticed it. And when I interrogated her about it, her face turned crimson. Didn't she tell you about it? So today you found your way over there again, did you? Lousy, shameless, good-for-nothing that you are! The painted faces available to you in your own household aren't enough for you, are they? Instead, who knows why, you're taken by that overgrown pumpkin head of a long-faced whore. What with her:

Phony eyebrows and bogus airs,²⁶

her temples adorned with long spit curls, the garish red color with which she daubs her lips, so her mouth looks like nothing so much as a bloody cunt, she's a fine woman indeed, nothing but a lanky, rosewood-complexioned, swarthy whore! I can't imagine what you see in her. No wonder you've taken that cuckold's brother-in-law, Wang Ching, under your wing, so you can use him to carry messages back and forth between you, early or late."

Hsi-men Ch'ing adamantly refused to acknowledge anything, but simply laughed, saying, "You crazy little slave! All you do is talk nonsense. How could any such thing have occurred? Today it was her husband who entertained me. She didn't even put in an appearance."

"You think you can fool me with that sort of talk, do you?" the woman said. "Who doesn't know that her husband is an open cuckold:

Grazing sheep on the one hand, while

Gathering kindling on the other?

He's simply turning his wife over to you as a means of getting a hand on your business and making money for himself out of it. You simpleminded good-for-nothing! You might just as well be:

Listening for the report of a blunderbuss

being fired forty li away."

Upon noticing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken off his outer clothes and was sitting on the edge of the bed, the woman stuck her hand out, pulled open his trousers, and groped out his organ, which was limp and flaccid, and still had a clasp fastened around it.

"There you go again," she said. "You're just like:

A preserved duck that's been put into

the pot to stew:

Its body has turned soft, but its beak

is as hard as ever.

The mute testimony is there for all to see.²⁷

You ruffian! You've been fooling around with that whore all day before coming home, so that your organ is:

As soft as driveling snot and thick as gravy,

yet you remain as hard-mouthed as ever. You can swear all you like. I'll get Ch'un-mei to bring a bottle of cold water, and if you dare drink it, I'll acknowledge that you've got guts. If you stop to consider it:

This salt is just as salty;

This vinegar just as sour.

When a bald man puts a hairnet on his head;

There's no need to brush it any further.

Enough is enough! If one were to believe what you say, you could seduce every woman in the world and get away with it. What a lousy shameless article you are! You're just a big good-for-nothing with too much fire in your eyes. It's a good thing you're a man. If you were a woman, you'd be:

Laid by every man in the street, and

Fucked by every guy in the alley.²⁸

You're in the same class as an itinerant shoemaker;

Wherever two hides meet you'll cobble them together."²⁹

These few lines of invective reduced Hsi-men Ch'ing to staring with wide-open eyes, as he made his way onto the bed. He then told Ch'un-mei to heat some distilled spirits for him, took a pill out of his cylindrical gold pillbox, put it in his mouth, and swallowed it.

Lying face up on the pillow, he then said to the woman, "My child, get down on your knees and suck your daddy off. If you can get it to stand up, it will be your good fortune."

The woman made a show of distaste, saying, "That filthy thing! You've been boring into that whore's hole with it, and now you want me to suck it off for you. That really shows how much you care for me!"

"You crazy little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense. I never did any such thing."

"If you never did any such thing," the woman said, "you'll have to swear an oath on that fleshy body of yours before you can get me to believe it."

After bantering back and forth for a while, she tried to get Hsi-men Ch'ing to get out of bed and wash himself off with water, but he refused to get out of bed. The woman then pulled a figured handkerchief out of her sleeve and proceeded to wipe his organ off with it before engulfing it with her ruby lips and sucking it audibly for some time. In no time at all, she had manipulated it until:

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
as it became engorged with rage.

He then positioned himself astride the woman's body and allowed his jade chowrie handle to penetrate her vagina from the rear, while he lifted up her thighs with his two hands, assumed a squatting position, and went to work. As he gave himself over to slamming away at her:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly;

In the light cast by the lamp,³⁰

He savored the sight as it went in and out.

The woman knelt by the pillow side and raised her hips in response to his movements for some time. Hsi-men Ch'ing's ardor was still unslaked, so he had the woman turn over and face upwards, while he applied some of the pink aphrodisiac ointment to his organ, and plunged back into her. Taking her pair of feet in his hands, he arched his back and alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, lifting her body into the air as he rammed away at her two or three hundred times.

The woman, finding his assault difficult to withstand, closed her eyes and cried out inarticulately in a trembling voice, "Daddy! On this occasion you'd better take it easy with me. You had no need to use that aphrodisiac."

"You little whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing blurted out at her. "Are you afraid of me, or not? Will you ever dare to treat me so disrespectfully again?"

"My own daddy!" the woman cried out. "That's enough. If you'll only be a little easier on me, I'll never dare offend you again. Daddy, slow down a bit. You're mussing my hairdo."

The two of them:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
for half the night before tiring out and going to sleep.

To make a long story short, it was not long before the time came for the celebration of the Double Yang Festival.

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Wu Yüeh-niang, "When Manager Han Tao-kuo invited me to his place the other day, we were entertained by a singer named Second Sister Shen. She is attractive and knows how to sing, as well as how to perform on both the *p'i-p'a* and the psaltery. I've sent a page boy to fetch her, and when she arrives, I propose that we keep her here for two days, so she can entertain the lot of you."

Thereupon, he ordered that the kitchen staff should prepare the appropriate wine, fruit, and other delicacies, and that in the great summerhouse in the garden, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, a large Eight Immortals table should be set up, and the bamboo blinds let down, so that the entire family could enjoy a feast there, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival.

It was not long before Wang Ching arrived, escorting Second Sister Shen in a sedan chair, and she was ushered into the rear compound, where she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and the other ladies. Yüeh-niang saw that she was young, and good-looking, and, upon inquiry, was told that she was not able to perform too many song suites, but that when it came to the various kinds of independent songs, such as those to the tunes "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" and "Shrouding the Southern Branch," or recitatives, she could perform a fair number. After she had been provided with tea and something to eat, she sang two song suites for them in the rear compound, after which they adjourned to the garden, where the feast had been prepared.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to the yamen but stayed at home in order to supervise the planting of chrysanthemums. Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o, as well as Hsi-men Ta-chieh, were all invited to take their places at the table, while Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang stood in attendance at their side to serve the wine. Second Sister Shen also stood by with her *p'i-p'a* to entertain them. Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters, feeling poorly in her present condition, and had to be asked repeatedly before she made a belated appearance, looking for all the world like a tree that had been felled by the wind. It cost her a considerable effort to pull herself together sufficiently to come out and sit down by Hsi-men Ch'ing. Everyone urged her to drink, but she hardly drank anything at all.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, noticing that:

Her face exhibited a worried hue, and

Her eyebrows remained contracted,³¹

said to her, "Sister Li, see if you can't relax. We'll have Second Sister Shen sing a song for you."

"Tell her what song you'd like to hear," said Meng Yü-lou, "so she can sing it for you."

But Li P'ing-erh remained adamantly silent.

As they were drinking, Wang Ching suddenly came in, and said, "Master Ying the Second and Uncle Ch'ang the Second have come."

"Invite Ying the Second and Ch'ang the Second to have a seat in the small summerhouse," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be there directly."

"Uncle Ch'ang the Second has had a porter deliver two gift boxes, which are sitting outside," reported Wang Ching.

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "These presents must be intended to express his gratitude for my help in closing the deal on that new house of his."

"We'll have to prepare something for their entertainment," said Yüeh-niang. "We can't let them go without an appropriate response. You go keep them company, while I arrange here to have some refreshments prepared for them."

Before leaving, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Second Sister Shen, "Whatever you do, see that you sing a good song for the benefit of the Sixth Lady."

He then went straight out toward the front compound.

"I've never seen anything like it," Chin-lien said to Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you simply mention any song you like so Second Sister Shen can sing it for you? You're disregarding Father's intentions. He invited her here on your account, and you won't even say what you'd like to hear."

At this point, Li P'ing-erh felt pressured to such an extent that she was compelled to comply and, after considering for some time, finally said, "Why don't you sing that song suite that begins with the words:

The purple roads and red lanes,

for us."

"That's no problem," responded Second Sister Shen, "I know it."

Thereupon, picking up her psaltery, she:

Adjusted the bridges ranged like wild geese,

Retuned the icy strings,

and:

Commencing to sing in full voice,

performed the song suite that begins with the tune "A Variation on A Sprig of Flowers":

The purple roads and red lanes,
Would be hard for even an expert painter³²
to successfully depict.
Eye-catching luxuriance is spread before me
like a brocade carpet.
It is as though spring is out of tune with me;
It is not I that am out of tune with spring.
Simply on account of that one I've set my heart on,
When I survey the scene it only augments my sorrow.

To the tune "Wen-chou Song":

The blossoms lie scattered,
The willows are umbrageous,
The butterflies are jaded, the bees bemused,
and the orioles tired of singing.
On first waking up,
I had forgotten my longing,
But the relentless twittering
of the swallows,
Has stirred up my old resentment,
And only served to reawaken it.
In an endless pitter-patter,³³
My teardrops silently cascade.

To the tune "Spring Fills the Garden":

The tranquil courtyard is secluded;
Unspoken feelings entangle my heart.
The cool pavilions and waterside retreats,³⁴
Are really suitable for feasting and drinking;



Li P'ing-erh While Ill Observes the Double Yang Festival

But I do not see my lover.
 With whom is he sharing a flagon?
 I could resume strumming the silken strings,
 Or choose to pluck the *p'î-p'â*,
 In order to dispel my melancholy;
 But it seems I am tired of hearing them.³⁵

To the tune "Wen-chou Song":

The pomegranate blossoms are ablaze,
 Like clusters of scarlet brocade.
 Their smokeless flames only succeed in
 incinerating my heart.
 Bashfully, I move forward,
 Thinking to pluck a blossom,
 But I shilly-shally about
 wearing it,
 Fearing that my flowery countenance,
 Is no longer what it used to be.
 When I am so lonesome and emaciated,³⁶
 It would not do to stick it in my hair.

To the tune “The Phoenix Tree”:

The leaves of the phoenix tree are flying;
The metallic autumn wind has begun to blow.
As I gradually fall prey to lovesickness,
I feel as though I have fallen into a deep well.
Day after day, the nights grow longer,
But I find it hard to endure my lonely pillow.
Reluctantly I mount the lofty tower,³⁷
In order to watch out for my lover.
It may be that the fickle fellow's heart
is out of tune with mine.
Who knows where he may be, where he may be,
Pursuing pleasure and indulging in drink?³⁸

To the tune “Wen-chou Song”:

The chrysanthemums have blossomed,
The cassia flowers lie scattered.
Right now, the dew is chilly, and the wind cold,³⁹
as the autumnal feeling deepens.
Suddenly, outside the window, I hear,
The reiterated cries of a solitary wild goose,
As sorrowful and distressing⁴⁰
as a human lament.
I am most disturbed by the chirping of the crickets,
Under the flowers, beside the steps.
Their constant crick-crick chirp-chirp,⁴¹
Has utterly destroyed my peace of mind.

To the tune “Sands of Silk-washing Creek”:

The wind has grown stronger,
The cold has become frigid.
When lovesick, what one dreads
the most is dusk.
Listless and indifferent,⁴² I confront
my lonely lamp;
Repeatedly scanning the apertures
in the window.
The sound of the bugle is prolonged,
penetrating my ears;
Note after note is like a sob,
difficult to hear.
In my depression, I force myself to pour
another cup of wine,
But when it affects my melancholy bosom,
the pearly tears cascade.

To the tune “Wen-chou Song”:

Giving forth long sighs,
Two or three of them,
I lean against the standing screen,
longing for that man.
Single-mindedly, I hope that in my dreams,
We may see each other once again.
In an endless pitter-patter, the snowflakes
begin to fall.
The windblown chimes under the eaves,
Intrude upon my dreaming soul;
Their ding-ding dong-dong,
Shatter my peace of mind.

Coda:

On account of my loved one,
My heart is on tenterhooks.
I think of him by day and yearn for him at night,
as my teardrops cascade.
How hateful it is that my talented lover won't
even let me see his shadow.⁴³

When the performance was finished, Wu Yüeh-niang said, “Sister Li, why don't you have a cup of this nice sweet wine?”

Li P'ing-erh, who was reluctant to refuse a request from Yüeh-niang, picked up her cup and swallowed a mouthful, before putting it back down again. She made an effort to continue sitting with the rest of the company, but, before long, she felt a surge of hot blood hemorrhaging from her lower body and had to return to her quarters. We will say no more, for the moment, about how the womenfolk entertained themselves, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he arrived at the small summerhouse, the Kingfisher Pavilion, he found that Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Shih-chieh were standing beneath the Juniper Hedge admiring the chrysanthemums. It so happens that, on either side of the Juniper Hedge, there were

arranged a total of twenty pots containing famous varieties of chrysanthemums, each of which was more than seven feet high. These included specimens of Great Crimson Robes, Principal Graduate Reds, Purple Robes with Gold Girdles, White Powdered Hsi-shih,⁴⁴ Yellow Powdered Hsi-shih, Skies Full of Stars, Drunken Yang Kuei-fei,⁴⁵ Jade Peonies, Goose Feather Chrysanthemums, Mandarin Duck Chrysanthemums, and the like.⁴⁶

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, the two men stepped forward and bowed to him, after which Ch'ang Shih-chieh told the porter to bring in the two gift boxes.

Upon seeing them, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "What's all this?"

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "out of gratitude for your generosity in enabling him to close the deal on his new house, and having no other way to repay you, has asked his wife to prepare these fresh stuffed crabs, and these two smoked roast ducks, and invited me to join him in paying you a visit."

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need was there for you to go to all this trouble? Your wife is still recuperating from her illness, and you have placed this additional burden upon her."

"That's exactly what I told him," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he said that if he presented you with anything else, he feared you might not appreciate it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told one of his attendants to open the boxes so they could have a look. There were forty large crabs, the shells of which had been scoured out and stuffed with crab meat, coated with a mixture of pepper, ginger, minced garlic, and starch, deep-fried in sesame oil, and flavored with soy sauce and vinegar, which rendered them fragrant and delectable. In addition, there were two oven-smoked ducks from the licensed quarter that had been roasted until they were succulent.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had examined them, he told Ch'un-hung and Wang Ching to take them inside, and to reward the porter with fifty cash. He then expressed his thanks to Ch'ang Shih-chieh, at which point, Ch'in-t'ung lifted aside the portiere and invited them to come into the Kingfisher Pavilion and sit down.

Ying Po-chüeh could not stop lavishing praise upon the chrysanthemums and inquired, "Brother, where did you get them?"

"It was Eunuch Director Liu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, that sent me these twenty pots of chrysanthemums."

"Including the pots?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"Yes, he sent everything to me, including the pots," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The flowers are nothing out of the ordinary," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "but these pots are double-banded wide-mouthed flowerpots, manufactured from the finest clay in the imperial kilns, and are both long-lasting and water-repellent. They are made from clay that has been strained through silken sieves and kneaded under foot until it becomes a thick paste, just like that used in the firing of the finest quality of bricks in Su-chou.⁴⁷ Where could one go to find articles of this quality these days?"

After Ying Po-chüeh had fulsomely praised them for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that tea be served and, while they were drinking it, went on to ask, "When is Brother Ch'ang the Second going to move into his new house?"

"He moved in only three days after the silver was paid over," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The previous occupants had already located another place and moved out within two or three days. Yesterday being an auspicious day for such undertakings, he laid in some miscellaneous merchandise and opened his shop for business. Sister-in-law Ch'ang's younger brother is tending the store for him, and keeping track of the silver."

"We must get together soon, and purchase some congratulatory gifts," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't want too many people to be involved. We'll also invite Hsieh Hsi-ta; just the three or four of you. I'll have the refreshments prepared at my place and carried over there, so it won't cost Brother Ch'ang the Second anything at all. I'll engage the services of two singing girls so we can throw a housewarming party for him, and give ourselves over to enjoyment the whole day."

"I thought of inviting you over for a visit," said Ch'ang Shih-chieh, "but, after giving it some thought, did not presume to do so. The place is too cramped, and I feared you might feel imposed upon."

"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't intend to put you to any trouble. I'll send a page boy over right now to invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to join us, so we can tell him about it."

Then, turning to Ch'in-t'ung, he said, "Quickly, go and invite Master Hsieh over here."

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh went on to ask, "which two singing girls do you plan to engage for this occasion?"

"I'll call upon Cheng Ai-yüeh and Hung the Fourth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "Hung the Fourth can provide a drumbeat of accompaniment, while Cheng Ai-yüeh sings slow-tempoed songs to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope.'"

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what kind of a man are you, that you should have been patronizing Cheng Ai-yüeh without saying a word to me about it? How was I to know? As far as the breeze and the moonlight are concerned, how does she compare to Li Kuei-chieh?"

"Why:

'She's two under full four words!'"⁴⁸
replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Then why is it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that, the other day, at your birthday party, she had hardly a word to say and pretended to be so demure? She's just a lousy, stiff-necked, sycophantic little whore!"

"When I go to see her again, sometime soon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll take you along with me. Your mother, Ai-yüeh, can play a good game of backgammon, and you can play a couple of games with her."

"If I go with you," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll give that little whore a hard time. You mustn't spoil her."

"You perverted dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'd better not do anything to antagonize her."

As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta arrived, bowed to the company, and sat down.

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "thus and so, has acquired a new house for himself and has already moved in, without letting us know anything about it. Each of us ought to contribute something, whatever we can afford, so that it won't cost him anything, and I'll have some refreshments prepared at my place and carried over to his residence by a page boy, and also engage the services of two singing girls, so we can enjoy ourselves for a day. What do you think?"

"Brother," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "just tell each of us what you think we should come up with, and we'll send it over to your place, that's all there is to it. Who else will be involved?"

"There won't be anyone else," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just the three or four of us. Two mace of silver apiece ought to suffice."

"If too many people are involved," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "he won't have room for us at his place."

As they were speaking, Ch'in-t'ung came in and reported, "Brother-in-law Wu K'ai has arrived."

"Tell Brother-in-law Wu to come in here and sit down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long Wu K'ai came into the studio, where he first bowed to the other three guests, and then sat down, after exchanging the customary amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing. A page boy provided another serving of tea, and they drank it together.

Wu K'ai then stood up and said, "May I ask my brother-in-law to accompany me back to the rear compound so I can have a word with him?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ushered Wu K'ai back to the rear compound, and into Wu Yüeh-niang's parlor. Yüeh-niang herself was still in the summer-house drinking wine and listening to the singing with the other women of the household. When she heard a page boy say that her elder brother had come, and that her husband was chatting with him in the rear compound, she got up and went back to the master suite. Upon seeing her elder brother, she greeted him with a bow and ordered Hsiao-yü to provide a serving of tea.

Wu K'ai pulled ten taels of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Yesterday, I received only three ingots of silver from the prefectural office. If my brother-in-law will accept these ten taels of silver for the time being, I will pay back the remainder of what I owe him on another occasion."

"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need to worry about it. Go ahead and spend it. What's the hurry?"

"I feared I might inconvenience my brother-in-law if I delayed," said Wu K'ai.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Is the repair work on the granary nearing completion?"

"It will be another month before it is done," said Wu K'ai.

"When the work is finished," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the office of the provincial regional inspector is sure to offer you a reward of some kind."

"This year's evaluation of military personnel is impending," said Wu K'ai. "I hope that my brother-in-law will continue to support me by speaking up on my behalf to the regional inspector."

"As far as that matter is concerned," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can leave it to me."

When their conversation was over, Yüeh-niang said, "Will my elder brother not go back up front for a visit?"

"I'd better go," said Wu K'ai. "I fear those three gentlemen have some business to discuss."

"Not at all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Brother Ch'ang the Second recently borrowed several taels of silver from me with which to buy a house of modest dimensions. He has already moved into it, and today he has brought some gifts to thank me for my help. In this festival season, I have asked them to stay for a visit. I didn't know that my brother-in-law would turn up, but you've arrived in the nick of time."

Thereupon, he ushered Wu K'ai back to the front compound in order to join the party, and Yüeh-niang promptly told the staff in the kitchen to send the refreshments up front. Ch'in-t'ung and Wang Ching had already finished setting up an Eight Immortals table, and they now brought out the appetizers, nuts, and wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered the storehouse to be opened, and a jug of the chrysanthemum wine that had been given to him by Hsia Yen-ling brought out for them. When they opened it, it turned out to be of a clear beryl-green color and exuded a pungent fragrance. Before straining it, they mixed it with a bottle of cold water, in order to reduce the sharpness of its flavor. After doing so, they poured it through a cheesecloth sieve, and when it had been strained, it turned out to be both mellow and delicious, superior to grape wine in these respects.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had Wang Ching fill a small gold goblet with it and offer it first to Wu K'ai to taste. After this, Ying Po-chüeh and the rest all tasted it:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration.

Before long, in:

Large platters and large bowls,

the appetizers and delicacies were brought in, filling the surface of the table. First there were two platters of steamed, rose-flavored, stuffed, glutinous rice cakes, to be dipped in white granulated sugar. The company made short work of them, grabbing them up while they were still hot. Only after that were the stuffed crabs brought out, along with two platters of roast duck.

Ying Po-chüeh offered a crab to Wu K'ai, and Hsieh Hsi-ta remarked, "I don't know how these were ever done to make them so flavorful, crisp, and delicious."

"They were sent over here from Brother Ch'ang the Second's place," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I have led a futile existence for fifty-one years," said Wu K'ai, "without knowing that crabs could be prepared in such a way. They really are delicious."

"Have our sisters-in-law in the rear compound had a chance to taste them?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"They've all had some," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's really put Sister-in-law Ch'ang to the test," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "to demonstrate such culinary skill."

Ch'ang Shih-chieh laughed at this, saying, "My humble wife was only afraid that she had not made things tasty enough, and that you gentlemen would laugh at her."

When all the crabs had been eaten, the attendants came forward to replenish the wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-hung and Shu-t'ung to come up beside them and take turns entertaining them with southern-style songs.

At this point, Ying Po-chüeh suddenly noticed the sound of singing, accompanied by a psaltery, emanating from the great summerhouse and inquired, "Brother, is Li Kuei-chieh here today? If not, who is responsible for this music?"

"You keep listening," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and see if you think it's her, or not."

"If it's not Li Kuei-chieh," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it must be Wu Yin-erh."

"You beggar!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk blind nonsense. It's actually a professional female singer."

"Is it Big Sister Yü, then?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"No, it's not her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This one is called Second Sister Shen. She's young, has a good figure, and really knows how to sing."

"Really," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If she's as good as all that, why don't you drag her out here so we can have a look at her, and get her to sing something for us?"

"Today being a holiday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've engaged her to come and help the ladies of the household celebrate the Double Yang Festival. It would take the ears of a dog like you to pick her out."

"My senses are as sharp as those of Thousand Li Eyes and Wind-borne Ears,"⁴⁹ said Ying Po-chüeh.

"If a bee so much as buzzes forty li away,

I can make it out."

The two of them continued chaffing each other for a while, after which Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, whatever you do, call her out here, so we can have a look at her. The rest of us may not matter, but you really ought to have her sing a song for your senior brother-in-law here. Enough is enough. Don't be so stubborn about it."

Unable to resist these importunities any longer, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched Wang Ching to bring Second Sister Shen out so she could sing something for Brother-in-law Wu K'ai. Before long, Second Sister Shen duly appeared, kowtowed to the company, and, after standing up again, sat down to one side on a folding chair that had been provided for her.

"Second Sister Shen," said Ying Po-chüeh, "may I ask how old you are?"

"I was born in the year of the ox," said Second Sister Shen, "so I'm twenty years old."

"And how many songs are there in your repertory?" he went on to ask.

"Accompanying myself with the *p'i-p'a* or the psaltery," said Second Sister Shen, "I can perform any number of songs and song suites."

"If you know as many as all that," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it ought to suffice."

"Second Sister Shen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take your *p'i-p'a* and perform a few current popular songs for us. We don't want to burden you unduly. I hear that you can perform the piece called "The Four Dreams and Eight Nothings." Why don't you sing that for Brother-in-law Wu here?"

He then directed Wang Ching and Shu-t'ung to replenish the wine. Whereupon, Second Sister Shen:

Gently strummed the silken strings,

Lightly parted her sandalwood lips,⁵⁰

and sang the set of songs to the tune "Lo River Lament":

Morbidly my indisposition grows worse;
When will it ever melt away?

I long for him in spring, yearn for him in summer,
and do the same in autumn and winter.

With a breastful of sorrow,⁵¹ I complain
to the Lord of Heaven.

If Heaven possesses consciousness,
Why doesn't it show some kindness?

No matter how much kindness I show,
it comes to nothing;

No matter how much feeling I show,
it comes to nothing.

It all amounts to a Dream of the Southern Branch.⁵²

He is in the East, I in the West;
When will we ever meet again?

Little by little, I fill the sheets of flowered paper,
and seal them again and again.

I entrust these missives to the fish and
wild geese as messengers,

But they are not trustworthy,
And fail to deliver my letters.

No matter how much I dote on him,
it comes to nothing;

No matter how much I resent him,

it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to a Dream of Witch's Mountain.⁵³
 My kindness evaporates like the morning breeze;
 Leaving me languorous and depressed.
 The way he carries on, he fails to finish
 that which he begins.
 His promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas
 are no more than wind in my ears.
 Does he not remember, in days of old,
 How ardently he expressed his love?
 No matter how much I may repine,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter how infatuated I may be,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to only a Dream of a Butterfly.⁵⁴
 My brightness resembles stupidity;
 I have fallen into his trap.⁵⁵
 In silence, all I can do is to secretly
 let my pearly tears well up.
 Who would have thought that his mouth and
 heart were not in agreement?
 My heart has been true to him,⁵⁶
 While he has played tricks on me.
 No matter whether I gain the advantage,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter whether I lose the advantage,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to a Dream of Radiant Terrace.⁵⁷

We will say no more at present about the singing and drinking in the front compound.

To resume our story, when Li P'ing-erh got back to her room and sat down on the commode, the blood from her lower body flowed out as copiously as urine, and in no time at all, she started to black out. When she tried to get up and pull up her skirts, she suddenly suffered a spell of vertigo and fell face forward onto the ground. Luckily Ying-ch'un was at her side and was able to break her fall, but she had broken the skin on her forehead. Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse helped her onto the k'ang, but for some time she was:

Oblivious to human affairs.

This threw Ying-ch'un into a panic, and she immediately told Hsiu-ch'un, "Quickly, go tell the First Lady what has happened."

Hsiu-ch'un went to the scene of the party and reported to Yüeh-niang and the others, "My mistress has fallen down in a faint in her quarters."

Yüeh-niang abruptly left the party and, accompanied by the other womenfolk, hastened on her way to assess the situation. They found Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse holding her up in a sitting position on the k'ang, but she remained:

Oblivious to human affairs.

"She seemed all right when she came back to her quarters," said Yüeh-niang. "What actually happened to bring her to this pass?"

Ying-ch'un took the lid off the commode and showed the contents to Yüeh-niang, which gave her quite a start.

"I fear," she said, "it must be the wine she drank just now that has brought on this copious flow of blood."

"But she hardly drank anything at all," both Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien exclaimed together.

Only some time after they had administered a decoction of bog rush and ginger to her did she gradually come back to her senses and recover her ability to speak.

"Sister Li," asked Yüeh-niang, "what happened to you?"

"It wasn't anything much," said Li P'ing-erh. "I sat down on the commode, but when I got up and started to pull up my skirts, a black patch appeared before my eyes and, before I knew it:

Heaven and Earth began to spin around,⁵⁸
 and I couldn't help falling down."

Yüeh-niang said, "I think I'd better send Lai-an to invite Father to come in here so we can explain the situation to him, and get him to send for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come take a look at you."

Li P'ing-erh objected to sending for Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "What's the need for:

Such a great show of consternation?

It will only disrupt his drinking party."

"Make up her bed then," Yüeh-niang said to Ying-ch'un, "and put your mistress to sleep."

Under the circumstances, Yüeh-niang had no wish to continue drinking, so she ordered that the utensils be cleared away, and they all went back to the rear compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to entertain Brother-in-law Wu K'ai and the others until evening, before returning to the master suite, where Yüeh-niang told him about Li P'ing-erh's fainting fit. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily made his way back up front to see how she was and found Li P'ing-erh lying on the k'ang, with her face as sallow as wax.

Tugging at Hsi-men Ch'ing's sleeve, she started to weep, and when he asked her what it was about, Li P'ing-erh said, "When I went back to my room and sat down on the commode, somehow or other, I don't know why, the blood started to flow from my lower body,

just as copiously as urine, and, before I knew it, a black patch appeared before my eyes. When I got up and started to pull up my skirts:

Heaven and Earth began to spin around,
and I fell down, no longer conscious of anything.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that a strip of the cuticle on her forehead had been broken open by the fall, he said, “Where were your maidservants? Why weren't they looking after you? How did they let you fall down and wound your face that way?”

“Luckily,” said Li P'ing-erh, “my senior maidservant was standing by and tried to break my fall. Together with the wet nurse, they were able to help me up. Otherwise, who knows how much worse a fall I might have taken?”

“Early tomorrow morning,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “I'll send a page boy to ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and have a look at you.”

That night he slept in the bed across the room from where Li P'ing-erh was lying.

The next morning, he did not go to the yamen but sent Ch'in-t'ung, riding on a mule, to fetch Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who did not arrive until noontime. Hsi-men Ch'ing first shared a serving of tea with him in the main reception hall and then sent a page boy inside to announce the doctor's arrival. Li P'ing-erh spruced up her quarters, lit some incense, and then invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come in.

After palpating her pulse, he came back out to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, “Your venerable consort's pulse is significantly more sluggish than it was the last time I examined her.

Her seven feelings have been wounded.⁵⁹

The inflammation created by the element fire in her liver and lungs is excessive, with the result that the element wood is in the ascendant and the element earth is deficient, causing an abnormal circulation of her overheated blood. The resultant flooding is like the collapse of a mountain and cannot be regulated. Send your servant back to inquire. If the blood she has hemorrhaged is purple in color, her condition may be treated successfully. If it is bright red in color, it is fresh blood. In that case, if the medicine I prescribe abates the bleeding somewhat, there is hope. If not, it will be difficult to treat.”

“I beseech you, venerable sir,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “to take care in determining the dosage of the medications you prescribe. Your pupil will see that you are handsomely rewarded.”

“What kind of talk is that?” said Dr. Jen. “You and I are on familiar terms with each other, as well as being mutual friends of Han Ming-ch'uan. Your pupil:

Will not fail to do his utmost on your behalf.”⁶⁰

After hosting another serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing saw his guest out the door, immediately after which, he prepared a bolt of Hang-chou chiffon and two taels of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung off with them to fetch the prescribed medication. It turned out to be a decoction for restoring the spleen, but when Li P'ing-erh took a dose of it after it had been heated, her hemorrhaging continued unabated.

Hsi-men Ch'ing became even more flustered than before and also invited Dr. Hu, who resided at the entrance to Main Street, to come and see her.

Dr. Hu said, “Anger has disrupted her blood vessels, causing an inflammation in her uterus.”

He also prescribed a medication for her condition, but when she took it, it was no more efficacious than:

A stone sunk in the vast sea.

When Yüeh-niang realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing was preoccupied with consulting physicians in the front compound, she decided to keep Second Sister Shen for one night only, after which, she gave her five mace of silver, a vest of cloud-patterned damask, and some other trinkets, which she put into a gift box, and then sent her off in a sedan chair.

Hua Tzu-yu, who had been a guest at the party in celebration of the opening of Hsi-men Ch'ing's new silk goods store, upon hearing that Li P'ing-erh was unwell, had his wife purchase two gifts and go to pay her a visit. When she observed how emaciated and sallow she had become, and that her appearance was:

No longer what it used to be,⁶¹

the two of them had a good cry together in her room. After her visit, Yüeh-niang invited her to tea in the rear compound.

Han Tao-kuo, for his part, said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, “There is a Dr. Chao living outside the East Gate, who specializes in female disorders. He is adept at palpating the pulse and is an excellent diagnostician. Some years ago, when my wife was suffering from irregular menstruation, it was he who treated her. If Your Honor will send someone to invite him to come and examine the Sixth Lady, I am sure her condition will improve.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, sent Ch'in-t'ung⁶² and Wang Ching, the two of them riding tandem on a mule, to go outside the city gate and extend an invitation to Dr. Chao.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also invited Ying Po-chüeh to join him for a consultation in the anteroom in the front courtyard, saying, “My sixth consort has become seriously ill. What am I to do about it?”

Ying Po-chüeh expressed surprise, saying, “I understood that my sister-in-law's ailment was somewhat better. Why has it taken a turn for the worse?”

“Ever since her young son died,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “she has been suffering from depression, which has resulted in a recurrence of her former ailment. Yesterday, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival, I proposed to invite Second Sister Shen, so that the women of the household could dispel their melancholy and have some fun together. She hardly drank anything at all on that occasion, but who would have expected that, no sooner had she returned to her quarters than she had a relapse, began to feel faint, and fell to the ground, breaking the skin on her face? I invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to examine her, and he said that her pulse was more sluggish than before; but when she took the medication he prescribed, the flow of blood became more copious than ever.”

“Brother,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “when you invited Dr. Hu to examine her, what did he say?”

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "Dr. Hu said that anger had disrupted her blood vessels, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it produced no visible effect. Today, Han Tao-kuo recommended a certain Dr. Chao Lung-kang, who resides outside the city gate and is a specialist in female disorders. I have sent two page boys after him, and they have been gone for some time already. I'm as upset as can be about it. Simply because of what happened to the child, she is so preoccupied by it, day and night, that it has given rise to this ailment. She's just a woman after all and doesn't know how to put it behind her. No matter how much you admonish her, she doesn't pay any attention. I'm:

At a loss for what to do next."

As they were speaking, P'ing-an came in and reported, "Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has come."

Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him into the reception hall, where, after exchanging the customary amenities, they sat down together.

"I have heard," said Ch'iao Hung, "that my kinswoman, your Sixth Lady, is unwell. Yesterday, when my nephew, Ts'ui Pen, came home, he suggested that my wife should come pay her a visit."

"It's true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "For some time now, ever since our young son died, she has been suffering from depression. She had a physical indisposition to begin with, and this only served to exacerbate it. I appreciate your concern."

"Have you had anyone in to examine her?" asked Ch'iao Hung.

"She has been taking the medication prescribed by Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and yesterday I also asked Dr. Hu from Main Street to examine her, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it only made her condition worse. Today, I have also sent for Dr. Chao Lung-kang, a specialist in female disorders who lives outside the city gate."

"The medical practitioner Old Man Ho," said Ch'iao Hung, "who lives outside the gate of the district yamen, is equally proficient at prescriptions, both great and small, and palpation of the pulse. His son, Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, has also recently set up practice as a licensed physician. Why don't you invite him to come and examine my kinswoman?"

"If he's as good as all that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll wait until my servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang to palpate her pulse, and see what he has to say. It won't be too late to invite Dr. Ho after that."

"Kinsman," said Ch'iao Hung, "in my ignorant view, the best thing to do would be to invite Old Man Ho to examine my kinswoman now and offer his diagnosis, after which you can have him sit in an antechamber. Then, after your servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang here from outside the city gate to take her pulse, you can see what he has to say, and then get the two physicians to discuss it together, in the hope of ascertaining the origin of the ailment. If they can agree upon an appropriate prescription after that, it is unlikely to prove ineffective."

"Kinsman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what you say makes sense."

He then turned to Tai-an and said, "Take my card and go with Ch'iao T'ung to invite the medical practitioner Old Man Ho who lives outside the gate of the district yamen to come here."

Tai-an and Ch'iao T'ung nodded in assent and departed on this errand. Hsi-men Ch'ing then invited Ying Po-chüeh to join them in the reception hall, where, after greeting Ch'iao Hung, he sat down with them for a cup of tea. It was not long before Old Man Ho arrived, came in the gate, bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, and was ushered to a seat in the place of honor.

Raising his hand in greeting, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It is some years since I have seen you, venerable sir, and your appearance is more impressive than ever, with your gray beard and white hair."

"And your distinguished son has been most successful in his career," chimed in Ch'iao Hung.

"The fact is," said Old Man Ho, "that he is so busy with his social responsibilities at the district yamen that he scarcely has time for anything else. It is my aged self who most often has to go out to examine the sick."

"For someone as old as you are, venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you seem to be in remarkably good health."

"As of now," said Old Man Ho, "I have led a futile existence for eighty years."

When they had finished running through these amenities, tea was served, after which, a page boy was dispatched to let Li P'ing-erh know that the doctor was coming. Before long, he was invited into her quarters, where he approached her bed in order to palpate her pulse. She had been propped up into a sitting position on the k'ang, with the fragrant clouds of her hair concealing her bosom, and exhibited an extremely emaciated appearance. Behold:

Her face is the hue of gilded paper,⁶³

Her body is thin as a bar of silver.

By degrees her good looks have diminished;

Imperceptibly her radiance has wasted away.

Her breast is tight with anger;

For days on end, neither water nor rice

has moistened her lips.

Her five viscera are congested;

All day long, it is difficult for pills

to get down to her stomach.

With a constant din, the hollows of her ears

resound with the sound of chimes;

Nebulously, as her eyesight becomes darker,

she seems to see fireflies flying.

Her six pulses are weak and sluggish;⁶⁴
The Assessor of the Eastern Peak has
 come to take away her life.
Her numinous soul is drifting hazily;
The Buddha of the Western Realm has
 called her to accompany him.
The baleful stars Death Knell and Condoler⁶⁵
 have already visited her;
Even the famous physician Pien Ch'üeh of Lu⁶⁶
 would find himself stumped.⁶⁷

When Old Man Ho had finished palpating her pulse, he came outside to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, "This lady's ailment originated from semen invading her menstrual blood vessels, after which she became afflicted with suppressed anger. When her anger and her blood came into conflict with each other, it resulted in copious hemorrhaging. Think carefully back to the time when her ailment began and see if this diagnosis is correct or not."

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how would you suggest that it be treated?"

As they were discussing the situation, it was suddenly reported that Ch'in-t'ung and Wang Ching had arrived back from outside the city gate with Dr. Chao.

"Who might that be?" asked Old Man Ho.

"It is another doctor who was recommended to me by my manager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you, venerable sir, will pretend to ignorance of the matter until after he comes back out from examining her pulse, the two of you can then discuss it together in the hope of agreeing upon an appropriate prescription."

Before long, he came in from outside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, after exchanging greetings with him, introduced him to the others. The two venerable gentlemen, Old Man Ho and Ch'iao Hung, were seated in the center in the position of honor, the newcomer was offered a seat on the left, Ying Po-chüeh was seated on the right, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host. Lai-an brought in a serving of tea, and, after they had drunk it, took away the teacups in their raised saucers.

The newcomer then said, "May I ask what are the names of you two venerable gentlemen?"

Ch'iao Hung replied, "One of us is surnamed Ho and the other is surnamed Ch'iao."

"And my surname is Ying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "May I venture to ask, sir, what is your distinguished name; where do you reside; and what is your profession?"

"Unworthy as I am," the newcomer replied, "the dwelling of your humble servant is located outside the East Gate, on the First Alley, beyond the Temple of the Second Scion (Erh-lang Shen), across the Three Bends Bridge, in the Quarter of the Four Wells.⁶⁸ I am none other than the celebrated Chao the Quack and have practiced medicine all my life. My paternal grandfather was an administrative assistant in the Imperial Academy of Medicine, and my father is currently serving as a medical officer in the mansion of the Prince of Ju.⁶⁹ For three successive generations we have devoted ourselves to the study of the medical arts. Every day I pore over the works of Wang Shu-ho,⁷⁰ Li Kao,⁷¹ and Wu-t'ing-tzu,⁷² as well as such texts as the *Yao-hsing fu* (Rhapsody on the properties of drugs),⁷³ *Huang-ti nei-ching su-wen* (Essential questions regarding the Yellow Emperor's inner classic [of medicine]),⁷⁴ *Nan-ching* (The classic of difficult issues),⁷⁵ *Huo-jen shu* (The book on preserving human life),⁷⁶ *Tan-hsi tsuan-yao* (Essential teachings of Chu Chen-heng),⁷⁷ *Tan-hsi hsin-fa* (Quintessential methods of Chu Chen-heng),⁷⁸ *Chieh-ku lao mai-chüeh* (Chang Yüan-su's [commentary on Wang Shu-ho's] secrets of pulse diagnosis),⁷⁹ *Chia-chien shih-san fang* (Thirteen alternative prescriptions),⁸⁰ *Ch'ien-chin fang* (Prescriptions worth a thousand pieces of gold),⁸¹ *Ch'i-hsiao liang-fang* (Beneficial prescriptions of unusual efficacy),⁸² *Shou-yü shen-fang* (Divine prescriptions for the realm of longevity),⁸³ and *Hai-shang fang* (Over-seas panaceas [from the Isles of the Blest]).⁸⁴

There is no text I have not perused,⁸⁵

There is not a text I have not read.

In prescribing, I use the life-giving
 methods stored in my breast;

In pulse-taking, I clearly comprehend
 the secrets under my fingers.

The six conditions and the four seasons,
Produce differences in the manifestations
 of the Yin and the Yang.

The seven outer and eight inner pulses,
Determine whether blockage or repulsion
 cause sinking or floating.

As for the symptoms of wind, vacuity,
 cold, and fever,

I have mastered them all without exception.⁸⁶

With regard to thready, swollen, hollow,

and stony pulses,
There are none I do not totally understand.
With my awkward mouth and clumsy lips,⁸⁷
I may fail to explain myself in detail;
But I have composed a few lines of verse,
Which will lay out the general outline.

They go as follows:

I'm a doctor whose surname is Chao,
At my gate people constantly clamor.
I sport placards and rattle my bell,⁸⁸
With no genuine article⁸⁹ to peddle.
In healing, I abjure the best nostrums,
In pulse taking, say what comes to mind.
Incompetent at pharmacology and medicine,
I'm inept even at relieving constipation.
For headaches I use tightened headbands,
For eye ailments I rely on moxabustion.
For heart trouble I recommend surgery,
For deafness I would advise acupuncture.
For money I'm prepared to do anything,
I'm out for profit rather than results.
Those who consult me are less likely to be
fortunate than unfortunate;⁹⁰
Wherever I appear there is likely to be
weeping rather than laughter.

Truly:

Motivated only one half by benevolence
and one half by self-interest;
From of old, the pursuit of medicine is
like the pursuit of immortality."⁹¹

When the company had heard him out, they all laughed uproariously.

Old Man Ho then asked him, "Did you acquire your expertise professionally, or acquire your expertise extra-professionally?"

Dr. Chao said, "What do you mean by the expressions 'acquire your expertise professionally,' or 'acquire your expertise extra-professionally'?"

"If you acquired your expertise professionally," responded Old Man Ho, "you learned the proper techniques of pulse diagnosis from the example set by your father. If you acquired your expertise extra-professionally, you can do no more than:

Ascertain the symptoms and prescribe accordingly,
that's all."

"Venerable sir," said Dr. Chao, "you don't understand. As the authorities of yore have stated:

Inspection, auscultation, interrogation, and palpation,
are the techniques that show a physician to be:

Divine, sagely, craftsmanlike, or skilled."⁹²

Since I have acquired my expertise professionally through three successive generations, I know that in addition to first inquiring about the symptoms and then examining the pulse, I must scrutinize the patient's coloration; just as the practitioners of the Tzu-p'ing school of fortune-telling⁹³ combine it with the astrological school of the Five Planets, and also resort to palmistry and physiognomy, in order to make sure that their predictions are reliable and unlikely to be incorrect."

"In that case," said Old Man Ho, "Please go inside and examine the patient."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon told Ch'in-t'ung to go back and tell them that they were coming, and that he had also arranged for a visit by Dr. Chao.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted Dr. Chao into Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Li P'ing-erh, who had just lain down for a rest, was propped up into a sitting position once again, supported by her pillow and bedding.

Dr. Chao first palpated the pulse on her left wrist, and then that on her right, after which he said, "Venerable lady, please lift up your head so I can examine your coloration."

Li P'ing-erh actually lifted up her head, upon which, Dr. Chao said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Your Honor, ask your venerable lady who I am."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly asked Li P'ing-erh, "Who do you think this gentleman is?"

Li P'ing-erh raised her head to take a look at him, and then said in a low voice, "I imagine he must be a doctor."

"Your Honor," said Dr. Chao, "there is nothing to worry about. She is unlikely to die since she is able to recognize people."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, and said, "Dr. Chao, do your best to examine her, and I will see that you are amply rewarded."

After examining her for some time, Dr. Chao said, "As for this ailment of your venerable lady's, pray don't take it amiss if I say so, but, after scrutinizing her coloration and palpating her pulse, I conclude that if it is not an externally contracted intestinal fever, it is an

internally contracted miscellaneous disorder, and that if it did not develop postpartum, it must have done so prior to conception.”

“That’s not what it is,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Please be good enough to make another careful appraisal.”⁹⁴

“I venture to say,” said Dr. Chao, “that it is a depression brought on by a dietary disorder resulting from overindulgence in food and drink.”

“For days on end,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “she has hardly eaten any food at all.”

“Perhaps it is a case of jaundice,” opined Dr. Chao.

“That’s not the case,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If that’s not the case,” said Dr. Chao, “why is it that her face is so yellow?”

He then went on to say, “No doubt it is a case of spleen vacuity diarrhea.”

“It is not a case of diarrhea,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If it is not diarrhea, what can it be?” said Dr. Chao. “How can it be an ailment that one is at a loss to identify?”

After sitting in thought for some time, he said, “I’ve finally thought of something. If it isn’t a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease, it must be a case of irregular menstruation.”

“Since she’s a woman,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “it’s unlikely to be a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease. But your suggestion that it might be a case of irregular menstruation is a little more reasonable.”

“Amitābha be praised!” exclaimed Dr. Chao. “Somehow or other your humble servant has finally gotten something right.”

“What kind of irregular menstruation might it be?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If it is not due to debility arising from amenorrhea,” opined Dr. Chao, “it must be a case of metrorrhagia like the collapse of a mountain.”

“To tell you the truth, sir,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “my spouse, thus and so, has been experiencing incessant hemorrhaging from her lower body, which has caused her figure to become emaciated. If you know of any fast-acting prescription that you can make up and give her to take, I will see that you are amply rewarded.”

“That’s no problem,” said Dr. Chao. “I do possess such a prescription. After we return to the front reception hall, I will write it out, so you can have it made up.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then proceeded to accompany him back to the front reception hall. Ch’iao Hung and Old Man Ho were still there and asked him what he thought the origin of the ailment was.

“As I see it,” said Dr. Chao, “it is only a case of menstrual flooding.”

“What medicine would you use to treat it?” asked Old Man Ho.

“I’ve got a marvelous prescription,” said Dr. Chao, “which contains a number of different ingredients. If she takes it, I can guarantee her recovery. Let me describe it for you.” To the tune “Slavey Chu”:

Take Radix Glycyrrhizae, Radix Euphorbiae,
and Sal Ammoniacum,
Veratri Radix et Rhizoma, Crotonus Semen,
and Daphnes Genkwa Flos;
Emulsify Arsenicum Trioxidum with fresh
Rhizoma Pinelliae,
Use Radix Aconiti, Semen Pruni Armeniacae,
and Semen Cannabis;
Combine all of these ingredients together;
Work them into a pill using honey mixed with
Bulbus Allii Fistulosi,
And take it early in the morning with a draft
of distilled spirits.⁹⁵

“To treat her with drugs such as these,” said Old Man Ho, “would only be to medicate her to death.”

Dr. Chao responded, “It has always been true that:

Toxic medications may be bitter to the taste

but beneficial for an illness.”⁹⁶

After all:

To bring the case to an early clear-cut conclusion,

Is superior to letting things drag on interminably.”

“This rascal is talking nothing but nonsense!” exclaimed Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Have the servants throw him out of here.”

“Since your own manager recommended and vouched for him,” said Ch’iao Hung, “you can hardly send the doctor off empty-handed.”

“To comply with your suggestion,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I’ll have someone in the shop up front weigh out two mace of silver for him and send him on his way.”

Dr. Chao, accordingly, took the two mace of silver and headed for home:

His one mind hastening like an arrow;

His two legs racing as though flying.⁹⁷

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw that Dr. Chao was out of the way, he said to Ch’iao Hung, “This man turned out to be an ignoramus.”

“Though I did not venture to say so just now,” said Old Man Ho, “this fellow is well-known outside the East Gate as Chao the

Quack. All he knows how to do is:

Sport placards and rattle his bell,

on the streets, attempting to con the passersby. What does he know about pulse diagnosis or the etiology of disorders?"

"As for this ailment of your venerable lady's," he went on to say, "when I get home, I'll make up a couple of prescriptions for her in the hope that they will do the trick. After she has taken them, if her hemorrhaging is reduced, and her chest feels more comfortable, it will be expedient to prescribe further medication. I am afraid, however, that if the hemorrhaging does not stop, and her appetite does not improve, her condition will prove difficult to treat."

When he had finished speaking, he got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed one tael of silver in a packet and sent Tai-an, with a gift box in hand, to pick up the prescribed medications. That evening they were administered to Li P'ing-erh, but they produced not the slightest change in her condition.

"You ought to be sparing in the medications you give her," said Wu Yüeh-niang. "She has already stopped eating and drinking, so what is there left in her stomach? If you insist on continuing to medicate her, it is likely to exhaust her vitality. Formerly, that Immortal Wu predicted that during her twenty-seventh year she would suffer a bloody catastrophe, and this just happens to be her twenty-seventh year. You ought to send someone to look for that Immortal Wu, and have him prognosticate on her behalf to see what the categories 'emolument' and 'horse' in her horoscope forebode for her."⁹⁸ If her fate should prove to be in conflict with some baleful star, he might be able to either avert the calamity or protect her against it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, sent a servant with his calling card in hand to the mansion of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command to inquire as to the whereabouts of Immortal Wu.

The servant was told, "Immortal Wu is an itinerant priest who wanders like a cloud. His comings and goings are uncertain. When he comes here, he generally stays in the Temple of the Tutelary God south of the city. This year, in the fourth month, he left on a pilgrimage to Mount Wu-tang."⁹⁹ If you want someone to calculate a fortune, there is a Master Huang, who resides outside the Chen-wu Temple, who is good at calculating them. He charges only three mace of silver per calculation but will not make house calls. He can interpret the events of a lifetime, from beginning to end, as clearly as though he were seeing them with his own eyes."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, consequently, sent Ch'en Ching-chi, with three mace of silver, to seek out Master Huang's dwelling outside the Chen-wu Temple in the northern quarter of the city. He found a poster pasted on Master Huang's door, that read:

Calculations concerning Anterior Heaven

based on the *Changes*;

The charge for each prognostication is

three mace of silver.

Ch'en Ching-chi went inside, bowed respectfully, proffered the stipulated fee, and said, "I have someone's fortune that I would like to trouble you to calculate, sir."

He then told him the eight characters that determined Li P'ing-erh's horoscope, as well as the facts that she was a female, that she was currently in her twenty-seventh year, and that she was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month.

Master Huang performed some calculations on his abacus and then said, "This female's horoscope indicates that she was born in a *hsin-wei* year, in a *keng-yin* month, on a *hsin-mao* day, during the hour *jen-wu*, which calls for analysis of the horoscopic category 'seal ribbon.'¹⁰⁰ The first of her 'decennial periods of fate' began in her fourth year and was designated by the combination *chi-wei*, the second began in her fourteenth year and was designated by the combination *wu-wu*, the third began in her twenty-fourth year and was designated by the combination *ting-ssu*, the fourth will begin in her thirty-fourth year and be designated by the combination *ping-ch'en*. This year of her horoscope is a *ting-yu* year, which means that she will suffer from 'matched shoulders,' because the stem of this year, which corresponds to the element metal, will be injured by the stem of her day of birth, which corresponds to the element fire. During this year the planet Ketu¹⁰¹ impinges on her fate, and it is also in conflict with the baleful stars known as Death Knell and the Five Devils, which will make trouble for her. Now Ketu is a dark star, the image of which resembles a tangle of threads without a head, the shape of which changes incessantly. If someone's decennial period of fate collides with it, it is likely to portend something ominous,¹⁰² such as the development of disease. It indicates that in the first, second, and third, or the seventh, or ninth months a medical calamity may occur, involving the loss of property, the untimely death of a child, the scheming of petty people, and the spreading of malicious gossip,¹⁰³ intended to inflict material damage. If it is the horoscope of a female, it is very unpropitious. The judgment reads:

During this year when the planet Ketu encroaches,
Her destiny is like propelling a boat on dry land,¹⁰⁴
Causing the head of the household to knit his brows.
In quietude, hesitating over the best thing to do,
In idleness, given over to sorrow without respite;
If you want to know why his woman is so afflicted,
And as unlikely to endure as a tangle of threads:
Ponder the events before conception and postpartum.¹⁰⁵

Her fortune reads:

Aside from the fact that she entered into
wedlock rather late,
It is also true that she lost her parents
early on in life.
Her fragrant features and alluring beauty
have bloomed of late,

Everything that she desired seemed to be
there for the asking.
But no sooner was she happily wed than
the dragon appeared,
And the congenial union of the sheep was
menaced by the tiger.¹⁰⁶
Sadly, when emotions are at their height
feelings are lost,
When her fate enters the year of the cock¹⁰⁷
the leaves will fall."

When Master Huang had copied this information out, he sealed it and entrusted it to Ch'en Ching-chi to take home with him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting together with Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen Pi-ku when Ch'en Ching-chi came back with the copied fortune, and he took it back to the rear compound to explicate for Wu Yüeh-niang's benefit. It was apparent that the fortune was:

More likely to be unfortunate than fortunate.¹⁰⁸

Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, but having heard about it:

His brows became tightly knit, as though
secured by a triple-spring lock;
His belly became overburdened, as though
with ten thousand bushels of woe.¹⁰⁹

Truly:

The lofty and eminent in their youth
meet with calamity;
While the clever and the intelligent
suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth
determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled
by fate rather than man.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 62

TAOIST MASTER P'AN PERFORMS AN EXORCISM ON THE LANTERN ALTAR; HSI-MEN CH'ING LAMENTS EGREGIOUSLY ON BEHALF OF LI P'ING-ERH

Whether one's conduct is false or true
is known only to oneself;
The causes of disaster or good fortune
are not to be sought elsewhere.¹
Good and evil acts inevitably bring
their appropriate results;
The only question being whether they
come early or come late.²
When one reexamines at one's leisure
the deeds of one's lifetime,³
And ruminates in quietude about what
one has done during the day,⁴
If one consistently practices rectitude
with one's whole heart,
It is natural that Heaven's principles
will not let one down.⁵

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the prescriptions Li P'ing-erh took, and the medical attention she received, were completely ineffectual; and that though:

The gods were besought and diviners consulted,
the results of these prognostications were all:

Ominous and inauspicious,
he was:

At a loss for what to do next.

Initially, Li P'ing-erh still endeavored as best she could to comb her hair and wash her face, and she was still able to get off the k'ang by herself in order to sit on the commode. But afterwards, gradually:

Her intake of food and drink diminished,⁶

Her figure became increasingly emaciated,⁷

and the hemorrhaging from her lower body continued unabated. It did not take long for a woman as pretty as a flower to become so weak and emaciated that she did not bear looking at. She was no longer able to get off the k'ang to perform her natural functions, but simply lay on a pad that had been covered with a layer of absorbent grass paper. Fearing that anyone coming in might be offended by the foul odor, she had her maidservants keep incense burning in the room. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on observing that her arms were as thin as bars of silver, wept as he kept watch over her in her room and only went to the yamen every other day.

"My brother," protested Li P'ing-erh, "you really ought to report to the yamen, rather than letting my situation interfere with your responsibilities. My condition doesn't really matter. The only problem is the hemorrhaging down below. If it would only stop, I could open my mouth to eat and drink again, and should be all right. You're a man and can't afford to tie yourself down keeping vigil in somebody's room like this."

"My sister," wept Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can't bear to relinquish you in my heart."

"Don't be a fool," said Li P'ing-erh. "If I don't die, that's that. But if I'm going to die, what can you do to prevent it?"

"I've been wanting to tell you, but haven't told you yet," she went on to say, "that whenever I'm alone in the room, I'm afraid. It seems, though vague and indistinct, that there is someone there in front of me. I constantly dream of him at night, looking just as he did when he was still alive:

Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,
in the attempt to pick a quarrel with me, while holding the child in his arms. When I try to take the child, he pushes me roughly away. He says that he has purchased another house where he now is and demands over and over again that I should go join him there. But I've been reluctant to tell you about it."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said:

"A person's death is like the extinction of a lamp."⁸

During these several years, who knows where he has gone? This is all due to the fact that you have been ill for so long and have lost so much blood from hemorrhaging below. I doubt the existence of any such things as evil spirits or demons, or the ghosts of kinfolk or unrelated persons, bent on troubling you. But tomorrow I will send someone to Abbot Wu's temple to get a couple of written spells, and paste them on the door of your room. That way we can determine whether there are any evil influences at work, or not."

Before he had even finished speaking, he headed toward the front of the compound and deputed Tai-an to take a mount and ride to the Temple of the Jade Emperor in order to get the spells. When Tai-an got out onto the street, he ran into Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta and dismounted to speak to them.

"Is your master at home?" they inquired.

"Father is at home," reported Tai-an.

"And where are you off to?" they went on to ask.

"I'm on my way to the Temple of the Jade Emperor to pick up some written spells," said Tai-an.

Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta then proceeded to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, where Ying Po-chüeh said, "Hsieh Hsi-ta has heard that our sister-in-law is unwell, which gave him quite a start; so we have come to ask after her health."

"She's been a little better the last couple of days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I can tell you, her body has become so emaciated she is scarcely recognizable, which has left me entirely at a loss for what to do in any direction. Her child is dead, but why not leave it at that? All she does is cry all night long, and it is this excess of grief that has brought on her illness. If you try to talk her out of it, she won't pay you any attention, which leaves me completely at a loss for what to do next."

"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "what have you sent Tai-an to the temple for?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing told them all about how Li P'ing-erh was afraid whenever she was alone in her room. "She fears that there are evil influences at work, so I have sent the page boy to ask Abbot Wu for a couple of written spells which can be pasted up in her room with a view to suppressing them."

"Brother," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "this is a result of the fact that my sister-in-law's vital spirits are at a low ebb. I doubt if there are any such things as evil spirits or demons involved."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if it's evil spirits that you want to dispel, that's no problem. Taoist Master P'an from the Temple of the Five Peaks outside the city gate is trained in the Five Thunder Rites of the Celestial Heart Sect⁹ and is very adept at exorcising evil influences. He is popularly known as Demon-catcher P'an and constantly relieves people with his potions. Brother, if you will invite him to come here, he can examine my sister-in-law's room to see if there are any evil spirits lurking there. If there are, he will know it. If you then ask him to treat her ailment, he will be able to do so."

"After I get the written spells from Abbot Wu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we can ascertain where he lives, and, if necessary, you can ride on a donkey with my page boy to invite him here."

"That's no problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'm happy to go. And if Heaven takes pity on her so that my sister-in-law recovers, I'd be willing to kowtow every step of the way, if necessary."

After they had talked for a while, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, having finished their tea, stood up and went about their business.

When Tai-an returned with the written spells, they were pasted up in the sickroom, but that evening, Li P'ing-erh was still afraid and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Just now the deceased one, together with two other men, came to apprehend me, but when they saw you coming in, they hid themselves out of the way."

"You shouldn't believe in such evil spirits," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but it doesn't matter. Yesterday Brother Ying the Second remarked that these hallucinations are the result of your emaciated state. He said that outside the city gate, at the Temple of the Five Peaks, there is a Taoist Master P'an who is good at curing ailments with his potions, and also at exorcising evil spirits. Tomorrow morning I'll ask Brother Ying the Second to go invite him to come and see you. If there are any evil influences at work, we can get him to dispel them."

"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "get him to come as soon as possible. That wretch was angry when he went away just now. He's likely to come back to get me tomorrow. Send someone after the Taoist master as quickly as you can."

"If you're afraid," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send a page boy with a sedan chair to bring Wu Yin-erh here to keep you company for a few days."

Li P'ing-erh shook her head, and said, "Don't impose on her. I'm afraid it would interfere with her business at home."

"How would it be," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if I got Old Mother Feng to come and look after you for a couple of days?"

Li P'ing-erh nodded her head in assent. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Lai-an to summon Old Mother Feng from the house on Lion Street, but she wasn't there, having locked her door and gone out.

Lai-an said to Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," "As soon as she comes back, whatever you do, tell her to come over as quickly as possible. The Sixth Lady at the mansion is calling for her."

Hsi-men Ch'ing also instructed Tai-an, saying, "First thing tomorrow morning you must accompany Ying Po-chüeh to the Temple of the Five Peaks outside the city gate in order to invite Taoist Master P'an to come here." But no more of this.

The next day, who should appear but Nun Wang from the Kuan-yin Nunnery, who came to see Li P'ing-erh, carrying with her a box of nonglutinous rice, twenty large pieces of junket, and a small box of squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices. When Li P'ing-erh saw that she had come, she hastily told Ying-ch'un to help her up into a sitting position to receive her. Nun Wang placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, after which Li P'ing-erh invited her to take a seat.

"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "ever since you went off to arrange for the printing of that sutra, I haven't seen so much as your shadow. I've been as ill as this, and you haven't even bothered to come and see me."

"Mistress mine," said Nun Wang, "I was completely ignorant of the fact that you were unwell. I only found out about it when the First Lady sent a servant to the Nunnery the other day. And as for the printing of that sutra, you may not know it, but that old whore Nun Hsüeh and I have been engaged in quite a quarrel about it. By arranging for the printing of that sutra on your behalf all I was doing was driving the fish into the net for Nun Hsüeh, who connived with the printer to get a kickback of five taels, while I got off with not so much as a candareen. You may be bent on creating good fortune for yourself, but that old whore, in the future, will end up in the Avici Hell.¹⁰ She has made me so angry that I'm not myself and even forgot to come by for the First Lady's birthday."

"Everyone creates his own karma,"

said Li P'ing-erh. "Let her do as she pleases. You shouldn't make an issue out of it."

"Who's making an issue out of it?" demanded Nun Wang.

"The First Lady is really annoyed with you," said Li P'ing-erh. "She says that you have even neglected to recite the *Shou-sheng ching*, or *Scripture on Incarnation*,¹¹ on her behalf."

"My bodhisattva!" protested Nun Wang. "However remiss I might be, I would never dare to neglect reciting a scripture for her. I have been reciting the *Shou-sheng ching* at my place for the last month and only finished doing so yesterday. On coming here today, I went first to the rear compound in order to see her and told her about my sense of grievance. When I told her, 'I didn't know that the Sixth Lady was unwell, and don't have anything to offer but this box of nonglutinous rice, some squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, and several pieces of junket that she can eat with her congee,' the First Lady told Sister Hsiao-yü to bring me here to see you."

When Hsiao-yü had opened the boxes to show her the contents, Li P'ingerh said, "Thank you for your trouble."

"Sister Ying-ch'un," said Nun Wang, "take two pieces of this junket and steam them, so I can look on as your mistress eats them with some congee."

Ying-ch'un accordingly accepted the proffered gifts and put them away.

"Prepare some tea for Reverend Wang to drink," Li P'ing-erh instructed Ying-ch'un.

"I've just had some tea in the First Lady's room in the rear compound," said Nun Wang. "Have her boil up some congee so I can watch you eat it."

Before long, Ying-ch'un set up a table and laid out four varieties of snacks to go with the tea which she provided for Nun Wang. After this, she brought in the congee for Li P'ing-erh to eat. There were a saucer of squash and eggplant julienne served in a sweet sauce and marinated with ten spices, a saucer of junket steamed to a frosty brown, two cups of congee made from the nonglutinous rice, and a pair of miniature ivory chopsticks. Ying-ch'un deployed the chopsticks, while the wet nurse Ju-i stood to one side holding a cup, as they attempted to feed her for some time, but she was only able to swallow two or three mouthfuls of congee, and nibble on some junket, before she shook her head, stopped eating, and told them to take it away.

"For us human beings," said Nun Wang:

It is food and water that sustain our lives.¹²

This is such good congee. Won't you have a little more?"

"What am I to do," said Li P'ing-erh, "if I'm unable to swallow it?"

Ying-ch'un then moved the tea table out of the way. Nun Wang lifted the coverlet aside, and when she saw that the flesh of Li P'ing-erh's body had wasted away to practically nothing, it gave her quite a start.

"Mistress mine!" she exclaimed. "When I left you the last time, you were getting better. Why have you taken such a turn for the worse, and become emaciated to such an extent?"

"She was indeed getting better," said Ju-i. "Her ailment originally began as a result of suppressed anger, and Father invited a doctor to come and examine her. She took the medicines he prescribed every day and was 70 or 80 percent on the way to recovery. But in the eighth month, her baby boy suffered a fright that left him in a bad way. The mistress was worried about him day and night and wore herself out so that she was not even able to get any sleep. Though she hoped against hope that the boy would recover, despite her expectations, he died. She can't help crying all day long, on top of which she is suffering from:

Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,

in her heart. Even someone forged out of iron or stone could hardly be expected to bear up under all these tribulations. It's not surprising that her ailment has taken a turn for the worse. When one is suffering from suppressed anger, it helps to discuss it with someone else, but the mistress won't let anything out. No matter how hard you press her on the subject, she won't say a word about it."

"What does she have to be angry about?" asked Nun Wang. "Your master loves her. The First Lady respects her. Of the five or six other ladies around her, who would actually give her cause for anger?"

"Reverend Wang," said the wet nurse, "are you really unaware of who has upset her?"

Turning to Hsiao-yü, she said, "Step outside and look around to see if the gate is shut, or not."

Even if you only talk along the road,

There may be someone lurking in the grass,

if you don't watch out."

She then went on to say, "It is the Fifth Lady next door who has upset our mistress. The cat from her place scratched the hand of her baby boy so badly that it caused him to go into convulsions. When the master came home, he interrogated her about it, but she refrained from telling him who was to blame. It was only later, after the First Lady had told him what happened, that he dashed the cat to death; but she still refused to acknowledge her guilt and vented her wrath on us. In the eighth month, after the little boy died, she took to:

Pointing at the mulberry tree,
But cursing the locust tree,

from her place next door, every day, expressing her gratification in a hundred different ways. Our mistress, in her room here, could hear everything she said perfectly clearly. How could she help being upset? In any case, although she was secretly perturbed, she didn't let the tears show. It's on account of this:

Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,
that she has developed this ailment. Heaven only knows, our mistress is possessed of an admirable disposition.

The good things that take place she keeps to herself,
The bad things that happen she also keeps to herself.

In her relations with her sister wives and concubines, she has never allowed herself to get:

Red in the face with anger.¹³

If she has attractive clothes, she refrains from appearing in them until the others have something comparable to wear. In this entire household there is not a person who has not derived some benefit from their association with her. But, just as I said, despite having benefited from her generosity, there are those who don't have a good word to say for her behind her back."

"Why should they disapprove of her?" asked Nun Wang.

"For example," said Ju-i, "one time Old Mrs. P'an, the Fifth Lady's mother, was here on a visit when it happened that the master wanted to sleep in the Fifth Lady's room, so she came over here to spend the night with our mistress. When she was about to leave, our mistress gave her some shoe uppers, a jacket, and some money, in fact, there is hardly anything she wouldn't have given her, but the Fifth Lady still didn't have a good word to say for her."

When Li P'ing-erh heard this, she was annoyed at Ju-i and said, "Don't be such an old woman. Why should you criticize her for no good reason? I'm already as good as dead. Let her do as she pleases.

Though Heaven does not speak, it is obvious
that it is high;
Though Earth does not speak, it is apparent
that it is low."¹⁴

"My Lord Buddha!" Nun Wang exclaimed. "Who could have known that you have such a good heart?
Heaven also has eyes, and
Looks down from above.

You are sure to accrue benefits therefrom in the future."

"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "what benefits could there be for me? I haven't even been able to save the life of my only child, and now I'm not fated to live any longer myself. Suffering as I am from this ailment in my lower body, even if I were a ghost, I wouldn't be able to take a single step comfortably. I would like to give you some silver, Reverend Wang, in the hope that in the future, after I'm dead, you can arrange to have some nuns regularly recite the *Hsüeh-p'en ching*, or *Blood Pool Sutra*,¹⁵ on my behalf. As for this evil karma of mine, there's no telling how much of it I may have accumulated."

"My bodhisattva!" exclaimed Nun Wang. "You are worrying far too much. Just see if you don't get better in the days to come. For someone as good-hearted as you are, the dragon kings and devas are sure to extend their protection."

As they were speaking, Ch'in-t'ung came in and said to Ying-ch'un, "Father has issued instructions that you should straighten up the room. Hua the Elder is about to come in to see how your mistress is. He is sitting outside in the front compound."

Nun Wang then stood up and said, "I'll go back to the rear compound for the time being."

"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "don't go home, but stay and keep me company for a few days. There are other things I want to discuss with you."

"Mistress mine," replied Nun Wang, "I won't go then."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered Hua the Elder in for a visit, but Li P'ing-erh remained lying on the k'ang and did not have anything to say.

"I didn't know anything about it," said Hua Tzu-yu, "until yesterday, when a servant from your place came to let me know. Tomorrow your sister-in-law will come to see how you are."

Li P'ing-erh merely responded by saying, "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble," and then turned over so that she was facing in the other direction.

Hua Tzu-yu sat with her for a while and then got up and returned to the front compound, where he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "When my deceased uncle, the old eunuch director, was serving as grand defender of Kuang-nan, he brought some medicinal notoginseng¹⁶ back with him. Has she taken any of it, or not? No matter what sort of uterine bleeding a woman may suffer from, whether it be flooding or spotting, if five candareen's weight of this medication in powdered form is taken with wine, it will put a stop to it immediately. If my sister-in-law still retains any of this herbal medication, why doesn't she take some of it?"

"She has tried that medication," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day, Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing prefecture came to pay a visit, and we discussed this medical problem. He also suggested a prescription, consisting of carbonized hemp palm fibers and white cockscomb flowers, decocted with wine, but it only stanchd her bleeding for one day, after which the hemorrhaging continued more copiously than ever."

"In that case," said Hua Tzu-yu, "her condition will prove difficult to treat. Brother-in-law, you ought to look into getting a set of

coffin boards for her as soon as possible, so they'll be ready when needed. Tomorrow, I'll have your sister-in-law come to see her."

When he had finished speaking, he stood up to go. Despite repeated attempts, Hsi-men Ch'ing could not persuade him to stay any longer, so he said goodbye and departed.

The wet nurse and Ying-ch'un were engaged in replacing the absorbent grass paper under Li P'ing-erh's body, when who should appear but Old Mother Feng, who came forward and saluted them with a bow.

"Old Mother Feng," said Ju-i, "you've been putting on the airs of a grande dame. Why haven't you come to look in on the mistress? Yesterday, Father sent Lai-an to fetch you, but he said you had locked your door and gone off somewhere."

"I can't tell you," said Old Mother Feng, "what a difficult time I've had, what with going to the temple to attend services all day long. I go out first thing in the morning, and then, no matter whether things go well or things go badly, I often don't get home until dark. And then I have to cope with Monk Chang, Monk Li, or Monk Wang."¹⁷

"However do you have the stamina to take on that many monks?" asked Ju-i. "It's a good thing Reverend Wang isn't here to hear you."

When Li P'ing-erh overheard this, she laughed lightly, saying, "This Old Mother never does anything but talk nonsense."

"Old Mother Feng," said Ju-i, "just when you're needed the most, you fail to show up. For the last several days, the mistress has not even swallowed a mouthful of congee, because she's been so depressed at heart. But you no sooner arrive than you induce her to laugh. If you would only consent to look after her for a few days, I'm sure that her ailment would take a turn for the better."

"I guess I'm just the sort of magician needed to fend off disaster for the mistress," said Old Mother Feng.

Everyone had a laugh at this.

Old Mother Feng then felt for Li P'ing-erh's body under the coverlet and said, "Mistress, everything will be all right if you can only get a little better."

She then went on to ask, "Can she get down to sit on the commode by herself?"

"It would be a good thing if she could," said Ying-ch'un. "The last two times she tried it, she struggled to do it and was just able to manage it with our support. For the last two days, however, she has remained on the k'ang. We put absorbent grass paper under her, and change it two or three times a day."

"The fact is," said Ju-i, "that she doesn't have the strength to eat anything much in the way of food, so how can her system withstand the effects of this hemorrhaging?"

As they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in and, catching sight of Old Mother Feng, said, "Old Feng, you ought to be coming over here to see her all the time. How is it that after you leave you fail to come back?"

"Master," protested the old woman, "how could I fail to come back? The last several days have been the time of year for me to pickle vegetables in the hope of picking up a few candareens. As long as I've got some pickled vegetables in the house, when people bring their karmic encumbrances to me to find places for, I'll have something for them to eat. Otherwise, where would I find the idle money to buy vegetables for them to eat?"

"Why didn't you tell me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day they harvested the vegetables on my country estate. If I turn over the produce from two or three vegetable beds to you, that ought to suffice."

"I'd be much obliged to you once again," said the old woman.

When she had finished speaking, Old Mother Feng went over into an adjacent room. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sat down on the edge of the k'ang, beside which Ying-ch'un was burning some rue incense.

"How are you feeling at heart today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired.

He then went on to ask Ying-ch'un, "Did your mistress eat any congee this morning, or not?"

"She did eat a little better than before," said Ying-ch'un. "Nun Wang brought her some pieces of junket, which I steamed for her, but she only nibbled at them. She was able to swallow no more than two mouthfuls of congee and broth, before she set them aside."

"Just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother Ying the Second and my page boy went outside the city gate to invite that Taoist Master P'an to come and see you, but he wasn't there. Tomorrow, I'll send Lai-pao on a donkey to go look for him again."

"Send someone after him as soon as possible," said Li P'ing-erh. "No sooner do I close my eyes than that wretch appears to harass me."

"That is only the result of your low spirits," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just set your mind at rest, and stop imagining him. I'm sure that after we get that Taoist master here to dispel those evil influences for you, and after you've imbibed some of his medicine, you're bound to get better."

"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "since I've contracted this awkward illness, there's little chance of my recovery. The best I can hope for is that we might be together again in a life to come. Today, when there's no one else around, I can speak to you freely. I had hoped that I could remain by your side, so that we could share a life together for a number of years, after which, even if we died, we would have had the experience of living together as man and wife. Who could have known that now that I am in my twenty-seventh year, I should first lose my dear adversary of a son, and then have the bad luck to come down with this fatal disorder, and have to abandon you for good? If I am ever to run into you again, it will be in the Gateway to the Shades."

As she spoke, she grasped Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand firmly in her own, while the tears fell from her two eyes, until she choked up and could no longer utter a sound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also was overcome by grief and wept, saying, "My sister, if you have anything to say, say it."

As the two of them were weeping together in her bedroom, Ch'in-t'ung suddenly came in and said, "An orderly has come to remind you, Master, that tomorrow is the fifteenth day of the month, when you will be expected to participate in the ceremonies of bowing

before the imperial tablet, taking the formal roll call, and presiding over the general disposition of pending cases in the yamen. Will you be going, or not? The foreman needs to know so he can attend you.”

“I won’t be able to go tomorrow,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Take one of my cards and deliver it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, so he can take care of bowing before the imperial tablet without me.”

Ch’in-t’ung nodded in assent and went out.

“My brother,” said Li P’ing-erh, “if you do as I wish, you’ll go to the yamen anyway. Don’t let me interfere with your official responsibilities. They’re important. Who knows when I’ll die? It’s early days yet.”

“I’m going to stay at home and keep you company for a few days,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “How could I bear to do otherwise? You must set your mind at rest, and stop worrying so much. Just now, Hua the Elder suggested to me that I look into getting a set of coffin boards for you, with a view to shocking you out of your indisposition. In that case, you’d surely get better.”

Li P’ing-erh nodded in assent and said, “So be it; but you mustn’t let yourself be talked into spending a foolish amount of money. It will suffice if you spend ten taels or so of silver in order to buy me a ready-made coffin, and then bury me beside the grave of your first wife. But don’t have me cremated, if you care about our feelings for each other as man and wife. In that case, both early and late, it will be more convenient for me to partake of whatever offerings are made to the deceased. The members of your household are so numerous, you need to consider what it will take to support them in the future.”

If Hsi-men Ch’ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he felt just as though:

A knife were slashing his liver and gall;

A sword were piercing his body and heart.

“My sister,” he said with tears in his eyes, “how can you talk that way? I, Hsi-men Ch’ing, even though I were to become utterly impoverished, would never let you down.”

As they were speaking, Yüeh-niang came in, with a small box of fresh apples in her hand, and said, “Sister Li, my elder brother’s wife has sent these apples for you to eat.”

She then instructed Ying-ch’ün, saying, “Wash these clean, and then cut them into slices with a knife for your mistress to eat.”

“Once again,” said Li P’ing-erh, “I am indebted to your elder brother’s wife for her solicitude on my behalf.”

It did not take long for Ying-ch’ün to peel the apples, cut them into slices, and put them in a bowl, after which, Hsi-men Ch’ing and Yüeh-niang, standing to either side of her, selected a slice to feed to her. They put it into her mouth, but after barely chewing enough of it to get the flavor, she spit it out. Yüeh-niang was afraid that they were tiring her, so she helped her into a supine position, with her face to the wall, and let her go to sleep. Hsi-men Ch’ing and Yüeh-niang then came outside to consult with each other about the situation.

“As for Sister Li,” said Yüeh-niang, “it appears to me that her condition has reached a critical stage. You ought to look into obtaining a set of coffin boards for her as soon as possible, so that they will be available when needed. If you wait until the time for them is at hand, things will be in such an uproar that in scrambling to come up with a decent coffin, you’ll be just like:

A horse trying to catch a rat.¹⁸

That’s no way to handle the business.”

“Today,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “Hua the Elder suggested the same thing. When I mentioned it to her just now, she enjoined me not to spend too much money and said that she would be content with a ready-made coffin. She went on to say, ‘The members of your household are so numerous, you need to consider what it will take to support them in the future.’ Her words have left me sore at heart ever since.”

He then went on to say, “We might as well wait until Taoist Master P’an has come to consider her case before looking out for a coffin.”

“Look here,” said Yüeh-niang, “you don’t know what you’re saying. When a person is so emaciated she hardly retains her human shape, and when her esophagus is so stopped up that she can’t even swallow a spoonful of water, you are still vainly expecting her to get well. We should be prepared for any contingency:

Beating the drum to sound an advance on the one hand,

And waving the flag to signal a retreat on the other.

If she is fortunate enough to recover, we can always donate the coffin to someone else. It won’t cost us anything to speak of.”

“I’ll do as you say,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

He then went back to the rear compound with Yüeh-niang and sent a page boy to summon Pen the Fourth.

When Pen the Fourth arrived in the reception hall, he asked him, “Who do you think has the best coffin boards available? I’d like you and my son-in-law to take some silver with you and see if you can find a good set.”

“Battalion Commander Ch’en’s place on Main Street,” said Pen the Fourth, “has recently acquired several sets of good coffin boards.”

“If he’s got good coffin boards available,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, turning to Ch’en Ching-chi, “you go back to the rear compound and ask your mother-in-law for five large silver ingots, so the two of you can go look for a set.”

Before long, Ch’en Ching-chi came back with five silver ingots of fifty taels weight each and then set off on this errand with Pen Ti-ch’uan. They did not return to report on their mission until mid-afternoon.

“What kept you so long?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“When we went to Battalion Commander Ch’en’s place,” the two of them replied, “we looked at several sets of coffin boards, but they were all of mediocre quality, and the price was not right. On our way home, however, we happened to run into your kinsman

Ch'iao Hung in the street, who said that Provincial Graduate Shang has a fine set of coffin boards. They were originally brought back by his father from his tour of duty as prefectural judge of Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan and were intended for his wife. Initially there were two sets of coffin boards from Peach Blossom Cavern,¹⁹ one of which has already been used, so this is the only set remaining. It is a complete set of five boards of different sizes, from which the side walls, bottom, lid, and end pieces can be fashioned,²⁰ and the asking price is 370 taels of silver. Ch'iao Hung went with us to look at these coffin boards, and they turned out to be of incomparably superior quality. Ch'iao Hung bargained over the price with Provincial Graduate Shang for some time, but he was only willing to reduce it by 50 taels. If it were not for the fact that he is planning to go to the capital to participate in the metropolitan examination next year, for which he needs the money, he would not be willing to part with this set of coffin boards. He also indicated that he is taking into consideration the fact that it is our household that wants them. If it were anyone else, he would insist on 350 taels."

"Since it is Ch'iao Hung who is acting as advocate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well pay out the 320 taels and have them carried here. But see that you do it quietly, without:

Ringing bells and beating drums."

"He has already accepted our 250 taels," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so we only owe him another 70 taels of silver to close the deal."

He then went back to the rear compound and got Yüeh-niang to give him another 70 taels of "snowflake" silver, after which the two of them left to complete their errand.

At dusk that evening, who should appear but a crowd of idlers, who carried the coffin boards through the gate, wrapped in strips of red felt, put them down in the front courtyard, and unwrapped them for Hsi-men Ch'ing to look at. Sure enough, they turned out to be fine coffin boards. Artisans were promptly engaged to saw them open, and when they did, they exuded a pungent aroma. Each piece was five inches thick, two feet five inches wide, and seven feet five inches long.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart was filled with delight, and he showed them off to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "These coffin boards will pass muster."

Ying Po-chüeh praised them unstintingly, saying, "It could be said that these coffin boards are fated to be hers.

Every object has its rightful owner.

Since my sister-in-law had the good fortune to marry you, Brother, it is only appropriate that she should end up in possession of these coffin boards."

Then, turning to the artisans, he said, "If you only take the pains to do a good job, your employer will reward you with five taels of silver."

"We understand," the artisans replied, and then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to go to work in the front reception hall, working all night to construct the coffin as quickly as possible. But no more of this.

Ying Po-chüeh then enjoined Lai-pao, "Early tomorrow morning, at the fifth watch, you should go to invite Taoist Master P'an. If he is willing to come, you should accompany him back here. This matter will brook no delay."

When he had finished speaking, he continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company that evening in the front reception hall, looking on as the artisans worked on the construction of the coffin. It was not until the first watch that he got up to go home.

"Come back as soon as you can tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm afraid that Taoist Master P'an may arrive rather early."

"I understand," responded Ying Po-chüeh, after which he said goodbye and went out the gate.

To resume our story, Old Mother Feng and Nun Wang were keeping Li P'ing-erh company in her room that night, when who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who came in to see her after the conclave in the front compound broke up and wanted to go to sleep there.

Li P'ing-erh objected to this, saying, "You mustn't think of it. This room is:

Polluted and unclean,²¹

and the two of them are also here. It wouldn't be convenient. You go sleep somewhere else."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Nun Wang and Old Mother Feng were there, he went over to Chin-lien's quarters next door.

Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to close the postern gate and secure it with the crossbar, after which she told her to light a lamp, open her trunk, and get out several items of clothing and silver ornaments, and place them beside her.

First of all, she called Nun Wang over, gave her a five-tael ingot of silver, along with a bolt of silk, and said, "After I am dead, whatever you do, you must invite some fellow nuns to join you in recitations of the *Blood Pool Sutra* on my behalf."

"Mistress mine," expostulated Nun Wang, "you are worrying yourself over much. If Heaven only takes pity on you, you are likely to recover."

"You just put these things away," said Li P'ing-erh, "and don't tell the First Lady that I gave you any silver. Just say that I gave you this bolt of silk to compensate you for arranging the recitations of the sutra."

"I understand what you're saying," said Nun Wang, and she thereupon took possession of both the silver and the silk.

Li P'ing-erh then called over Old Mother Feng, picked up four taels of silver from beside her pillow, along with a white damask jacket, a yellow damask skirt, and a silver comb, and gave them to her, saying, "Old Feng, you're a familiar companion. You have served me from the time I was a child right up until the present time. Now, after I am dead, these articles of clothing and this ornamental comb can serve you as keepsakes, and you can use this silver to defray the cost of a coffin. And don't worry about the house. I'll talk to Father about it, so that you can continue to live there and act as a caretaker on his behalf, as it were. He's not about to evict you or anything like that."

Old Mother Feng accepted the silver and the clothing with one hand and knelt down to kowtow with tears in her eyes, saying, "It seems my luck is running out. As long as you remain alive I can count on you to look out for me. But if:

Anything untoward should happen to you,²²
what will become of me?"

Li P'ing-erh also called over the wet nurse Ju-i and gave her a purple damask jacket, a blue damask skirt, an old satin cloak, two hairpins with gold heads, and a silver cap ornament,²³ saying, "This is in recognition of the fact that you nursed my baby boy. Now, the boy has died, but, as I said, I didn't want you to bind up your breasts as though your job were over. It was my hope that as long as I remained alive, I might have further occasion to use you. Now, unexpectedly, it looks as though I am going to die, but I will talk to your master and the First Lady, and suggest that after my death, if the First Lady gives birth to a son, they should not get rid of you, but allow you to nurse her child. I am giving you these articles of clothing as a keepsake. Please don't take it amiss."

The wet nurse got down on her knees and kowtowed, saying with tears in her eyes, "I had truly hoped that I would be able to serve you to the end. You have never so much as gotten angry with me, or raised your voice to criticize me. It's just my bad luck that the boy died, and that you have contracted this fatal disorder. Please, whatever happens, do tell the First Lady that my husband is dead, and that as long as I live, I hope to be able to continue serving the master and mistress. If I were to leave, where would I go?"

When she had finished speaking, she accepted the clothes and ornaments, kowtowed, and then got up and stood to one side, while wiping the tears from her eyes.

Li P'ing-erh then called over Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, who knelt down before her while she addressed them, saying, "The two of you have also served me since you were children. Now, after I have died, I won't be able to look after you any more. You both have enough in the way of clothing, so there is no need to give you any, but I will give you these two pairs of gold-headed hairpins, and these two floral ornaments of gold as keepsakes. As my senior maidservant, Ying-ch'un, since Father has already had his way with you, there is no call for you to leave the household. I will ask the First Lady to let you serve in her quarters. As my junior maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, I'll ask the First Lady to look out for another family for you to serve, lest you be looked askance at for remaining in my quarters, and be subject to criticism by others as a slave without a master. After I'm dead, you may let your true colors show; but if you work for anyone else and affect the:

Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,
or endeavor to:

Do whatever you like for good or for ill,
the way you have been accustomed to do while in my service, no one will tolerate it."

Hsiu-ch'un knelt down on the ground and wept, saying, "Mother, I won't leave here even to save my life."

"Don't be silly," said Li P'ing-erh. "If you remain in these quarters, who will you serve?"

"I will keep vigil over your spirit tablet," said Hsiu-ch'un.

"Even though offerings may be made to my spirit tablet for a while," said Li P'ing-erh, "eventually the day will come when it will be burnt. You'll have no alternative but to leave then."

"I could serve the First Lady along with Ying-ch'un," said Hsiu-ch'un.

"Well, let's leave it at that," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'm afraid Hsiu-ch'un is still somewhat naive in her understanding of things."

After listening to Li P'ing-erh's injunctions, Ying-ch'un took possession of the head ornaments she had been given, while weeping so hard she could not get a word out. Truly:

Tear-filled eyes gaze into
tear-filled eyes;
The brokenhearted see off
the brokenhearted.²⁴

That night Li P'ing-erh managed to issue her final injunctions to everyone.

At dawn the next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room, and Li P'ing-erh asked him, "Have you purchased a coffin for me, or not?"

"The coffin boards were procured yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They're being made up into a coffin in the front compound right now, with a view to shocking you out of your indisposition. If you recover, we can always donate it to someone else."

"How much silver did you spend on it?" Li P'ing-erh went on to ask. "You shouldn't spend money indiscriminately, or you'll end up with not enough to live on."

"It wasn't much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I only paid a hundred some taels of silver."

"That's still too much," said Li P'ing-erh. "See that you get it prepared in advance and lay it out for me."

After talking with her for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back out to the front compound to watch the progress of the coffin construction.

Who should appear at this juncture but Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh, who came into her room and, seeing that her condition was extremely serious, asked, "Sister Li, how are you feeling?"

Li P'ing-erh grasped Yüeh-niang by the hand and wept, saying, "First Lady, I am not going to recover."

Yüeh-niang wept with her, saying, "Sister Li, if you have anything you want to say, the Second Lady is here with me, you can say it to the two of us."

"What have I got to say?" said Li P'ing-erh. "During these several years that we've been sisters, you've never let me down. I had really hoped to remain together with you until our heads of hair turned white, but, contrary to my expectations, my fate has turned out to be bitter. First, I lost my darling boy, and now, I've been so unfortunate as to come down with this awkward ailment, which is going

to be the death of me. After I'm dead, these two maidservants of mine will have no one to look after them. Since Father has already had his way with the senior maidservant, I suggest that she be assigned to your quarters, where she can wait on you. As for the junior maidservant, if you wish to employ her, then keep her. Otherwise, see if you can't arrange a monogamous marriage for her with some humble family, so there will be but:

One husband and a single wife.

That way she won't be subject to criticism as a slave without a master, and it would be a fitting reward for the service she has rendered me. In that case, my mouth and eyes will be content to remain closed after my death. In addition, the wet nurse Ju-i has repeatedly expressed her unwillingness to leave the household. If you consent to do me the favor of assenting to her wishes, it will be an appropriate reward for her service in nursing my child. And in the future, when your own ten months of pregnancy are up, if you bear a son, she can take over the job of breast-feeding him."

"Sister Li," said Yüeh-niang, "you can put your mind to rest about these matters. The two of us will take responsibility for taking care of them. We must:

Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

If you should end up:

High as the hills or deep as the sea,

I will arrange to have Ying-ch'un work for me, and Hsiu-ch'un work for the Second Lady. The maidservant who is assigned to the Second Lady's quarters at present is not a reliable worker and will have to be gotten rid of sooner or later. I'll have Hsiu-ch'un wait on her instead. As for the wet nurse Ju-i, although you say that she has no place to go, there is no room for her in my quarters. No matter whether I have a child or not, in the future I'll arrange a match for her with one of the servants, so that she can remain in the household as a servant's wife. That ought to take care of it."

Li Chiao-erh then spoke up from the side, saying, "Sister Li, you should stop worrying about these matters. The two of us will take responsibility for them. In the future, after your funeral observances are over, I'll take her into my quarters to wait upon me, and see that she receives preferential treatment."

Li P'ing-erh then told the wet nurse and her two maidservants to come over and kowtow to their two benefactors. Yüeh-niang was unable to control her tears.

Before long, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o came in to see how she was, and Li P'ing-erh bestowed a few sisterly words that were both kind and just upon each of them, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Later on, after Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and the others had left, leaving Yüeh-niang alone in the room with her, Li P'ing-erh wept quietly and said to her, "Mother, in the future, if you bear a son, be sure to raise him carefully so that he can be the root that perpetuates Father's ancestral line. Don't be as careless as I was and allow yourself to be undone by anyone else."

"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "I understand what you're saying."

Gentle reader take note: This single sentence had such an effect on Yüeh-niang that, later on, after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Chin-lien was no longer permitted to remain in the household, it was all due to her memory of this deathbed remark of Li P'ing-erh's. Truly:

It has always been true that gratitude for kindness

and festering resentment;

Even in a thousand or ten thousand years

will never be allowed to gather dust.

As they were speaking, who should appear but Ch'in-t'ung, who told them to straighten up the room and burn some incense because Taoist Master P'an from the Temple of the Five Peaks had arrived. Yüeh-niang supervised the maidservants as they cleaned up the room, prepared some clear tea brewed with purified water, and ignited some genuine "hundred-blend" incense.²⁵ Yüeh-niang and the other women then concealed themselves in the bedroom next door in order to eavesdrop on the proceedings.

Before long, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who ushered Taoist Master P'an into Li P'ing-erh's room. What did he look like? Behold:

On his head is a Taoist cap with the Five Peaks

wreathed in sunset clouds;

His body is appareled in a short robe of coarse

black cotton cloth.

His waist is bound by a girdle woven of

varicolored silken thread;

On his back he bears a sword of antique bronze

incised with a pine-grain pattern.²⁶

On his two feet he wears a pair of

double-looped hemp sandals;

In his hand he holds a five-luminary

demon-dispelling fan.²⁷

His eyebrows are peaked,

His two eyes are almond-shaped;

His mouth is foursquare,
Trailing a set of side whiskers.²⁸
His demeanor is awe-inspiring;
His appearance is imposing.
If he is not a roving immortal wandering
beyond the clouds,
He must hail from the Isles of the Blest
or the Jade Palace.

Lo and behold, as he came in through the postern gate and made his way around the screen-wall, just as he approached Li P'ing-erh's quarters, beneath the stylobate under the veranda, the Taoist master stepped backwards two paces, seemed to be berating someone, and repeated a few occult formulas, before he stepped inside, as the servants pulled the portiere aside, and approached the sickbed. Once there:

He focused his two eyes upon her,
Exerting the wise discernment of their divine vision,
Brandished his sword in one hand,
Performed calculations on the joints of his fingers
while pacing the dipper, and
Recited an incantation,²⁹
Instantly comprehending the situation.

Going out into the parlor, he proceeded to set up an incense table facing the exterior of the building, and Hsi-men Ch'ing ignited some incense.

After burning some written talismans, Taoist Master P'an cried out in a loud voice, "Divine marshal on duty this day, why have you not yet appeared?"

He then spurted a mouthful of consecrated water out of his mouth, whereupon a strong gust of wind arose, and a yellow-turbaned warrior³⁰ appeared before him. Behold:

His forehead is enveloped in a yellow silk turban;³¹
His body clad in a purple robe of embroidered silk.
A Lion Barbarian girdle³² tightly binds
his wolflike waist;
Leopard-skin trousers securely enclose
his tigerlike body.
He constantly wanders the highways of the clouds;
He is accustomed to navigating the astral winds.
The grotto heavens and blessed abodes³³
he traverses in an instant;
The sacred peaks, rivers, and Feng-tu
he visits in a snap of the fingers.
If a malevolent dragon wreaks havoc,
He can apprehend it from the bottom of the sea;
If evil sprites should make trouble,
He can smash their mountain lairs and nab them.
Within the halls of the Jade Emperor,
He is known as a talismanic functionary;
Before the carriage of the Northern Dipper,
He holds the title of celestial warrior.³⁴
He is always on duty before the altar
to protect the law;
He constantly visits the mundane world
to vanquish demons.³⁵
On his breast is suspended the bronze plaque
of the Board of Thunder;
In his hand he holds a brilliantly decorated
gilded battle-axe.³⁶

That divine marshal stood respectfully beneath the steps and said in a loud voice, "Having summoned me, what would you command me to do?"

Taoist Master P'an said, "The woman, née Li, of the Hsi-men household is unwell, and he has lodged an appeal on her behalf before my altar. I command you to apprehend the local tutelary god, and the six household spirits, in order to ascertain whether there are any evil spirits at work, and hale them before me. This matter will brook no delay."

When he had finished speaking, the spirit disappeared.

In a little while, Taoist Master P'an closed his eyes and changed countenance, sat upright at his place, and rapped his tablet of authority on the surface of the altar table, just as if he were hearing a case in court. It was some time before he stopped and came outside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him out to the summerhouse in the front compound and asked him what he had ascertained.

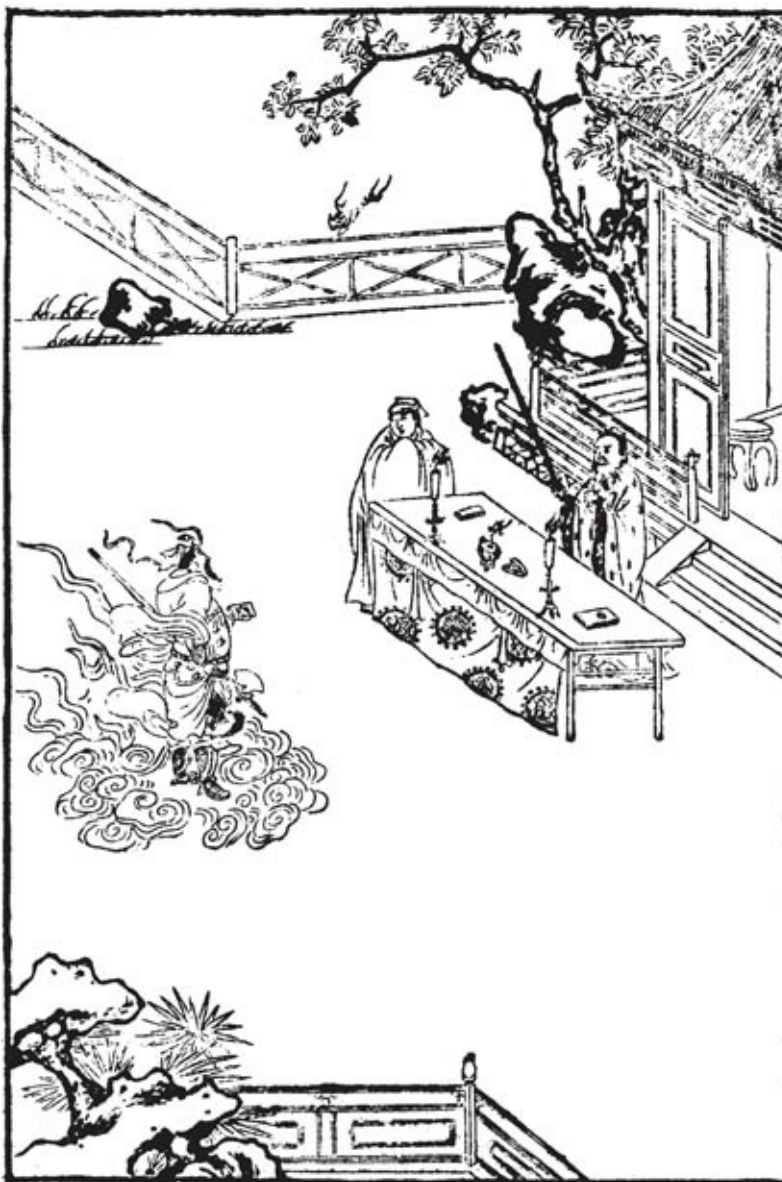
"Unfortunately," said Taoist Master P'an, "this woman is being sued in the court of the underworld by someone who suffered an injustice at her hands in a former existence. It is not a case of evil spirits, so they are not subject to apprehension."

"Ritual Master," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is there anything you can do to exorcise the source of the problem?"

"In the case of an:

Enemy or creditor,

from a previous existence," said Taoist Master P'an, "it is up to the plaintiff himself. If he is willing to drop the case, it may be dropped; but even the authorities of the underworld cannot force him to do so."



Taoist Master P'an Conjures Up a Yellow-turbaned Warrior

Because he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was courteous and sincere, he then went on to ask, "How old is your lady?"

"She was born in the year of the sheep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and is currently in her twenty-seventh year."

"All right then," said Taoist Master P'an, "let me perform a sacrifice at the altar to the star that governs her destiny, and see what happens to the lantern that corresponds to her fate."

"When will you perform the sacrifice?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And what will you need in the way of incense, paper money, and sacrificial offerings?"

"This evening," said Taoist Master P'an, "during the third watch, at midnight, I will delineate the boundaries of the sacred area with white ash, set up a lantern altar, invest it with yellow damask, place the lantern representing the star that governs her date of birth upon it, and make sacrificial offerings of the five grains, dates, and soup, without need of wine or meat. Then I will merely set out twenty-seven lanterns of destiny, corresponding to the years of her age, and cover them with a canopy. Nothing else will be required. While I am officiating at the sacrifice, chickens and dogs must be excluded from the premises, to prevent them from coming in and interfering with the proceedings. During the ceremony, you sir, having observed the appropriate ritual abstentions, should dress yourself in black, and prostrate yourself below the altar."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that all the suggested preparations were carried out to the letter and did not presume to enter the consecrated area, but remained in his study, where he performed his ablutions, observed the ritual abstentions, and changed into clean clothing. He also asked Ying Po-chüeh to remain with him rather than going home, in order to share a vegetarian repast with Taoist Master P'an.

During the third watch, when the setting up of the lantern altar had been completed, Taoist Master P'an took a seat in lofty isolation at the upper end of the consecrated area. The lantern altar was arrayed before him, with representations of the Green Dragon of the East, the White Tiger of the West, the Red Bird of the South, and the Dark Warrior of the North presiding over the four directions. Above it was suspended a three-tiered canopy, on which were represented the symbols of the twelve constellations correlated with the twelve earthly branches, arranged in a circle. Beneath this were arrayed the twenty-seven lanterns of destiny.

The celebrant began by declaiming the words of a petition, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in black, prostrated himself beneath the steps. The servants had all been excluded from the area, so that there was no one else present. The area was:

Ablaze with lamps and candles,
as the twenty-seven lanterns were simultaneously lighted. Taoist Master P'an, seated upon his ritual throne, let down his hair, brandished his sword, and:

Recited an incantation.

After which, he proceeded to:

Invoke the Dipper,

Imbibe the primordial breath,

Pace the void, and

Perambulate the jasper altar.

Truly:

When three sticks of incense are burnt

the Three Realms unite;

Each command that is issued results in

a clap of thunder.

Behold:

In the clear sky, the stars and moon

shine brightly,

When all of a sudden,

The earth turns black and the sky darkens.³⁷

The curtains suspended on all four sides

of the summerhouse,

Are suddenly swept by a gust of eerie wind.

Truly:

It is not the roaring of tigers,

Nor is it the droning of dragons.³⁸

It appears to penetrate the doors and

permeate the curtains;³⁹

It certainly destroys the flowers and

scatters the leaves.

It drives the clouds out of the hills;

And sends the rain back to the rivers.

The wild geese are separated from their mates

and cry in distress;

The gulls and herons in their startled flocks
seek the treetops.
The goddess Ch'ang-o hastens to batten down
her palace in the moon;
The wind-borne Lieh-tzu, high up in space,
calls out to be rescued.⁴⁰

In the wake of three powerful gusts of wind, a chill breeze blew in that extinguished every last one of Li P'ing-erh's twenty-seven lanterns of destiny. Only a single flame recovered, by the light of which Taoist Master P'an, seated on his ritual throne, was able to see clearly a figure clothed in white, who came in from outside, accompanied by two black-clad servitors and, holding a document in his hand, proceeded to present it before the altar. When Taoist Master P'an examined it, he saw that it was an arrest warrant issued by the court of the underworld, which bore three official seals.

Startled by this, he descended from his ritual throne and, stepping forward, urged Hsi-men Ch'ing to get to his feet, saying, thus and so, "Sir, please stand up. It seems that, in your lady's case:

One who has offended Heaven, has nowhere else to pray.⁴¹

Her lanterns of destiny have been extinguished. How then is she to be saved? I fear that her end is imminent."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he lowered his head without a word, and his eyes brimmed over with tears.

Weeping, he besought the exorcist, saying, "My only hope, Ritual Master, is that you can do something to save her."

"One's allotted years are hard to evade."

said Taoist Master P'an. "It will be difficult to save her."

He then expressed a desire to depart.

Hsi-men Ch'ing urged him repeatedly to stay, saying, "Wait until daybreak, and you can get an early start."

"We people who have left home to enter the priesthood," said Taoist Master P'an, "are accustomed to:

Hiking through the underbrush and sleeping in the dew;⁴²

Camping in the mountains and stopping over at temples.

It is only natural."

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not press him on the subject any further but ordered his attendants to bring out a bolt of fabric and three taels of silver as compensation for his performance of the ritual.

"I am a practitioner of the ultimate way of August Heaven," said Taoist Master P'an, "and have sworn an oath to Heaven itself that I would not presume to covet worldly wealth. Were I to do so, I would:

Suffer for my culpability."⁴³

Only after demurring repeatedly did he direct his acolyte to accept the fabric in order to make a Taoist robe, and then he prepared to take his leave and depart.

Before doing so, he enjoined Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "This evening, sir, you should observe the taboo against going into the sickroom, lest you bring a catastrophe upon yourself. Beware! Beware!"

Having finished speaking, he was escorted out to the front gate, where he:

Shook his sleeves in disdain and departed.⁴⁴

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the summerhouse to oversee the clearing away of the lantern altar. When he understood that there was no saving star to be hoped for, he was profoundly saddened, and when he sat down with Ying Po-chüeh, without his realizing it, his eyes overflowed with tears.

"This is merely an instance of the fact that everyone has a predetermined number of years to live," said Ying Po-chüeh. "When things come to such a pass, no amount of effort will avail. Brother, you should try to worry yourself less about it."

Then, upon hearing the sounding of the fourth watch, he said, "Brother, you are tired. You should get yourself some rest. I will go home for the time being, and come back tomorrow."

"I'll have a page boy get a lantern and see you on your way," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then ordered Lai-an to fetch a lantern and accompanied them outside, after which he saw to the closing of the gate and came back inside. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in the study all by himself, with a candle in his hand, feeling deeply disturbed at heart.

All he could do was give vent to long sighs as he thought to himself, "The ritual master warned me not to go into her sickroom, but how can I bear not to do so? Even if it should cost me my life, what of it? I feel the need to keep vigil, and have a word with her."

Thereupon, he went into her room and saw that Li P'ing-erh was lying with her face to the wall.

When she heard Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she turned over, and said to him, "My brother, why didn't you come in before?"

She then went on to ask, "What did that Taoist master have to say about the lantern ritual?"

"You can relax on that score," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The lanterns did not indicate anything to worry about."

"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "you're deceiving me. Just now, that wretch, with two other people in tow, appeared before me once again and troubled me for a while. He said, 'You may have invited a ritual master to come and exorcise me, but my plaint against you has already been approved by the authorities in the underworld. You will not be allowed to escape.' He was angry when he went away and is likely to come back to get me tomorrow."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:

Two streams of tears crisscrossed his face,
and he commenced to weep out loud, saying, "My sister, you should just set your mind at rest, and pay no attention to him. I had really hoped to be able to keep company with you throughout the days to come, but who could have anticipated that you would abandon me and go off this way? I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, would rather suffer the closing of my own mouth and eyes in death, rather than this:

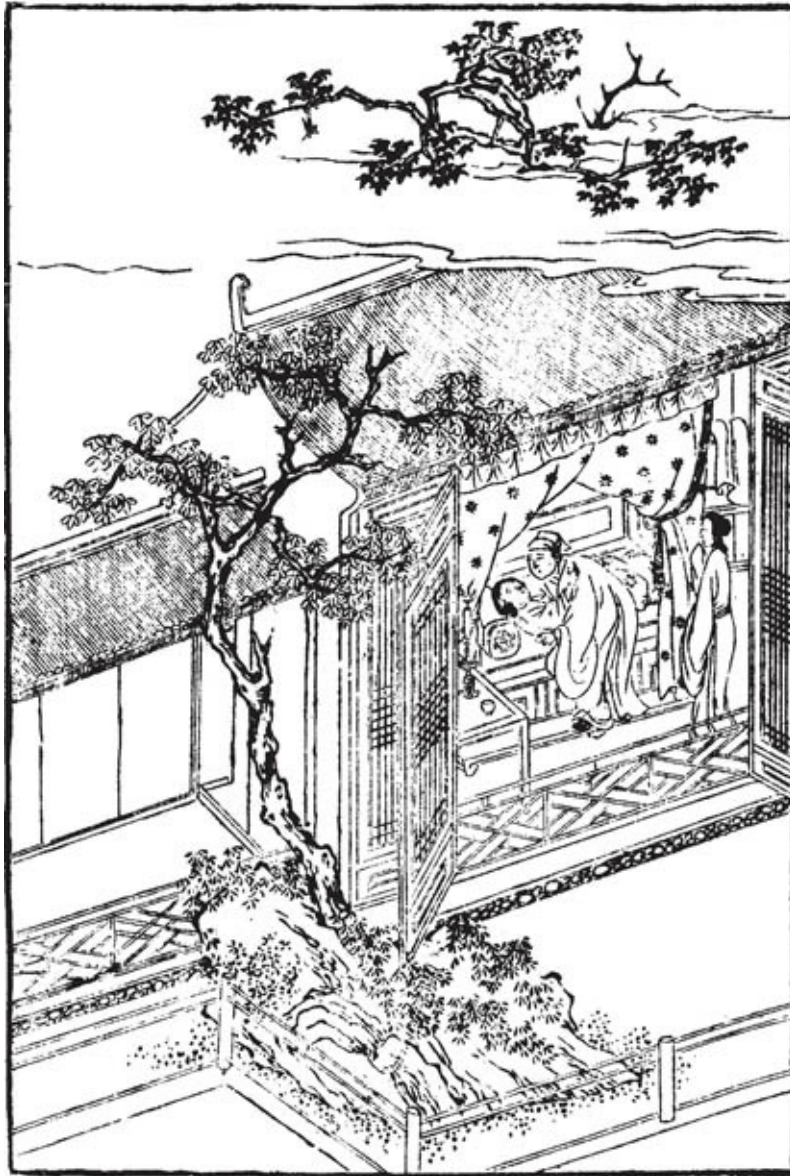
Stomach-turning and gut-wrenching suspense."⁴⁵

Li P'ing-erh put both arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck and gave way to:

Sobbing and wailing.

After weeping grievously for some time, she became too hoarse to cry audibly any longer and said, "My brother, I had hoped that we could:

Share our life together like a double-headed flower.



Hsi-men Ch'ing Weeps Painfully on Behalf of Li P'ing-erh

Who could have anticipated that today I would have to leave you in death? Taking advantage of what time is left before my eyes are closed, I'd like to say a few words to you. Your household wealth is extensive, and you are without paternal relatives to rely on, or anyone to assist you in managing it. You must consider carefully whatever you do, and not give way to the impulse of the moment. And you must not do anything to the detriment of the First Lady or the others. She is feeling poorly in her present condition, and, sooner or later, she may give birth to a child that can serve as a foundation for the perpetuation of your ancestral line, and prevent the

dissipation of your property. Moreover, you occupy an official post. From now on, you ought not to go out drinking so often and should endeavor to come home earlier when you do. Your household responsibilities are important. The situation will not be the same as when I was here to admonish you. If I die, who will there be to deter you with bitter-tasting but well-meant advice?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he felt just as though:

A knife were slashing his heart and liver,

and he wept, saying, "My sister, I understand what you're saying. Don't you worry yourself about me. I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, must have been:

Bereft of affinity and short on fortune,

in a former existence, to be:

Unable to remain husband and wife to the end,⁴⁶

with you in this incarnation. It pains me to death! Heaven is destroying me!"

Li P'ing-erh went on to say, "With regard to Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, I have already spoken to the First Lady about them. In the future, when I am dead, Ying-ch'un can be reassigned to wait on the First Lady. With regard to the junior maidservant, the Second Lady has already agreed to take responsibility for her. She lacks any satisfactory maidservant in her quarters, so she can be deputed to wait on her."

"My sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you don't need to instruct me on that score. Once you are dead, who would presume to separate your maidservants? And the wet nurse, also, will not be dismissed. They will all be expected to keep vigil over your spirit tablet."

"What's so important about the spirit tablet?" said Li P'ing-erh. "Once it's been brought home after the funeral, and the fifth of the seven weekly commemorations have been held, it can simply be burned, and that will be the end of it."

"My sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't you worry about any such thing. So long as I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, am alive, offerings will continue to be made to your spirit tablet."

As their conclave continued, Li P'ing-erh urged him, saying, "You'd better go get some sleep. It's late."

"I'm not going to sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll keep you company here in your room."

"I'm not about to die just yet," said Li P'ing-erh. "This room is contaminated with foul odor, and you'll be bothered by the smoke of the incense. Moreover, it won't be convenient for them to look after me with you here."

Hsi-men Ch'ing had no alternative but to issue instructions to the maidservants to look after their mistress with care, after which, he returned to the master suite in the rear compound and told Yüeh-niang in detail about how the lantern ritual had been of no avail.

"Just now, when I went into her room," he said, "I observed that she could still talk clearly enough. If Heaven will only take pity on her, I imagine she may recover yet. Who knows?"

"The sockets of her eyes have contracted," said Yüeh-niang. "Her lips have dried up, and her ears are burning. How can she be expected to recover? It's only a question of time. This ailment of hers is one that allows her to remain clearheaded and to speak distinctly right up until she stops breathing."

"Ever since she became a member of our household," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has never given offense to anyone, high or low. Moreover, she has a most accommodating disposition and never has a bad word to say about anybody. How can I bear to give her up?"

Having said this, he started to weep again, and Yüeh-niang also could not prevent her tears from falling, but we will say no more at present about this colloquy between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang.

To resume our story, Li P'ing-erh called for Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse and said, "Help me turn over to face the wall, so I can take a nap."

"What time has it gotten to be?" she then went on to ask.

"The cock has not yet crowed," said the wet nurse. "It must be sometime in the fourth watch."

She then said to Ying-ch'un, "Let's replace the absorbent grass paper under her body, help her turn over to face the wall, and cover her with a quilt, so she can get some sleep."

Everybody had been staying up all night without any sleep. Old Mother Feng and Nun Wang finally went to bed behind the latched door in the adjacent room, while Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un put their bedding down on the floor in front of their mistress and lay down to sleep.

They had not been asleep for more than an hour and were still:

In a state of profound slumber,

when Ying-ch'un dreamed that Li P'ing-erh got down off the k'ang and gave her a shake, saying, "The two of you look after the house. I'm going away."

She suddenly woke up with a start and saw that the lamp on the table had not yet gone out. When she looked at the bed, her mistress was still lying with her face to the wall, but when she felt with her hand, she found that there was no longer any breath coming out of her mouth. She did not know just when it happened, but:

Alas and alack;

She had stopped breathing and died.

What a pity that the life of such a beautiful woman,

Should turn into only an instance of a spring dream.⁴⁷

Truly:

When King Yama decrees that you will die

during the third watch;
The hour of your death cannot be delayed
until the fifth watch.⁴⁸

Ying-ch'un hastily woke everyone up, and they lit lamps and gathered to see what had happened. Sure enough, they observed that she was no longer breathing, and that her body was lying in a pool of blood. In a state of panic, they ran back to the rear compound to inform Hsi-men Ch'ing of the situation.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that Li P'ing-erh was dead, he and Wu Yüeh-niang hastened to the front compound:

Covering two steps with every one,
and lifted the quilt off her body. Behold:
The color of her face was unchanged;
Her body still retained some warmth;
She had slipped away unobtrusively.

Her body was clothed in nothing but a bodice of red satin.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, disregarding the fact that her body was stained with coagulated blood, embraced her with both arms and kissed her fragrant cheeks, protesting again and again, "My lost sister! My kind and just sister, with your accommodating disposition! How can you abandon me this way? I would rather that I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had died in your stead. I also am:

Not long for this world.
What have I got left to live for?"

There in her bedroom, he leapt three feet off the ground and started to cry out loud in full voice. Wu Yüeh-niang also wiped away her tears while weeping incessantly. Before long, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the members of the entire household, high and low, including the maidservants and waiting women, commenced weeping as though they were endeavoring to raise the roof, so that:

The sound of their lamentations shook the earth.⁴⁹

Yüeh-niang said to Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, "We don't know just when she died during the night. She doesn't even have an article of clothing on her body."

"I felt her body," said Meng Yü-lou, "and it's still warm. It must not be very long since she departed. If we don't seize the opportunity to put some clothes on her while her limbs are still warm, what are we waiting for?"

Yüeh-niang observed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was reclining face-to-face on top of her body, weeping, and crying out, "Heaven is bent on destroying me, Hsi-men Ch'ing! Sister, during the three years you've been a member of my household, you haven't enjoyed a single good day. I've been the ruination of you."

When Yüeh-niang heard these words, she was somewhat perturbed at heart and said, "What ridiculous palaver!

Weep for her a couple of times and forget it.

Have you no compunction about crying that way face-to-face with a corpse? You run the risk of being contaminated by the foul emanations from her mouth. If she hasn't enjoyed a single good day, who is there who has?

A person's death is like the extinction of a lamp.

Even half a day of borrowed time is not to be had.

If you were able to keep her alive, that would be fine, but when a person's allotted years are up, who can avoid going by this path?"

She then went on to instruct Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, "The two of you take the keys and look in the other room for the burial garments that she has prepared in advance, so that we can help each other get them onto her."

She also said, "Sister Six, the two of us had better see if we can straighten up her hair."

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Yüeh-niang, "Try to select two sets of garments that she was particularly fond of to dress her with."

Yüeh-niang accordingly instructed Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, saying, "Look for that newly tailored jacket of scarlet satin brocade, with the willow-yellow brocade skirt; that blouse of lilac-colored, cloud-patterned, figured silk, that she wore earlier this year for our visit to kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place, with the wide trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue; and that newly made up white satin jacket, with the skirt of yellow pongee."

Thereupon, with Ying-ch'un holding a lamp, and Meng Yü-lou holding the keys, they proceeded to open the interior door to the adjacent bedroom and take down the second lacquer chest adorned with gold tracery, which was stored on top of the bedstead with retractable steps and contained newly made up clothing. After opening the lid to the chest, Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh searched through it for some time and came up with the three outfits of clothing they were looking for, as well as a short, close-fitting purple satin camisole, a petticoat of white pongee, a pair of scarlet underdrawers, a pair of white satin woman's stockings, and a pair of figured ankle leggings. Li Chiao-erh carried these things over to the adjacent room and showed them to Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang was engaged, together with Chin-lien, in arranging Li P'ing-erh's chignon by the light of a lamp. They coiled it securely, wrapped it in a raven-black kerchief, and used four gold hairpins to hold it in place.

Li Chiao-erh then asked, "What-colored shoes should we look for to put on her?"

"Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "the pair of shoes that she fancied the most was that one made of scarlet brocade, embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach,' with white satin high heels. She hardly wore them more than a couple of times. We might as well try to find that pair to put on her."

"That will never do," said Yüeh-niang. "If she wore those when appearing before the court of the nether world, she'd be condemned

to jump into the fiery pit. Look instead for that pair that she wore the other day when she went to her sister-in-law's place outside the city gate, the pair made of purple silk brocade, with high heels, that is also embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach.' That would be a more appropriate pair for us to put on her."

When Li Chiao-erh heard this, she went to look in the four small lacquer chests adorned with gold tracery in which Li P'ing-erh kept her hundred or more pairs of shoes, but, though she went through them all, she failed to find them.

"When Mother wore them," said Ying-ch'un, "she always put them back here. Where could they have gone?"

She then went back to the kitchen to ask Hsiu-ch'un about it.

"I saw Mother wrap them up and put them in the commode on top of which the boxes rest," said Hsiu-ch'un.

When they opened the drawers of the commode, they finally located them, inside another large package of new shoes. The group of them then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to get the corpse properly clothed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then supervised a number of page boys in taking down and rolling up the scrolls of painting and calligraphy in the main reception hall, and creating an enclosed space there with standing screens, to which Li P'ing-erh's body was carried out on the leaf of a door and laid out in state. A brocade mat was placed underneath her body, and it was covered with a paper shroud. A table for her spirit tablet and an incense table were set up, and a vigil lamp was lighted. Two page boys were deputed to serve the spirit of the departed, one of them to strike the chime, and the other to burn paper money. Tai-an was dispatched to fetch Yin-yang Master Hsü as quickly as possible, so he could ascertain the time of her death and interpret his divinatory texts. Once Yüeh-niang had supervised the removal of the articles of clothing needed to dress the corpse, the door to Li P'ing-erh's bedroom was locked. Only the room with the k'ang was left open for the use of the maidservants and waiting women.

When Old Mother Feng saw that her mistress was dead, she wept as though she had:

Three noses from which to drivel,

As well as two eyes to shed tears.

Nun Wang, for her part, murmured monotonously as she recited the *Heart Sutra*,⁵⁰ the *Sutra of the Healing Buddha*,⁵¹ the *Scripture on Delivery from Enmity*,⁵² the *rangama Sutra*,⁵³ and the *Great Compassion Dh ran*,⁵⁴ as she besought the Bodhisattva King Who Escorts the Dead to conduct her on the road to the shades.

Meanwhile, in the front reception hall, Hsi-men Ch'ing beat his breast in sorrow, and couldn't help caressing the corpse, as he wept until his voice became hoarse, protesting again and again, without ceasing, "My kind and just sister, with your accommodating disposition."

While everyone was so preoccupied, the cock crowed, and Tai-an came back with Yin-yang Master Hsü, who saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with the words, "I can see that Your Honor is distressed. At what time was it that your lady died?"

"The precise time is not known," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At the time she went to sleep the fourth watch had already been sounded, and the people in her quarters were so fatigued that they were all fast asleep, so we don't know exactly when it was that she died."

"Which of your ladies was it?" asked Master Hsü.

"It was my sixth insignificant concubine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She had developed an awkward ailment that dragged on interminably right up to the present time."

"It doesn't matter," said Master Hsü, who then directed the attendants to light the lamps in the reception hall and lifted aside the paper shroud in order to have a look at her.

Calculating the time on his fingers, he said, "Since we are now precisely two-fifths of the way through the fifth watch, she must have expired during the previous watch, which corresponds to the earthly branch *ch'ou*, or the ox."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered that a writing brush and inkstone be provided and asked Master Hsü to interpret his divinatory texts.

Master Hsü, by the light of the lamps, opened his black bag, took out an almanac with its perpetual calendar, and consulted it. Having ascertained her maiden name and the eight characters that determined her horoscope, he proceeded to pronounce as follows:

The deceased wife, née Li, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, an officer of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the *hsin-wei* year of the Yüan-yü reign period; and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month of the *ting-yü* year of the Cheng-ho reign period. The fact that this day of her death is a *ping-tzu* day of a *wu-hsü* month indicates a conflict between the celestial stems and earthly branches, which makes it an inauspicious day for any undertaking and portends a double bereavement. The baleful spirit of the departed is ten feet high and is headed in a southwesterly direction. If it encounters the baleful spirit of the Year God,⁵⁵ it will portend a fatal situation. The members of her immediate family should abstain from crying until after they have put on their mourning clothes, when it will not matter. On the day of the encoffining ceremony, people born in the year of the dragon, the year of the tiger, the year of the cock, and the year of the snake should stay out of the way, although relatives by marriage need not do so.

At this point, Wu Yüeh-niang sent Tai-an out to instruct Master Hsü to proceed with consulting the *Black Book*⁵⁶ about what the future might hold in store for her.

Master Hsü, accordingly, consulted his esoteric yin-yang texts and pronounced:

Today is a *ping-tzu* day, and her death took place during the *chi-ch'ou* hour, so she is governed by the zodiacal palace Precious Vase⁵⁷ above, which corresponds to the area of Shantung below. In her former life, she was the son of a family named Wang in Pin-chou and was guilty of killing a pregnant ewe. Consequently, in this life she was reborn as a female in the year of the sheep, her nature was gentle and compliant, and she was given to artifice from her earliest years. Both her father and her mother died, and she had no relatives on whom she could depend. Initially, she entered someone's household as a concubine but suffered from the hostility of his legitimate wife. Later, upon acquiring a husband of her own, she found that they were incompatible, and her fate was crossed by the "three penalties" and "six banes."⁵⁸ Although she acquired a distinguished husband in her years of maturity, she suffered from continual ailments, and the "matched shoulders" in her horoscope. She gave birth to a son, but he died prematurely, and her suppressed anger brought on hemorrhaging from her lower body that resulted in her death. Earlier, on the ninth day of this month, her soul left her to be reborn as the daughter of Commander Yüan in the metropolis of Pien-liang, or K'ai-feng prefecture, in Honan province. The difficulties she encounters there imperil her survival, but she will endure to the age of nineteen, when she will marry a wealthy man of much greater age than herself. She will enjoy prosperity during her mature years, and live to the age of forty-one, when she will succumb to a fit of anger and die.

When he had finished his prognostication from the *Black Book*, the assembled womenfolk all sighed with wonder. Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Master Hsü to ascertain what would be auspicious days for breaking ground for her tomb, and for the burial ceremony.

"Permit me to ask Your Honor," said Master Hsü, "how long do you intend for her to lie in state?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing wept, saying, "She still looks so vibrantly alive. How can I bear to send her on her way? I'd like to keep her here until after the fifth weekly commemoration."

"There are no appropriate days for burying her in the fifth week," said Master Hsü, "but there are in the fourth week. I would suggest that you break ground for her tomb at noon on the eighth day of the tenth month, which is a *ting-yu* day; and that the burial ceremony should take place at 10:00 AM on the twelfth, which is a *hsin-ch'ou* day. The horoscopes of all six members of the family will not create any conflicts on that day."

"All right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the funeral procession will set out on the twelfth day of the tenth month, without fail."

Master Hsü, thereupon, wrote out the death certificate and placed it on the body of the deceased, after which, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The encoffining ceremony should take place at 8:00 AM on the nineteenth. Your household will be responsible for making all the necessary preparations."

By the time Master Hsü had been ushered out the gate, the day had already dawned. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ch'in-t'ung, riding on a donkey, outside the city gate to invite the attendance of Hua the Elder, after which, he deputed teams of servants to go to the homes of all the other relatives of the family and inform them of Li P'ing-erh's death. He also sent someone to the yamen to request a leave of absence, so he could remain at home to take charge of the funeral arrangements. He sent Tai-an to the shop on Lion Street to obtain twenty bolts of bleached Hsiang-yang ramie and thirty bolts of porous ramie fabric, and he arranged for Tailor Chao to engage the services of a considerable number of tailors, who were put to work in an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard. They were hired for the purpose of making the marquees and tablecloths that would be required for the funeral, the burial clothes and waistband for the encoffining ceremony, and the blouses and skirts for the womenfolk in their respective chambers. In addition, white T'ang-style caps and long white robes were supplied for each of the page boys and other servants. He also weighed out a hundred taels of silver and entrusted them to Pen the Fourth with the mission of going to the specialty shops outside the city gate and urging them to provide thirty bolts of lustrous hemp fabric and two hundred lengths of yellow damask suitable for the mourning garments of relatives of different degrees of mourning. He then went on to arrange for carpenters to erect a large, thirty-foot-wide, covered structure in the main courtyard.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing contemplated the habits, conduct, and looks of Li P'ingerh, it suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten to have a portrait of her painted.

Calling over Lai-pao, he asked him, "Where is there a good painter to be found, who is skilled at making portraits? I'd like to find one in order to make a posthumous portrait of her. I had completely forgotten about this matter."

"That Master Han who painted some standing screens for us in the past," said Lai-pao, "was formerly a court painter attached to the Hsüan-ho Academy. He has lost his position there and returned home, but he is an excellent portraitist."⁵⁹

"Where does he live?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go at once and invite him to come here."

Lai-pao nodded in assent and proceeded to set off on this errand.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had been up all evening without any sleep and had been busy through all five watches of the night, in addition to which, he was suffering from the sorrows of bereavement, so that his spirits were disturbed, and he was out of sorts and resorted to cursing the maidservants and kicking the page boys. As he kept vigil over the dead body of Li P'ing-erh, he couldn't help weeping and howling with grief. Tai-an, who remained at his side, also wept until he could neither weep nor utter a sound. Meanwhile, Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, were behind the curtain, sharing responsibility for directing the maidservants from the various quarters and the servant wives as they went about their tasks.

When she saw the way in which Hsi-men Ch'ing had given himself over to crying until his voice was hoarse, refused the offer of so much as a drink of tea, and was manifestly out of sorts, Wu Yüeh-niang said, "Just look at the ridiculous way he's carrying on! If she's dead, she's dead, and that's that.

You can't cry her back to life again.

Weep for her a couple of times and forget it.

All he seems bent on is stretching out the weeping as long as he can stand it. He hasn't gotten any sleep for two or three nights and hasn't even taken the time to comb his hair or wash his face. He's been busy through all five watches of the night, without so much as a taste of:

Saffron soup or flavored water.⁶⁰

Not even an iron man could take it. If he would only comb his hair and come outside for something to eat, he might be able to keep going; but, slight as he is, if he were to collapse, what would we do?"

"Do you mean to say he hasn't even combed his hair or washed his face?" said Meng Yü-lou.

"It would have been a good start if he had washed his face," said Yüeh-niang, "but, a while ago, when I sent a page boy to ask him to return to the rear compound and wash his face, he kicked him outside. Who would venture to ask him again?"

"Whoever saw the like!" exclaimed Chin-lien, picking up where Yüeh-niang left off. "When I went into the room a while ago to look for some garments, did I not admonish him with the best of intentions, saying, 'Although you may have lost someone, you're only wearing yourself to a frazzle by carrying on this way. If you come and have something to eat in your room before you continue, it won't delay anything.' But he opened his red eyes wide, and cursed me, saying, 'You dog-fucked whore! What business is it of yours?' The fact is that, nowadays, if I'm not to be fucked by the dog, who else is there to fuck me? The unreasonable good-for-nothing! All he does is claim that everyone else is giving him a hard time."

"When she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive," said Yüeh-niang, "how could he help being pained? But even if you're pained, you ought to take it easy, rather than letting it all hang out this way. When a person is dead, to caress her lip to lip, without paying any attention to whether or not there are foul emanations from her mouth, and howl with grief that way, is no way to

carry on. When I criticized him with a few words, what should he do but come out with the claim that during the last three years she hasn't enjoyed a single good day. As though, every day, she'd been required to:

Carry water and turn the millstone."

"That's not it at all," said Meng Yü-lou. "It's not that Sister Li had anything to complain about. But she has suffered from Father's propensity to sort people differentially into:

Three classes and nine categories."

"If she was able to enjoy her days," said Chin-lien, "it would appear that some people are more privileged than others, when we should all be:

Walking along the same gangplank."

As they were speaking, who should appear but Ch'en Ching-chi, holding nine lengths of watered-silk in his hand, who said, "Father has ordered that you ladies should cut handkerchiefs out of this material for the use of the women in each of your quarters, and that, if anything is left over, it can be used to make skirts for you ladies."

Yüeh-niang took the silk and then said, "Son-in-law, go and invite your father to come in here and have a bite to eat. It's already nearly noon, and he hasn't had so much as a sip of tea."

"I wouldn't dare do that," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "A while ago, when one of the page boys invited him to have something to eat, he kicked him nearly to death. Why should I risk pestering him?"

"If you won't ask him," said Yüeh-niang, "wait until I send someone else to ask him to come and eat."

In a little while, she called over Tai-an and said to him, "Your master hasn't yet had anything to eat but has been crying all day long. You take some food in to him, and take advantage of the presence of Licentiate Wen, to get him to share something with him."

"If you invite Master Ying the Second and Master Hsieh to come over," said Tai-an, "and wait until after they get here to send someone in with the food, I guarantee that it won't take more than a few words on their part to get him to eat."

"You filthy-mouthed jailbird!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "You're just like a:

Tapeworm in his belly.

We womenfolk of his are no match for you. How can you be so sure that only if those two come over will he consent to eat anything?"

"You ladies don't understand," said Tai-an. "Those two are Father's closest friends. At drinking parties, large or small, he is never without them. If Father consumes three mace worth of refreshments, they will have three mace worth, and if Father is content with two mace worth, they will settle for two. No matter how upset Father may be, they have but to say a few words before:

His eyebrows blossom and his eyes light up."⁶¹

They continued talking for a while, until Ch'i-t'ung showed up with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta.

The two of them, upon their arrival, no sooner came in the door than they prostrated themselves on the ground in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and wept for some time, repeating, over and over again, the words, "My kind and just sister-in-law."

This provoked both P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou into cursing them, saying, "The lousy oily mouthed jailbirds! Do they suggest that none of the rest of us are kind or just?"

When the two of them had finished their weeping, they got to their feet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned their salutation.

The two of them commenced to weep all over again, saying, "Brother, it is most distressing, most distressing."

They were then ushered into the anteroom, where they exchanged greetings with Licentiate Wen and sat down.

Ying Po-chüeh was the first to speak, asking, "When did our sister-in-law die?"

"She stopped breathing at two o'clock in the morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It was already past the fourth watch when I got home," said Ying Po-chüeh. "When my wife asked how she was, I said, 'All we can do is hope that the good deeds she has done in secret will avail. Sister-in-law's illness is already in its final stages.' Who would have thought that I had no sooner fallen asleep than I had a dream in which Brother sent a servant to invite me to attend a party at your place in celebration of an official promotion and urged me to come as quickly as possible. Upon arrival, I saw that you were dressed entirely in scarlet clothing. You took two jade hairpins out of your sleeve to show me and told me that one of them was broken. After examining them for some time, I said, 'Brother, it's too bad. This one that is broken is made of jade, while the one that is intact is made of artificial crystal.' But you insisted that they were both made of jade. My wife and I were asleep together when I woke up and said to myself that this dream boded no good. My wife noticed that I was smacking my lips and asked me who I was talking to, but I said, 'It's something you don't know about. I'll tell you in the morning.' But when morning came, who should appear but your servant, dressed in white mourning garments, which led me to stamp my feet in consternation. And now, sure enough, Brother, I see that you are wearing mourning clothes."

"I had a dream just like yours last night," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I dreamed that my kinsman Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital had sent me a set of six hairpins, one of which was broken. I said it was too bad, and I was just telling my wife about it in the middle of the night when, unexpectedly, we learned that the lady in the front compound had stopped breathing. Heaven must be blind to leave me so destitute! I would rather that I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had died in her stead, rather than having to confront this event. In the future, whenever I think of her during any:

Single hour or half a minute,

how can I help but be pained at heart? What have I ever done to anyone that Heaven should now see fit to rob me so egregiously of my beloved!⁶² First that child of ours died, and now she too has departed:

With her legs stretched out straight."⁶³

What have I still got to live for in this world? Though in my home:

The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,
what good will it do me?"

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "these sentiments of yours are wrong. It is true that my sister-in-law has been a good wife to you, and when she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive, how could you help being pained at heart? But the fact is that you are not only the possessor of considerable wealth, but also have an official career before you. You are like the bastion of Mount T'ai, upon which the members of this entire household, both high and low, are dependent. If anything were to happen to you, what would become of them? These other ladies of yours, for example, would be left without a husband to support them. As the saying goes:

So long as one of us lives, all three will live;

Whenever one of us perishes, all three will die.⁶⁴

Brother, you are not only intelligent, but clever. What need is there for your brothers to point these things out to you? It is no wonder that the death of our sister-in-law in the springtime of her youth is something the pain of which is hard to get over, hard to survive. But when you have put on your mourning clothes, arranged for Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to recite scriptures on her behalf, mounted an impressive funeral procession, and seen that she is properly buried in her tomb, your feelings for her will have been given full expression, as is only appropriate in commemoration of your relationship with her. What more can you do? You must set your mind at rest."

At the time, this single conversation with Ying Po-chüeh had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that:

The ground of his heart was profoundly affected;

The obstruction in his mind was abruptly removed.⁶⁵

and he stopped weeping. Before long, when tea was served, he actually drank it.

He then called for Tai-an and said to him, "Go back to the rear compound, and tell them to prepare some food for me to share with your Second Master Ying, Licentiate Wen, and Master Hsieh."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "do you mean to say that you haven't even eaten yet?"

"Ever since you left," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been busy all night. Up until now, I haven't had so much as a taste of anything to eat."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it is foolish of you not to eat. As the saying goes:

It is preferable to forfeit your capital,

Rather than opting to suffer from hunger.⁶⁶

Is it not said in the *Hsiao-ching*, or *Classic of Filial Piety*, 'People should be taught that the dead should not hurt the living,⁶⁷ and that disfigurement should not lead to the detriment of life'?⁶⁸ The dead are dead, and the survivors must continue to get on with their lives. Brother, you must get ahold of yourself."

Truly:

A few words serve to disclose the proper path
to a gentleman;

A single speech suffices to awaken the sleeper
from his dream.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 63

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES OFFER FUNERAL OBLATIONS AT A MEMORIAL FEAST; HSI-MEN CH'ING IS REMINDED OF LI P'ING-ERH WHILE WATCHING A DRAMA

Even among the twelve jasper terraces¹ and jeweled
balustrades of paradise,
Once the alabaster blossoms have fallen, they are
unlikely to bloom again.
Even medications concocted out of dragon's beard²
have not been efficacious;
Though pills were being made up from bear's gall,
they weren't ready in time.
Behind hibiscus curtains the night brings sorrow,
the red candles have expired;
Within paper windows, as autumn comes to an end,
the kingfisher quilt is cold.
One feels empathy with the goose that has lost
it's fellows and flies alone;
As frost falls and the wind rises, it's image
appears in forlorn isolation.

THE STORY GOES that on that day, as a result of Ying Po-chüeh's persuasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing wiped away his tears, ceased his weeping, and ordered a page boy to go back to the rear compound and bring them some food.

Before long, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second arrived, performed their obeisances before the spirit tablet of the deceased, saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, and communicated their distress at his bereavement. They were invited into the anteroom, where they sat down with the others.

Meanwhile, Tai-an went back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "How come you ladies did not believe me? Master Ying the Second had no sooner arrived than, with a single conversation, he succeeded in persuading Father to have something to eat."

"You lousy inveterate jailbird!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Since you spend all day outside the house playing the role of pander for him, it's scarcely surprising that you understand his character."

"I've attended the master since my childhood," said Tai-an. "How could I fail to be familiar with his innermost feelings?"

"Just who are the people sitting in the anteroom who will be sharing a meal with him?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Your elder brother and your second brother have just showed up," said Tai-an. "Along with Licentiate Wen, Second Master Ying, Master Hsieh, Manager Han, your son-in-law, and Father, there are eight in all."

"Ask our son-in-law to come back here and eat in the rear compound," said Yüeh-niang. "Why should he insist on joining the party?"

"He has already sat down with them," said Tai-an.

"You and the other page boys go to the kitchen and take the food out to them," said Yüeh-niang. "And take an extra bowl of congee for Father to eat. He hasn't had any breakfast this morning."

"What other page boys are there?" said Tai-an. "I'm the only one left at home. All the rest have been deputed to announce the death to friends and relatives, to burn paper money, or to buy things. And Wang Ching has been sent to Kinsman Chang Kuan's place to borrow a cloud-shaped gong for the occasion."

"Why don't you get that slave Shu-t'ung to help you out?" said Yüeh-niang. "Though I suppose he's:

Reluctant to set the fins on his
silk hat aflutter."³

"Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung have been assigned to serve before her spirit tablet," said Tai-an, "one of them to strike the chime, and the other to burn paper money. And as for Ch'un-hung, Father has sent him to go with Pen the Fourth to exchange the damask that he bought earlier today. He doesn't think it's good enough and wants to exchange it for a grade of damask that costs six mace per length, in order to make mourning garments for the visitors."

"If you stop to consider it," said Yüeh-niang, "that damask that cost five mace per length would have been good enough, but he would insist on exchanging it."

She then went on to say, "You call that little slave Hua-t'ung off his post and get him to help you take the food out. What are you waiting around for?"

Thereupon, Tai-an, together with Hua-t'ung, proceeded to carry the food out to the front compound, in:

Large platters and large bowls,
and set up an Eight Immortals Table on which to serve it.

While the company were eating their meal, who should appear but P'ing-an, carrying in his hand an accordion-bound calling card, who reported, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling from the yamen has sent along a professional scribe, and three members of the guard unit, for your benefit and would like a note of acknowledgment."

After reading the card, Hsi-men Ch'ing issued instructions, saying, "Get three mace of silver to reward the messenger, and write out an accordion-bound thank-you note, indicating that the sender is in one-year mourning, in reply to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."

When the company had finished their meal, the utensils were cleared away.

Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-pao, who brought with him the painter Master Han.

After saluting him, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I would trouble you, sir, to paint a portrait of my deceased consort."

"I understand," said Master Han.

"If there is any further delay," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I fear that the appearance of her countenance will have changed."

"It doesn't matter," said Master Han. "I can capture her likeness even after death."

Just as they were finishing their tea, P'ing-an suddenly came in and announced that Hua the Elder from outside the city gate had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing accompanied Hua Tzu-yu as he wept in front of the spirit tablet for a while, after which, salutations were exchanged as he joined the rest of the company.

He then went on to ask, "At what time did she die?"

"She stopped breathing at 2:00 AM," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was still speaking:

Clearly and distinctly,
shortly before her death. She had not been asleep for long when her maidservant got up to see how she was and found that she had stopped breathing."

Hua Tzu-yu, upon noticing that the young attendant standing beside Master Han was holding an easel, and that he had pulled a painting brush and some pigments out of his sleeve, said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother-in-law, are you planning to have her portrait painted?"

"I am so heartsick over her death," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I can't bear not to have an image of her likeness that I can look at from time to time to remind me of her."

He then issued instructions that the womenfolk from the rear compound should stay out of the way and then lifted aside the curtain and led Master Han, along with Hua the Elder and the rest of the company, into the partitioned area in which Li P'ing-erh was lying in state.

Master Han then proceeded to lift the funeral banderole aside with his hand and concentrated the gaze of those vigilant organs of his, with their:

Five concentric rings,
Eight precious attributes, and
Two spots of magic liquid,⁴

upon the sight revealed below. He saw that her hair was done up in a raven-black kerchief, and that, although she had been ill for a long time:

Her coloration was still lifelike,⁵ and
Her countenance remained unaltered.

Although she appeared sallow than before, her lips were still adorably red and moist. Hsi-men Ch'ing could not help wiping the tears from his eyes as he wept at the sight.

Thereupon, Lai-pao and Ch'in-t'ung set up the easel at her side and laid out the pigments. Master Han took in her appearance at a glance, and the company crowded around him, urging him to begin to paint.

Ying Po-chüeh ventured to address him, saying, "Sir, you must realize that this is the visage of an invalid. In the past, when she was well:

Her face was fuller than this, and
Her countenance was enchanting."⁶

"There is no need for the venerable gentleman to instruct me," said Master Han. "I understand the situation. May I venture to ask Your Honor, is this, by any chance, the same person that I caught a glimpse of formerly, on the first day of the fifth month, when she was paying a visit to the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak?"

"She is that very one," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was still herself at the time. If you will endeavor to remember what she looked like, sir, and paint one full-length portrait, as well as a half-length one to be worshipped beside her spirit tablet, I will present you with a bolt of satin, and ten taels of silver to boot."

"With regard to Your Honor's instructions," said Master Han, "I will, of course, do my best."

In hardly any time at all, he succeeded in producing a half-length portrait. Truly:

Her jade face exhibits the rare beauty
of a secluded flower;

Her full flesh is a delicate jade that
exudes its own bouquet.

When he showed it to the assembled company, they saw that it was, indeed, a portrait of a beauty.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had looked at it, he said to Tai-an, "Take it back to the rear compound and show it to the ladies, to see what they think. If they find anything wrong with it, come tell us, so that it can be corrected."

Tai-an, accordingly, took it back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "Father says that you ladies should examine this portrait of the Sixth Lady to see how well it is done. If you find any feature that is not true to life, say what it is, so that Master Han can correct it."

"Why that:

Inveterate mischief-maker!"

exclaimed Yüeh-niang.

"Nobody knows where the dead end up going to.



Master Han Produces a Portrait as a Posthumous Memento

And yet he insists on having her portrait painted. It doesn't even resemble her all that much."

P'an Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "And where are her children, if her likeness is to be perpetuated in the form of a

portrait so they can:

Kowtow and perform obeisances,

before it? In the future, when all six of his womenfolk have died, he'd better have portraits painted of all six of us."

Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh took the portrait in hand and examined it, saying, "First Lady, come and see. This painting depicts her the way she looked when she was well. She's dolled up very vividly, but her lips look a little flat."

"The left side of her forehead is a bit too low," said Yüeh-niang. "And her eyebrows were more curved than those depicted here. But it's amazing that this gentleman could capture such a likeness from her dead body."

"He caught a glimpse of the Sixth Lady at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak," explained Tai-an. "Just now, he was able to produce this likeness from memory."

In a little while, who should appear but Wang Ching, who came in and said, "If you ladies have had a chance to examine it, I've been instructed to have it taken back outside. Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has arrived and is anxious to have a look at it."

Tai-an, accordingly, took it back to the front compound and said to Master Han, "The ladies in the rear compound say that her lips are a bit flat, the left corner of her forehead is a bit too low, and her eyebrows should be made to curve a little more."

"That's no problem," said Master Han, and he took up his brush forthwith, made the desired corrections, and then presented it to Ch'iao Hung for his approval.

"This portrait of my kinswoman is masterfully done," announced Ch'iao Hung.

"It lacks only the breath of life."⁷

Hsi-men Ch'ing was delighted by this response and proceeded to toast Master Han with three cups of wine. After he had been wined and dined, he rewarded him with a bolt of silk and ten taels of silver, presented to him upon a red lacquer tray.

He then told him, "Finish the half-length portrait first, as I want to hang it up immediately. As for the full-length portrait, it will be all right as long as it's ready in time for the funeral procession. She must be depicted in bright blue and green style, with pearls and trinkets adorning her chignon, wearing a scarlet full-sleeved variegated brocade robe, over a flower-sprigged skirt. And it should be mounted on patterned damask, with ivory knobs on the ends of the roller."

"There is no need for you to instruct me any further," said Master Han. "I understand what is wanted."

He then accepted the silver, told his young attendant to carry the easel, bowed in farewell, and went out the gate.

Ch'iao Hung and the others spent some time looking over the newly constructed coffin, after which, he said, "I suppose the preliminary laying out ceremony for my kinswoman will be performed today."

"Right now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as soon as the coroner's assistant and his workers arrive, we will carry out the preliminary laying out. The encoffining ceremony will take place on the third day."

After finishing his tea, Ch'iao Hung said his farewells, stood up, and departed.

Before long, the coroner's assistant and his workers arrived to perform their functions. The papier-mâché funerary objects were made up, and the burial clothes laid out. Hsi-men Ch'ing himself performed the ceremony of swabbing the eyes of the deceased with a ball of damp cotton, so she could see her way more clearly in the underworld, and had Ch'en Ching-chi play the role of a filial son by closing her eyelids. Hsi-men Ch'ing then came up with an imported pearl, which he inserted into her mouth. In no time at all, the preliminary laying out was completed satisfactorily, she was left to lie in state as before, the curtains were let down, and the entire household, high and low, wept to mark the occasion.

Lai-hsing had already obtained from a shop that specialized in burial objects for the dead gold-flecked effigies of four maidens to wait on her, bearing a chamber pot, a towel, a washbasin, and a comb, respectively. They wore pearl necklaces and enchased silver pendant earrings that looked just like the real thing, and they were dressed in clothes of variegated satin. Two of them were placed to each side of the body. Before her spirit tablet there were arrayed antique bronze incense burners and vases from the Shang and Chou dynasties, as well as candlesticks and incense cases, made to order by pewterers, that graced the table on which they were placed:

With a glitter that rivals the sun's.

Ten taels of silver were also weighed out for a silversmith to be made into three sets of silver ceremonial goblets.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the anteroom in the front courtyard, deciding, with the help of Ying Po-chüeh, how to handle the record books for the expenses of the funeral proceedings. To begin with, he weighed out five hundred taels of silver and a hundred strings of cash and entrusted them to Han Tao-kuo to keep account of. Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing were put in charge of making the necessary purchases, both large and small, and were also made responsible for the outside kitchen. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, and Manager Kan Jun, the four of them, were to take turns keeping company with the guests who came and went to offer condolences. Ts'ui Pen was placed in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear. Lai-pao was put in charge of the outer storeroom. Wang Ching was given responsibility for the wine cellar. Ch'un-hung and Hua-t'ung were deputed to be in attendance before the spirit tablet. P'ing-an was responsible every day, with the help of four orderlies, for striking the cloud-shaped gong, and presenting incense sticks and paper money to the guests whenever they arrived. The professional scribe, along with another four orderlies, were stationed at the main gate to record the names of the visitors, hold the baldachin on the days when scriptures were being recited, be available to carry the heraldic pennants, and, when they had nothing else to do, help guard the gate. Once these duties had all been assigned, they were written down and posted on a screen wall, for the benefit of the parties concerned as they went about their respective tasks.

Lo and behold, at this juncture, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the local imperial estates, sent people to deliver sixty pine planks, thirty stems of sturdy bamboo, three hundred reed mats, and a hundred lengths of hemp cord, together with his calling card, which they showed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who rewarded the head messenger with five mace of silver and sent him back with a card indicating that he was in one-year mourning.

He then directed the carpenters to raise the main beam of the temporary covered structure they were erecting in order to enlarge it further, so that it would accommodate two portals, with a screen wall in between. He also told them to erect an eighteen-foot-wide covered structure in front of the kitchen in the front compound, and a forty-two-foot-wide structure outside the main gate for the display of placards detailing the particulars of the funereal arrangements.

Twelve Buddhist monks from the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Required, were engaged to come and recite sutras for the salvation of the deceased. Two waiters were hired to be on duty every day in order to provide a regular supply of tea from a local tea house, and two cooks were engaged to work in the outer kitchen and produce whatever foods might be called for.

That day, Hua Tzu-yu and Wu the Second visited for a while and then got up and left.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Licentiate Wen to draft the text of an obituary notice that he intended to have printed and told him to include the words, "My poor wife has unexpectedly died."

When Licentiate Wen surreptitiously showed this to Ying Po-chüeh for his advice, Ying Po-chüeh said, "You cannot logically say such a thing as long as my sister-in-law Wu occupies the position of his legitimate wife. How can he disseminate such a statement without arousing criticism? Even Brother Wu K'ai is certain to be distressed at heart. Let me take the subject up with him at my leisure. You had better not put it that way."

They continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company until evening arrived, at which they separated and returned home.

That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go back to the rear compound but had a summer bedstead set up beside Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, surrounded by standing screens and provided with the necessary bedding, so that he could sleep there by himself, with Ch'un-hung and Shu-t'ung close by to wait upon him. At dawn the next morning he went back to the master suite to perform his ablutions and put on the white T'ang-style mourning cap, mourning robe, white velveteen socks, white shoes, and mourning girdle that the tailor had made for him.

On this second day after Li P'ing-erh's death, early in the morning, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling came to visit the bereaved, offer his condolences, and urge his host to moderate his grief. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned his salutation, Licentiate Wen joined them for a cup of tea, after which Hsia Yen-ling got up to go.

On his way out the gate, he admonished the scribe that he had sent over, saying, "Be sure to do a conscientious job while you're here. If any of the orderlies fail to show up for duty, report it to the yamen so that they can be disciplined."

When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and headed back to the yamen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Licentiate Wen to send out the obituary notices and sent servants to invite the relatives of the family to come early on the third day after Li P'ing-erh's death to attend a service for her benefit and the recitation of sutras on her behalf. That afternoon vergers from the temple arrived, whose job it was to prepare the consecrated space in which the ceremony would be held and hang up Buddhist effigies, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

That same day, Wu Yin-erh in the licensed quarter heard the news of Li P'ing-erh's death and came in a sedan chair to weep in front of her spirit tablet and burn paper money on her behalf. Upon her arrival in the rear compound, Wu Yüeh-niang led her back out front, where she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and wept, saying, "When the Sixth Lady died I didn't know a thing about it. No one came to say so much as a word to me. It's really distressing."

"You are her adopted daughter, after all," said Meng Yü-lou. "She has been unwell for some time, and you didn't even come to see her."

"My good Third Lady!" protested Wu Yin-erh. "If I had only known, how could I have failed to come? May I die if I'm not telling the truth. The fact is, I didn't know anything about it."

"You may not have come to see your mother," said Yüeh-niang, "but she still bore you in mind and set aside something to give you as a keepsake. I've been keeping it for you."

She then instructed Hsiao-yü, "You go get it and show it to Sister Yin."

Hsiao-yü, accordingly, went into the inside room and brought out a bundle containing a set of satin clothing, two gold-headed hairpins, and a floral ornament of gold. This had the effect of causing Wu Yin-erh to:

Weep so copiously she seemed to be made of tears.

"If I had only known that she was so unwell," she exclaimed, "I would have come and waited on her for a couple of days."

As she spoke, she bowed to Yüeh-niang in gratitude. Yüeh-niang entertained her with tea and asked her to stay until the third day ceremonies were completed before going home.

On the third day after Li P'ing-erh's death, the monks began to strike their chimes, conducted the flag-raising ceremony to invite the presence of the gods, and proceeded to recite their sutras. Paper money was carried outside to be burned, and the members of the entire household, high and low:

Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel.⁸

Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in heavy mourning and a hempen headband, prostrated himself before the effigies of the Buddhas. The neighbors in the area, friends and relatives, and senior officials who came to extend their condolences, burn paper money, and offer oblations on behalf of the deceased could not be numbered. Yin-yang Master Hsü put in an early appearance in order to preside over the encoffining ceremony, and when the sacrificial announcements had been completed, the body was carried over to be placed inside the coffin.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had Yüeh-niang search out four outfits of Li P'ing-erh's first-class clothing and fit them into her coffin, in addition to which, he placed four small ingots of silver in the four corners of the coffin.

At this, Hua Tzu-yu remarked, "Brother-in-law, there is no need to put those in there. Gold and silver are sure to reemerge in the world at some time in the future. That is not:

A good long-term plan.”⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing refused this advice and proceeded to put them where he had intended. A “seven star board”¹⁰ had been placed inside the coffin for the corpse to rest on, the purple interior cover was put in place, and the coroner's assistants, standing on all four sides, then simultaneously drove “longevity nails” into the four sides of the lid of the casket. At this point, the members of the entire household, high and low, commenced weeping and wailing out loud.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, wept himself into a stupor, protesting again and again, without ceasing, “My tender-aged sister! I'll never be able to see you again.”

After some time, once the formal wailing was over, he treated Yin-yang Master Hsü to a vegetarian repast and saw him on his way.

When the officiating monks had done with the ceremony of scattering paper flowers and rice on the bier, a placard on which there were pasted four large characters reading “May the votive lamps ensure her peace” was set up before the spirit tablet. The friends and relatives, managers, and others were all dressed in mourning garments for the occasion, so that when the ritual of circumambulation while burning incense was performed, the area in front of the gate was turned into a patch of white.

Licentiate Wen had recommended that Privy Councilor Tu, who resided in the northern quarter of the city, should be invited to inscribe the funeral banner. His given name was Tzu-ch'un,¹¹ his courtesy name was Yün-yeh, and he had served in the Hsüan-ho¹² Palace Hall during the reign of Emperor Chen-tsung¹³ but was now living in retirement at home. Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, provided him with a gift of gold currency and a box of candied fruit and entertained him in the summerhouse, where he personally toasted him with three cups of wine in the presence of Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen. The funeral banner of scarlet government-quality linen was laid out for him to inscribe.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted him to write the words “Coffin of the Respected Lady of the Imperially Commissioned Commandant Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard,” but Ying Po-chüeh repeatedly objected, saying, “Your legitimate wife is alive and well. How can you say such a thing?”

“I understand that the deceased had borne him a son,” said Privy Councilor Tu Tzu-ch'un. “Under the circumstances, that way of putting it would not offend against propriety.”

They argued about it for some time before substituting the term “consort” for the term “respected lady.”

“The term ‘respected lady,’” said Licentiate Wen, “is a title bestowed by an imperial patent of nobility, whereas the term ‘consort’ simply means ‘the person who shares the bedroom with you.’ It is a term of much wider application.”

Thereupon, Tu Tzu-ch'un inscribed the banner, as directed, in white pigment and also applied gold leaf to the words “Imperially Commissioned.” The banner was then suspended before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. He was also invited to inscribe the name of the deceased on her spirit tablet. When these tasks were completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed his gratitude with a bow and entertained him with a collation, after which he took his leave and departed.

That day, Ch'iao Hung, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Hua the Elder, as well as Mr. Han, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, and Mr. Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister from outside the city gate, all contributed offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals and came to burn paper money. Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, and Hua the Elder's wife all came to offer their condolences, make sacrifices, and weep over the bier. Yüeh-niang and the others, all wearing white hempen covers over their chignons, held in place with hempen headbands, with hempen girdles around their waists and hempen skirts, came out to return their salutations and join in the wailing, after which they ushered them into the rear compound to entertain them with tea and a vegetarian repast. Only Hua the Elder's wife and Hua the Elder himself wore heavy mourning, being dressed in long robes cut like those of a Taoist priest. The rest of the guests all wore light mourning.

That day, Li Kuei-chieh in the licensed quarter learned of Li P'ing-erh's death and came in a sedan chair to burn paper money on her behalf.

When she saw that Wu Yin-erh was already there, she asked, “When did you get here? And why didn't you let me know about it? Some friend you are! All you ever think about is yourself.”

“I also hadn't known about Mother's death,” said Wu Yin-erh. “Had I known about it, I would have come sooner.”

Yüeh-niang entertained them in the rear compound, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Time passed quickly, and it was not long before the day came for the first of the seven weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. For this occasion, Buddhist Superior Lang,¹⁴ the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Required, led a contingent of sixteen senior monks in coming to perform a “land and water” mass for the salvation of the deceased. The liturgy included excerpts from the *Lotus Sutra*¹⁵ and the *Litany of the Compassionate Water of Samādhi*.¹⁶ Among the household's relatives, friends, and managers there was not one who did not attend.

On the day in question, Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor also came to burn paper money and offer his condolences, with a view to securing the job of presiding over the services for the second weekly commemoration. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse to join the rest of the guests in a vegetarian repast.

At this juncture, a page boy suddenly appeared to announce that Master Han had come to deliver the half-length portrait, and everyone was invited to have a look at it. Behold:

The chignon on her head was adorned with gold
and turquoise ornaments,
With two phoenixes, from whose beaks dangled
bangles on ropes of pearls.¹⁷
She was dressed in a gown of figured

scarlet material,
And her countenance was pale and fragrant,
Looking exactly as it did when she was alive.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw it, he was utterly delighted and had it suspended above the head of the coffin. Among those present there were none who did not praise it extravagantly, saying:

"It lacks only the breath of life."¹⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Master Han into the summerhouse to share in the vegetarian repast and enjoined him, saying, "With regard to the full-length portrait, you must lavish even greater attention than usual upon it."

"Your humble servant," said Master Han, "will expend his utmost skill with the brush upon it. How could he presume to be inattentive?"

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had rewarded him generously, he made his departure.

At noon, Ch'iao Hung came to present the offerings of his household. These included pigs and sheep and other sacrificial offerings; fancy table settings of a kind intended as much for display as for eating; high-stacked pyramids of cone-shaped fruit; candied effigies of the Five Ancients and ingot shaped cakes; square-shaped confectionery and trees of wheat-gluten candy; soup and rice in gold saucers; ornate bowls containing the flesh of the five sacrificial animals; mountain-shaped stacks of imitation gold and silver ingots; satins, silks, and variegated fabrics; paper money for the use of the dead and offertory incense; more than fifty carrier-loads in all. Local mummers on stilts, performing to the beat of gongs and drums, and musicians playing more refined music on percussion and wind instruments, along with hired mourners carrying tasseled banners, all arrived, filling the air with noise, along with innumerable male and female guests.

Yin-yang Master Hsü was engaged to declaim the funeral eulogy, while Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in mourning garments, positioned themselves in front of the spirit tablet to return the salutations of the visitors, and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, together with Licentiate Wen Pi-ku and Manager Kan Jun, devoted themselves to entertaining the guests.

That day, Ch'iao Hung had invited Provincial Graduate Shang, Censor Chu, Wu K'ai, School Official Liu, Battalion Commander Fan, and Kinsman Tuan, the father of Big Sister Tuan, some seven or eight relatives and friends in all, to come with him in order to burn incense in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. After the three sacrificial libations had been offered, they knelt down to hear the recitation of his funeral eulogy, which read as follows:

On this, the twenty-second day *hsin-ssu*, of the ninth month, the first day of which was *keng-shen*, in the year *ting-yu*, the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period, her kinsman Ch'iao Hung and others respectfully offer a stiff-bristled pig and a soft-haired sheep,¹⁹ along with other offertory foods,²⁰ in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of our late kinswoman, née Li, the consort of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Alas! The lady was, by nature, magnanimous and kindhearted. In regulating her household she was diligent and thrifty.²¹ In governing her inferiors she was compassionate and good-natured. Her total exemplification of the female virtues aroused the admiration of the neighborhood. As the flower of the women's quarters, she exuded the fragrance of orchids. In her marriage with her husband she did her best to simulate the relations of the male and female phoenix. In nurturing her offspring she exhibited judgment and talent. In emulation of the paragons of female conduct she was submissive and virtuous. In setting a moral example for the women of the household she displayed harmony and purity in her relations with her in-laws. The jade was planted in Indigo Field²² and the pearl from Ho-p'u had begun to shine.²³ Everyone expected her to live forever in marital harmony with her husband like that between zither and cithara, enjoying an extended longevity without limit. Who could have anticipated that as the result of a single illness the Yellow Millet Dream²⁴ should have ended? At the death of a good person, who is not grief-stricken? Our infant daughter, while still in her diapers, rejoiced in the love of our kinswoman. Who could have anticipated that before the union between our families could be consummated, Heaven should fail to comply with our wishes,²⁵ and the phoenix should have lost its mate? We are doomed to endure the separation between the living and the dead, there being nothing that can be done about it. May our ties of friendship remain long-lasting, and find expression in this proffered libation. Should the spirit of the deceased be cognizant of our actions,²⁶ may it deign to come and enjoy our offering.²⁷ Pray come and partake thereof.²⁸

When the male guests had finished with their offerings and had received a salutation in return, they were ushered into the summerhouse, where a collation had been prepared for them. But no more of this.

Afterwards, Ch'iao Hung's wife, her sister-in-law Mrs. Ts'ui, the wife of Censor Chu, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Big Sister Tuan, and the other female guests and relatives presented their offerings. Meanwhile, local mummers, to the accompaniment of gongs and drums, performed an ensemble dance depicting the Assessor of the underworld, which created quite a din. Wu Yüeh-niang joined her guests in ceremonial wailing before the spirit tablet, after which, she invited them into the rear compound, where they were served tea, and then an ample repast, complete with the usual:

Three soups and five courses,

but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse entertaining his guests with wine, when they suddenly heard the sound of the cloud-shaped gong in the front compound being struck, and a servant appeared in a state of obvious agitation, to report, "His Honor Prefect Hu Shih-wen has come to burn paper money. He is descending from his sedan chair at the front gate."

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into a state of consternation, as he hastened to don his formal mourning garments and await the arrival of his guest in front of the spirit tablet. He also had Licentiate Wen, dressed in the cap and gown of a licentiate, but in mourning white, go out to greet the visitor and assist him in changing out of his outer garments in the front reception hall.

Only after his attendants had entered bearing the offertory incense and paper money did Prefect Hu Shih-wen, dressed in white mourning-clothes with a gold girdle, come in himself, surrounded by a retinue of officials and functionaries who:

Smoothed his garments and adjusted his girdle,

Dancing attendance upon him without cessation.²⁹

Thereupon, Ch'un-hung, who was kneeling before the spirit tablet, held the incense up high for him while he prostrated himself twice.

"Venerable sir, please stand up. We have put you to a great deal of trouble," Hsi-men Ch'ing protested, as he hastily came forward to return his salutation.

"I fear I have been remiss in offering my condolences," said Prefect Hu Shih-wen. "When did your honorable spouse die? Your

pupil only found out about it yesterday.”

“Who could have foreseen,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “that my humble spouse should come down with an incurable ailment? I am the undeserving recipient of the concern you have deigned to express.”

When Licentiate Wen had saluted him, he and Hsi-men Ch’ing sat down to either side of their visitor to offer him a cup of tea, after which Prefect Hu got up to go, while Licentiate Wen saw him to the gate and into his sedan chair. The guests who had come to offer sacrifices were entertained until the afternoon, before the party broke up and they went their separate ways.

The next day, Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter came to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. When she descended from her sedan chair, she was dressed in a jacket of white cloud-patterned damask that opened down the middle, over a skirt of blue silk, while her chignon was wrapped in a white drawnwork kerchief, held in place with a pearl headband. When she came inside and burnt an offering of paper money before the spirit tablet, Yüeh-niang observed that she had brought with her eight platters of patisserie, meat of the three sacrificial animals, soup and rice, to offer in sacrifice to the deceased, and hastened to provide her with a mourning skirt of plain damask. Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh also came and offered three mace apiece as sacrificial gifts.

When Yüeh-niang told Hsi-men Ch’ing about it, he said, “What does it matter? Provide each of them with a plain damask mourning headband and girdle, and invite them into the rear compound, where they can be served with tea and stay overnight.”

That evening, the relatives, friends, and employees of the family all gathered to participate in an all-night wake. A troupe of Hai-yen³⁰ actors was engaged to perform southern-style plays of the genre known as hsi-wen.³¹ Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch’un were also in attendance.

For this evening, Hsi-men Ch’ing had set up fifteen banquet tables in the large temporary structure in the main courtyard. Among the more prominent guests were Ch’iao Hung, Wu K’ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han, Licentiate Ni, Licentiate Wen, Dr. Jen Hou-ch’i, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T’ien-hua, Pai Lai-ch’iang, Ch’ang Shih-chieh, Fu Ming, Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch’uan, the two nephews Wu Shun-ch’en and Ts’ui Pen, in addition to which there were seven or eight neighbors. Each of the banquet tables was replete with the customary:

Ten dishes and five appetizers,

and ten or more great candles on raised candlesticks were lighted. In the adjacent reception hall, blinds were let down, and banquet tables were set out for the female guests, surrounded by standing screens, so arranged that they were able to look outside in order to watch the dramatic performance.

On this occasion, after the guests had finished making their sacrificial offerings, and Hsi-men Ch’ing and Ch’en Ching-chi had saluted them in return, they sat down in their designated places, while the actors struck up their gongs and drums before them. The play they performed was *Yü-huan chi*, or *The Story of the Jade Ring*, the tale of the two lives of love between Wei Kao and the courtesan Yü-hsiao.

Hsi-men Ch’ing had deputed four orderlies to be in charge of carrying the platters of food, while Ch’in-t’ung, Ch’i-t’ung, Hua-t’ung, and Lai-an were responsible for serving the individual dishes, and the four boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch’un, poured the wine at the banquet tables.

Before long, after the prelude to the drama, the *sheng* (young male lead), playing the part of Wei Kao, sang for a while and then went offstage, followed by the *t’ieh-tan* (supporting female role), playing the part of Yü-hsiao, who also sang for a while before exiting the stage. At this point, the chef arrived from the kitchen to supervise the serving of the soup and rice and carve the goose.

Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Hsi-men Ch’ing and said, “I hear that the three singing girls from the quarter are here. Why not have them come out to serve a cup of wine to your venerable kinsman Ch’iao Hung and your elder brother-in-law Wu K’ai? They would then be better situated to watch the play, so you’d actually be doing them a favor.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing accordingly told Tai-an to go inside and invite the attendance of the three singing girls.

“That really isn’t appropriate,” remarked Ch’iao Hung. “They are here to offer their condolences. How can you call on them to serve the wine?”

“Venerable kinsman,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “you don’t understand the situation. Little whores like this should not be allowed to cool their heels. Have them dragged out for me immediately. Tell them that Master Ying the Second says that since the Sixth Lady has died, they ought to demonstrate their filiality by serving each of us a cup of wine.”

Tai-an went inside on this errand and was gone for some time before coming back to report, “When they heard that Master Ying the Second was present, they all refused to come out.”

“In that case,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “I’ll have to go myself.”

After taking a few steps, however, he came back and sat down.

“Why have you come back?” Hsi-men Ch’ing laughed at him.

“I really intend to drag those three little whores out here,” said Ying Pochüeh, “but I need to utter a few words of abuse in order to vent my spleen before I’ll be prepared to go.”

After this, Tai-an was sent inside to summon them once again before the three of them finally came out, as nonchalantly as could be. All of them were dressed in white satin jackets that opened down the middle, over blue silk skirts. After facing the company and:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

bowing in greeting, they stood by to one side with ingratiating smiles.

“Since you knew that we were all here,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “how could you bring yourselves to:

Adduce three excuses or four pretexts,³²
for refusing to appear?”

The three of them did not respond to this sally but stepped up to serve a round of wine and then sat down at a table that had been set up for them.

Below them:

Drums and music began to sound, as the players came on to perform another scene in which the *sheng*, playing the part of Wei Kao, and the *ching* (comic-villain role), playing the part of Pao Chih-shui, pay a visit together to the bordello in which the singing girl Yühsiao is employed.

When the madam came out to receive them, Pao Chih-shui said, "You go and call out that girl for me."

"Master Pao," responded the madam, "you don't know how to treat people properly. My daughter is not accustomed to come out for just anybody. Are you incapable of uttering the word 'please'? How can you speak of simply calling her out?"³³

At this, Li Kuei-chieh turned to the company and laughed, saying, "This character named Pao is just like Beggar Ying, a lame donkey who doesn't know the score."

"If I don't know the score," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how is it that the madam of your establishment likes me so much?"

"What she likes is for you to keep out of the way," responded Li Kueichieh.

"Let's watch the play," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What are you dithering about anyway? If you say another word, you'll have to drink a large bumper of wine as a forfeit."

Only then did Ying Po-chüeh consent to remain silent, while the players finished the scene they were performing and went offstage.

Meanwhile, Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, Wu Shun-ch'en's wife Third Sister Cheng, Big Sister Tuan, together with Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives from the Hsi-men household, were all watching the play through the suspended blinds on the left side of the reception hall, while Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Hsiao-yü were all crowded together watching the play through the suspended blinds on the right side.

The servant Cheng Chi, in charge of serving the tea to the ladies on the other side, happened to pass underneath the blinds where the maidservants were gathered carrying a serving of tea flavored with fruit kernels, when Ch'unmei called him to a halt, asking, "Who are you serving this tea to?"

"It's for Sister-in-law Wu and the ladies on the other side," responded Cheng Chi.

Ch'un-mei appropriated a cup for herself and was holding it in her hand, when, unexpectedly, Hsiao-yü, on hearing that down below the actor playing the female role was performing the part of a character named Yü-hsiao, grabbed hold of Yü-hsiao, saying, "Whore, your patron has shown up, and the madam is calling for you to receive the customer. Why haven't you gone out?"

As she spoke, she gave her a vigorous shove, which pushed her outside the suspended blinds and splashed the tea in Ch'un-mei's hand all over her person.

Ch'un-mei cursed Yü-hsiao, saying, "You crazy whore! What do you think you're doing? By horsing around this way you've splashed my tea all over. You're lucky you didn't break the teacup."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing overheard this altercation, he sent Lai-an over to inquire who was responsible for the commotion.

Ch'un-mei remained seated on her chair, saying, "Go tell him that Yühsiao, the wanton whore, couldn't help responding wantonly on catching sight of her lover."

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had made this inquiry, he was busy seeing to the wine service at the banquet and let the matter drop.

Yüeh-niang came over to the other side of the reception hall and scolded Hsiao-yü, saying, "You've been out here for some time. You ought to go back and see to things in the master suite. When all of you are out here, who is there to look after the place?"

"Your step-daughter Hsi-men Ta-chieh just went back there," said Hsiao-yü. "The two nuns are also sitting in your room."

"Whenever we let you lousy dog-begotten creatures come out here to watch the show," expostulated Yüeh-niang, "you end up:

Provoking an altercation."³⁴

When Ch'un-mei saw that Yüeh-niang had come over, she stood up and said, "Mother, you ought to interrogate them. The whole lot of them have been carrying on crazily, with total abandon, guffawing raucously, heedless of whether anyone sees them or not."

After Yüeh-niang had given them a scolding, she returned to the other side of the reception hall.

By this point, Ch'iao Hung and Licentiate Ni had gotten up and departed.

Brother-in-law Shen, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and Brother-in-law Han were also about to go, but Ying Po-chüeh stopped them, appealing to Hsi-men Ch'ing with the words, "Our host. You, too, say something. Some of us are your friends, after all, and ought not to leave you in the lurch, but even your relatives are threatening to leave. Brother-in-law Shen does not reside outside the city gate, and though Brother-in-law Han, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and Hua the Elder live outside the wall, it's only the third watch, and the gates aren't even open yet. What's the hurry? We should all sit down together for a while longer. After all, the performance isn't over yet."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by ordering a page boy to bring out four jugs of Ma-ku wine³⁵ and put them down in front of him, saying, "If you gentlemen will only finish off these four jugs of wine, I won't insist on detaining you any longer."

He then took a large loving cup and put it down in front of Wu K'ai, saying, "Whoever elects to:

Leave the feast and break up the party, by threatening to get up and go, will have to drink a penalty cup of wine enforced by this gentleman."

Thereupon, the company all sat down again, while Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung, "Urge the players to lose no time in putting on another scene, and to choose one that is lively."

In no time at all, the drums and clappers began to sound, and the *mo* (supporting male role) came out and addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "May I ask, would the scene entitled 'Bequeathing the Self-Portrait' be appropriate?"

"I don't care," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just so it's lively."

The *t'ieh-tan*, playing the part of Yü-hsiao, then proceeded to sing for a while.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the player sing the words:

In this life we are unlikely to meet again.

For this reason, I bequeath this self-portrait to you.³⁶

it suddenly brought to mind the image of Li P'ing-erh on her sickbed, and his heart was so moved that he couldn't help starting to shed tears, which he wiped away constantly with a handkerchief.

This was spotted at once by P'an Chin-lien, who was gazing with a sardonic eye through the lowered blinds and pointed it out to Yüeh-niang, saying, "First Lady, just look at that feckless good-for-nothing! Why on earth should he have started to cry while drinking wine and watching the performance of a play?"

"Smart as you are," said Meng Yü-lou, "it's a wonder you don't understand such things.

Music expresses man's sorrows and joys,
partings and reunions.³⁷



Hsi-men Ch'ing Is Deeply Stirred While Watching a Drama

I imagine that on seeing this episode of the drama, his heart was moved.

Upon seeing an object one remembers its owner;³⁸

Upon seeing a saddle one thinks of one's horse.³⁹

That is why he started to shed tears."

"I, for one," said Chin-lien, "do not believe that:

The storyteller, when he lets his tears fall,

Empathizes with the sorrows of the ancients.

It is all nothing but an act. Only if he could reduce *me* to tears by his singing would I rate him a good actor."

"Sister Six, quiet down," said Yüeh-niang. "We're listening to the performance."

Meng Yü-lou then turned to Wu K'ai's wife and explained, "Our Sister Six here, for some reason or other, is given to shooting off her mouth."

The players continued to perform for a while until, during the fifth watch, everyone got up to go. Though Hsi-men Ch'ing, holding a large goblet of wine in his hand, blocked the door and urged them to have another drink, he was unable to detain them any longer, and finally saw them out to the front gate.

After overseeing the clearing away of the utensils, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed the players to leave their costume trunk behind, saying, "Tomorrow, Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh are coming to offer a sacrifice and spend the day, so I'll expect you to put on another day's performance."

The players assented to this and, after having been treated to food and wine, returned to their lodgings to rest. The four young musicians, Li Ming and company, also returned home. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing that the day was about to dawn, also returned to the rear compound to get some rest. Truly, it is a case of:

As the red sun illuminates the windows

the night chill diminishes;

As the thin mist envelopes the bamboos

the dawn light is exiguous.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 64

YÜ-HSIAO KNEELS IN MAKING AN APPEAL TO P'AN CHIN-LIEN; OFFICERS OF THE GUARD SACRIFICE TO A RICH MAN'S SPOUSE

Infatuated by love, on awakening to find
the night almost over;
He tentatively examines the handkerchief
woven of mermaid silk.
Only when dead does the spring silkworm's
thread come to an end;
Not until burnt to ashes do the tears of
the wax candle dry up.¹
The male and female phoenix mates have been
blown apart by the wind;
Her soft jade and captivating fragrance² are
no longer of this world.
Before he has finished boasting of the two
words that spell "romance";
The cock has crowed beneath the waning moon
and the fifth watch is chill.³

THE STORY GOES that by the time the company had dispersed, the cocks were already crowing and Hsi-men Ch'ing retired to rest.

Tai-an took a large jug of wine and several saucers of food out to the shop in the front compound, intending to share them with Manager Fu and Ch'en Ching-chi. Manager Fu was getting along in years and had stayed up all night, so he didn't feel like sitting around any longer but proceeded to spread out a mat and lay down on the k'ang to go to sleep.

"You and P'ing-an help yourselves," he said to Tai-an. "I doubt if Son-in-law Ch'en will show up."

Tai-an lit a candle on the counter and invited P'ing-an to come inside where the two of them proceeded to share the wine:

First a cup for you,

Then a cup for me,

until it was all gone, after which, they put the utensils away and P'ing-an went back to the gatehouse to sleep. Tai-an then secured the gate to the shop and lay down foot-to-foot on the k'ang next to Manager Fu.

Manager Fu, idly responding to something in the preceding conversation, said to Tai-an, "Now that the Sixth Lady is dead, the quality of the coffin, the sacrifices, the sutra recitations, and the funeral arrangements are certainly more than sufficient, are they not?"

"On the one hand," responded Tai-an, "she was blessed with good fortune, but not with longevity. Although Father has spent all this money on her, he has not had to dip into his own pocket. When the Sixth Lady married Father, there is no disguising the fact, as you well know, that she brought with her a considerable dowry. Others may not know the extent of it, but I do. Without even taking into account the amount of silver specie, the gold and pearl jewelry, objets d'art, jade-ornamented girdles, chatelaines, pendants, silver frets, and valuable gemstones were too numerous to count. Why do you suppose Father was so enamored of her? He was not enamored of her person, but enamored of her money.

"Even though that was the case, if one were to bring up the subject of the late Sixth Lady's disposition, no one in this whole household was her equal. She was self-deprecating and congenial, and greeted everyone with a smile. As far as we servants were concerned, she never once raised her voice in criticism, made the mistake of reviling us as slaves, or threatened us with dire consequences.

"When commissioning us to buy anything for her, she would simply hand us a nugget of silver. And when we suggested, 'Mother, why don't you put it on the scale and weigh it, so we'll know what we're spending,' she would laugh, saying, 'Just take it. What's the point of weighing it? If you don't expect to make a little something out of the transaction, what are you hoping for? Just see that I get my money's worth.'

"Who is there in this entire household who hasn't borrowed silver from her? And though she lent it out, no one ever returned it. She didn't seem to care whether she got it back or not. The First Lady and the Third Lady are also liberal as far as money is concerned, but the Fifth Lady and the Second Lady are a bit tight. When it is their turn to be in charge of the household finances, we feel plague-stricken. They are more than willing to grind our legs down to the bone. At best, they simply will not give full value. Even without any other funny business, for an expense of a mace of silver, they will weigh out only nine and a half candareens worth, or, when you get right down to it, no more than nine candareens, apparently expecting us to make up the difference."

"Well, at least the First Lady is better than that," said Manager Fu.

"Although the First Lady is all right," said Tai-an, "she's got a hair-trigger temper. One minute, she'll be in a good mood, talking away as pleasantly as can be, but the next minute, should anyone offend her, no matter who it might be, she'll let you have it in no uncertain terms. In the final analysis, she's no match for the Sixth Lady, who aroused resentment in nobody and was often willing to put in a good word with Father on our behalf. Even in the weightiest matters of a kind that would not brook appeal, if we appealed to her, she would speak to Father on our behalf, and he would never fail to comply. The Fifth Lady, on the other hand, is quick to make groundless allegations, is forever saying, 'Just you see if I don't tell Father about this,' and constantly threatens people with a beating. And now, this sister of ours, Ch'un-mei, is another star of contention, and, as fate would have it, they are both to be found in the same quarters."

"The Fifth Lady has been here for some years now," averred Manager Fu.

"You know what kind of a person she is," said Tai-an, "and can remember back to the time when she first arrived. She doesn't even show any respect to her own mother. On more than one occasion when the old lady has visited, she has treated her so badly she has gone home in tears. And now that the Sixth Lady has died, she is able to preside over the world of the front compound. She feels free to abuse whoever is in charge of sweeping the flower garden for not getting it clean enough, so that, early in the morning, he ends up looking as though:

His head has been sprayed with dog's blood."

The two of them talked for a while until Manager Fu started to snore stertorously as he fell asleep on his pillow. Tai-an also had had more than enough to drink and no sooner closed his eyes than he became oblivious to:

Heaven above and earth below.

By the time:

The red sun was three rods high in the sky,⁴
they had still not gotten up.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing often chose to sleep in front of Li P'ingerh's spirit tablet in the front compound. In the morning, when Yü-hsiao came out to dispose of the bedding, Hsi-men Ch'ing would go back to the rear compound to comb his hair, while Shu-t'ung, with his own hair still undressed, would take advantage of the opportunity for the two of them to:

Engage in badinage and repartee,
joking and contending with each other for some time before she returned to the rear compound.

Who could have anticipated that, on this particular day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone back to the master suite to get some rest, Yü-hsiao availed herself of the fact that people weren't up yet, to surreptitiously come out to the front compound and give Shu-t'ung a wink, upon which the two of them snuck out to the studio in the garden and proceeded to get down to business together.

They could hardly have foreseen that P'an Chin-lien would arise early that morning and abruptly make her way to the reception hall, where she found that the lamp in front of the spirit tablet had gone out, while the tables and chairs in the large temporary structure were lying around:

Higgledy-piggledy,⁵
with no one in attendance but Hua-t'ung, who was busily engaged in sweeping the grounds.

"You lousy jailbird!" Chin-lien said to him. "Do you mean to say that you are the only one here sweeping the grounds? Where have all the others gone?"

"They haven't gotten up yet," replied Hua-t'ung.

"Drop your broom for the time being," said Chin-lien, "and go up front to ask our son-in-law for a length of white damask for my mother, Old Mrs. P'an, who doesn't have a mourning skirt. You can also pick up a mourning headband and girdle for her. She's going home later today."

"I fear your son-in-law may still be asleep," said Hua-t'ung, "but I'll go ask him for you."

After some time, he returned and reported, "Your son-in-law says that it's not part of his responsibility, since it is Shu-t'ung and Ts'ui Pen who are in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear. The thing for you to do is to ask Shu-t'ung for what you want."

"Who knows where that slave has gone off to?" said Chin-lien. "You go see if you can find him."

Hua-t'ung looked into the studio in the front courtyard and reported back, saying, "He was there a minute ago. He must have gone to the studio in the garden to do his hair."

"You can finish your sweeping," said Chin-lien. "I'll go ask that jailbird for what I need myself."

Thereupon, she:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,
Gently lifted her beige skirt,

and headed toward the studio in the garden. Upon chancing to hear the sound of laughter within, she pushed open the door, only to find Shu-t'ung and Yühsiao just in the thick of things on the bed inside.

"A dandy jailbird you are!" she exclaimed. "A fine thing the two of you are up to in here!"

The two of them, who were still entwined with each other, were thrown into such consternation by her appearance that they were barely able to extricate themselves in time to kneel down on the ground before her and plead for mercy.

"You lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien to Shu-t'ung. "Just go fetch me a bolt of mourning damask and a bolt of cotton cloth, so I can

send my mother home with them.”

Shu-t'ung lost no time in fetching the wanted articles and proffering them to her, whereupon, Chin-lien went straight back to her quarters, with Yü-hsiao following in her wake.

Upon their arrival there, Yü-hsiao knelt down on the floor and groveled around on her knees, appealing to Chin-lien with the plea, “Fifth Lady, whatever happens, don’t tell Father about this.”

“You lousy little bitch!” Chin-lien demanded. “Tell me the truth. All this while, how many times has that slave made out with you? You’d better not try to deceive me by so much as a single word.”

Yü-hsiao then confessed the whole story of how the two of them had been carrying on an affair.

“If you want me to let you off,” said Chin-lien, “you’ll have to agree to three conditions.”

“If you consent to spare me,” said Yü-hsiao, “no matter how many conditions you impose, I’ll agree to them all.”

“The first condition,” Chin-lien said, “is that you will tell me everything that happens in your mistress’s quarters, no matter how trivial. If you fail to tell me anything, and I hear about it, I will definitely not let you off the hook. The second condition is that if I ask you for anything, you’ll find a way to see that I get it. The third condition is that you tell me how it is that your mistress, who has not been pregnant before, should now have managed to conceive.”

“I will not deceive you, Fifth Lady,” said Yü-hsiao. “The fact of the matter is that my mistress, thus and so, conceived after taking a fertility potion, provided by Nun Hsüeh, containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child.”

Chin-lien made a mental note of everything she had said and only then consented not to report anything to Hsi-men Ch’ing.

When Shu-t’ung saw the sardonic smile on the face of P’an Chin-lien as she led Yü-hsiao off to her quarters, he realized that this was an affair that was not likely to end propitiously for him. He therefore availed himself of the opportunity to help himself to the considerable number of handkerchiefs, scarves, ornamental toothpicks, hairpins, toggles, and other gifts from visitors that were stored in a cabinet in the studio. He had managed to scrounge something over ten taels of silver for himself, and he also went to the counter of the shop out front and finagled Manager Fu into giving him another twenty taels by saying they were needed to buy additional supplies of mourning damask. He then went straightaway outside the city gate and hired a long-distance mount to take him to the nearest embarkation point, where he boarded a boat from his hometown and embarked for his place of origin in Su-chou. Truly:

Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.⁶

It so happened that on that day Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Aiyüeh all returned to their respective establishments. In the morning, Eunuch Director Hsüeh and Eunuch Director Liu sent men to deliver offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals, so that they would be able to offer oblations and burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. Each of them also donated a tael of silver as their contributions toward the expenses of an all-night wake and engaged the services of two professional performers of the genre known as Tao-ch’ing, or Taoist songs, proposing to come visit with Hsi-men Ch’ing during the day.



Yü-hsiao Kneels in Order to Accept the Three Conditions



Shu-t'ung Secretly Decamps Setting Sail before the Wind

Hsi-men Ch'ing was anxious to be able to supply his visitors with mourning damask and started looking for Shu-t'ung in order to get the necessary key but couldn't find him anywhere.

"This morning," reported Manager Fu, "he came to the counter in the shop and asked me for twenty taels of silver to buy mourning damask with. He said that you had told him the existing supply of mourning damask was inadequate. No doubt he has gone outside the city gate to purchase some more."

"I didn't tell him any such thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So why should he be asking you for silver?"

He then sent someone outside the city gate to the shops that sold mourning damask to look for him, but he was nowhere to be found.

"I suspect this slave has been up to some funny business," said Yüeh-niang to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who knows what sort of scurvy tricks he's capable of? And now it looks like he's appropriated several taels of silver and made off with them. You had better open up those studios of yours and give them a good going over. It's not a job for a legless crab like myself. I fear he may have absconded with other things as well."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, went to inspect his two studios and found that the keys to the storeroom were still hanging on the wall, but that a considerable number of handkerchiefs, scarves, gifts of books and silver, ornamental toothpicks, toggles, and the like, were missing from the large cabinet.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was enraged and called in the neighborhood authorities, telling them to seek out and apprehend the fugitive throughout the:

Three quarters and two alleys,
of the pleasure precincts, but he was nowhere to be found. Truly:
Not only was he impatient to return to
his native place;
But the misty waters of the Five Lakes⁷
were impenetrable.

By this time, at about noon that afternoon, Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived in his sedan chair, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Wu K'ai, Ying Pochüeh, and Licentiate Wen to help entertain him.

Before doing anything else, Eunuch Director Hsüeh went up to Li P'ingerh's spirit tablet to burn incense and perform an obeisance, after which, he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "How sad! How sad! What ailment was it that your lady died of?"

"Unfortunately," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she suffered from a severe case of hemorrhaging, which was not looked after properly, and resulted in her death. I am grateful to you, venerable sir, for your expression of concern."

"I haven't much to offer," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh. "It is but a paltry expression of my feelings."

Then, catching sight of the portrait of Li P'ing-erh that was hanging nearby, he said, "What a beautiful lady. She looks just as though she were:

Enjoying prosperity in the springtime of her youth.
What a pity that she has departed this world so early."

"That things are unequal is part of their nature,"⁸
opined Licentiate Wen, who was standing to one side. "After all:

Failure or success, long life or short,⁹
are things that are predetermined. Even a sage can do nothing to alter them."

Eunuch Director Hsüeh turned his head to look at Licentiate Wen and, noticing that he was dressed in the cap and gown of a licentiate, but in mourning white, asked, "What school is this venerable gentleman enrolled in?"

Licentiate Wen responded with a bow, saying, "Your unworthy pupil is enrolled in the Prefectural School."

Changing the subject, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "I'd like to see the lady's coffin, if I may."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered his attendants to lift aside the curtains suspended to either side, so that Eunuch Director Hsüeh could go inside and take a look.

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,
Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "What a fine coffin. May I ask how much you paid for it?"

"I got it through a relative," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and compensated him appropriately."

"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "why don't you hazard a guess. Where did the wood come from, and what is it called?"

After carefully examining it, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "If it didn't come from Chien-ch'ang,¹⁰ it must have come from Chen-yüan."¹¹

"Even if it came from Chen-yüan," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it wouldn't be worth all that much."

"The best coffin wood," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "is surely Yang-hsüan Elm."¹²

"Boards cut from the Yang-hsüan Elm are comparatively thin and short," said Ying Po-chüeh. "How could they pass muster? These coffin boards are superior to those made from the Yang-hsüan Elm. They come from a place called Peach Blossom Cavern, located on the Wu-ling River in Hu-kuang province. In former days, during the T'ang dynasty, a fisherman entered this cavern where he encountered the Hairly Woman, a refugee from the Ch'in dynasty, who had sought shelter there from the military conflicts of the time.¹³ It is a secluded place where people seldom come. These boards were all more than seven feet long, four inches thick, and two feet five inches wide. As a special favor to a kinsman the owner gave him a substantial discount, so the asking price was only 370 taels of silver. You have never seen the like, sir. When they were sawed open, they exuded a pungent aroma and had flowerlike patterns on both sides."

"The lady is fortunate indeed," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "to be able to enjoy a coffin of this quality. We eunuchs, when we pass away, cannot expect such elaborate funeral arrangements."

"Venerable sir," said Wu K'ai, "that's a fine way to talk! People like you have direct access to the imperial court and enjoy great rank and emolument. We outer officials can hardly hope to compete with the likes of you, venerable sir, who are daily exposed to the pure radiance of the sovereign and transmit the words of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years. At present, His Honor T'ung Kuan has been promoted to the rank of Commandery Prince,¹⁴ and his sons and grandsons are all entitled to:

Wear python robes and girdles of jade.

What limit is there to your prospects?"¹⁵

"Might I ask," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "what is the name of this glib-tongued gentleman?"

"This is my wife's elder brother, Wu K'ai," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At present he holds the position of battalion commander in the local guard."

"Is he the elder brother of this deceased lady?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

"No," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is the elder brother of my humble spouse."

Eunuch Director Hsüeh then saluted Wu K'ai with a bow, saying, "Pray forgive my unmindfulness."

After he had inspected the coffin for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him to the summerhouse, where a folding armchair had been placed in the position of honor, upon which Eunuch Director Hsüeh sat down.

After a servant had served them with tea, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "How is it that Eunuch Director Liu is not here yet? I'll have one of my retainers go out to meet him."

At this, a black-clad retainer knelt down and reported, "When Your Honor left home, you sent your humble servant to invite His Honor Liu to start out, and his sedan chair was already in waiting. He should be here any minute."

Eunuch Director Hsüeh then went on to ask, "Have those two performers of Tao-ch'ing arrived, or not?"

"They arrived this morning," reported Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have them called in."

It was not long before they appeared before the company and kowtowed.

"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

"We have been given something to eat," they replied.

"Since you've already been fed," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "I want you to do the best you can today. I'll see that you are amply rewarded."

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your pupil also has a troupe of players here, who are prepared to perform for you."

"Where are these players from?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

"It is a troupe of Hai-yen actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"What with that barbarous accent of theirs," pronounced Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "who knows what they are singing about? Their plots are only concerned with those poor discontented scholars who endure hardship for three years within their unheated chambers and then wander abroad for nine years, carrying their:

Zithers, swords, and book boxes,¹⁶

on their backs, making their way to the capital in order to compete in the examinations, in the hope of obtaining an office. They don't even have the consolation of wives or children by their sides. What do the vicissitudes of such people mean to celibate old eunuchs like ourselves? We can do without them."

Licentiate Wen, who was seated beside him, laughed at this diatribe, saying, "Venerable sir, what you have just said is quite unreasonable.

Those who reside in Ch'i speak with a Ch'i accent;

Those who reside in Ch'u speak with a Ch'u accent.

Though you may reside in your:

High halls and spacious structures,¹⁷

how can your heart fail to be moved by such things?"

At this rejoinder, Eunuch Director Hsüeh clapped his hands and laughed, saying, "I had forgotten that Licentiate Wen was present. You outer officials always come to the defense of each other."

"After all," said Licentiate Wen, "it is from us licentiates that members of the official class are recruited. Venerable sir:

For every branch you chop down,

A hundred trees are threatened.¹⁸

When the hare dies, the fox is sad;

Creatures grieve for their fellows."¹⁹

"That is not so," responded Eunuch Director Hsüeh:

"In the space of any particular quarter,

There are both the wise and the foolish."

As they were talking, an attendant suddenly came in and reported that Eunuch Director Liu was getting out of his sedan chair, at which, Wu K'ai and the others went out to greet him. Upon coming inside, Eunuch Director Liu bowed in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet.

When they had finished with the customary amenities, Eunuch Director Hsüeh addressed his fellow eunuch, saying, "Why is it, venerable sir, that you have not arrived until now?"

"Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter dropped by for a visit," Eunuch Director Liu explained, "and I had to entertain him for a while before sending him off."

The company thereupon sat down in their respective places, while attendants served them with tea.

Eunuch Director Liu then asked one of his servitors, "Have our offertory tables been set up yet, or not?"

"They have all been properly set up," the servant replied.

"We might as well proceed to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased, then," said Eunuch Director Liu.

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need for any further ritual observances. You have already demonstrated your respect for the deceased."

"Why else did we come?" said Eunuch Director Liu. "We ought to present our offerings in person."

At this juncture, the attendants provided them with incense sticks, and the two eunuchs proceeded to light them before the spirit tablet, offer the customary three libations, and then perform an obeisance.

"Venerable sirs, please get up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, after performing two kowtows, they stood up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kowtowed to them in return.

The company then returned to the summerhouse and sat down, while the preparations for the feast were completed, and wine was served. The two eunuchs were seated in the places of honor to left and right, with Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh placed below them, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host at the lower end of the seating arrangement. As their:

Drums and gongs began to sound,

the players came on and presented the program of pieces they were prepared to perform. The two eunuch directors examined it for a while and chose a selection from the play entitled *Liu Chih-yüan hung-p'ao chi*, or *Liu Chih-yüan and the Crimson Robe*.²⁰

Before many scenes had been played, however, they grew tired of it and called in the performers of Tao-ch'ing, saying, "It would be more fun if they were to sing a Tao-ch'ing for us."

Thereupon, the two of them began to tap their "fisherman's drums,"²¹ as they stood shoulder to shoulder, facing their audience, and sang in high-pitched voices the story entitled *Han Wen-kung hsüeh-yung Lan-kuan*, or *Han Yü Is Impeded by Snow at Lan-kuan*.²²

At this juncture, the chef came out and kowtowed before the company, and the two eunuch directors rewarded him with appropriate gratuities. Hsi-men Ch'ing had also prepared meat and wine to serve to their attendants, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

During the course of the banquet, Eunuch Director Hsüeh began a conversation with Eunuch Director Liu, saying, "Brother Liu, you may not have heard about it yet, but, the other day, on the tenth day of the eighth month, during:

A great downpour of rain,²³

the thunder and lightning destroyed the owl-tail-shaped ornaments at the ends of the roof beam of the Ning-shen Hall in the grounds of the Imperial Palace, frightening any number of palace women to death. The Emperor himself was greatly alarmed and ordered that all his officials should engage in self-examination,²⁴ that daily petitions should be presented to the spirits during propitiatory services in the Temple of Highest Clarity, that the butchering of animals should be prohibited for ten days, that the judicial offices should suspend punishments, and that no officials should be permitted to present memorials to the throne.

"Recently, an envoy from the Jurchen regime of the Great Chin has presented a memorial demanding that we cede them the territory of our three frontier defense commands,²⁵ and that old villain Ts'ai Ching proposed that we should agree to this, and that the troops and horses under the command of T'ung Kuan should be turned over to Censor-in-Chief T'an Chen,²⁶ along with Huang Yu²⁷ and the other ten commissioners in charge of the Three Border Regions, but the troops refused to return, and the matter has been turned over to the court officials for deliberation.

"The other day, at the solar term 'Beginning of Winter,' the Lord of Ten Thousand Years was scheduled to come out to sacrifice at the Imperial Ancestral Temple. That morning, an erudite of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices named Fang Chen,²⁸ who was supervising the sweeping of the premises, observed that a brick in the wall of the temple was oozing blood,²⁹ and that there was a declivity in the northeastern corner of the floor of the hall. He reported these observations in a memorial to the throne. In response to this, a supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny sent up a memorial stating in the strongest possible terms that T'ung Kuan had been given too much authority, and that eunuchs ought not to be granted the rank of commandery prince. At present, an imperial mandate written in letters of gold has been dispatched by express courier, ordering Commander T'ung Kuan to return to the capital."

"Now that you and I have been sent out to be local officials," responded Eunuch Director Liu, "such affairs at court are no longer any business of ours. As the saying goes:

Each day you live is merely another day.³⁰

Even if the sky should be about to fall,

There are the four giants to hold it up.³¹

Sooner or later this realm of the Great Sung dynasty is sure to come to grief at the hands of this bunch of discontented scholars.

Wang Ten-plus-nine,

Let's sip our wine!"³²

He then called for the two performers of Tao-ch'ing to come forward and instructed them, saying, "Sing us the story of *Li Po hao t'an-pei*, or *Li Po's Addiction to the Cup*."³³

The two performers then began to tap their "fisherman's drums" and sang to them for a while.

The feasting continued until evening, when the two eunuchs ordered their servants to prepare their sedan chairs and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to detain them any longer and saw them out to the front gate, where they departed, with their escorts shouting to clear the way.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside, he ordered that candles should be lit and the tables left in place, instructed the caterers to set things back in order, and urged Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen to keep their seats. In addition, he sent a page boy to invite Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, Ts'ui Pen, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join them.

When they had all been seated, he called for the players and instructed them, saying, "Continue to perform the *Yü-huan chi* from where you left off yesterday."

He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and remarked, "These eunuchs have no taste for the flavor of southern-style drama. If I had known they didn't like it, I would not have urged them to stay."

"They failed to appreciate your intentions," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Eunuchs, with their perverted tastes, only go for pieces like *Lan-kuan chi*,³⁴ and the:

Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,

performed by their boy actors. What do they know of major works that treat of:

Sorrows and joys, partings and reunions?”

Thereupon, the drums and clappers began to sound, and the players proceeded to present:

With lively action and slow singing,

the remaining scenes from *Yü-huan chi* that they had not finished performing the day before. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the page boys to serve the company by:

Promptly pouring the fine wine.³⁵

Ying Po-chüeh, who was sitting at the same table with Hsi-men Ch'ing, asked him, “Have the three singing girls gone home yet? If not, why don't you have them come out and serve us a cup of wine?”

“You're still dreaming of them, are you?” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “They've long since had enough of it and gone home.”

“They must have stayed over here for two or three days,” said Ying Po-chüeh.

“Wu Yin-erh stayed the longest time of all,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

That day, the company remained seated at their places until the third watch after the performance of the play was over, before the party finally broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to come a little early the next morning in order to help entertain the official visitors who were coming to offer a sacrifice to the deceased, after which, he rewarded the players with four taels of silver and sent them on their way.

The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yenling, and a sizable contingent of officials from the local guard all clubbed together to provide a pig and a sheep, and a fancy table setting of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, as their sacrificial offerings. A ritual specialist had been engaged to declaim the funeral eulogy. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a banquet for the occasion, and the three boy actors, Li Ming and company, were also in attendance.

At noon, the sound of drums was heard, indicating that the offertory gifts had arrived. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen went out to the gate to welcome the visitors and looked on as the group of officials, with their attendants:

Crowding behind and clamoring in front,³⁶
dismounted and were ushered into the front reception hall to change their clothes.

Before long, the sacrificial offerings were duly displayed, the group of officials gathered in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi returned their salutations. The ritual specialist, whose job it was to act as master of ceremonies, then called out his instructions, presented the three sacrificial libations, knelt down to one side, and proceeded to declaim the funeral eulogy, which read as follows:

On this, the twenty-fifth day *chia-shen*, of the ninth month, the first day of which was *keng-shen*, in the year *ting-yu*, the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period, his devoted colleagues Chou Hsiu, Ching Chung, Hsia Yen-ling, Chang Kuan, along with their fellow officials Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, Hsü Feng-hsiang, P'an Chi, and others, respectfully offer a stiff-bristled pig and a soft-haired sheep, along with other offertory foods, in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of the late consort, née Li, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, an officer of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. We address the spirit of the departed. Delicately raised in the women's quarters, she was chaste and adept at female occupations. Her virtue was that of gold or jade, her appearance that of fragrant orchids. In regulating her household she exhibited judgment, in managing her domestic tasks she left nothing to be desired. She showed respect for learning and was on good terms with her in-laws. Revering her husband as her Heaven, she paid him respect by raising the serving tray as high as her eyebrows.³⁷ Though she hoped to live to a ripe age, Heaven chose to curtail her remaining years. She and her husband should have enjoyed the harmony of phoenix mates or musical instruments, but, alas, Heaven begrudged her her remaining years and chose to hurry them to an abrupt end. Alas! The length or brevity of life are predetermined.³⁸ Heaven seems to reject persons of worth. Pearls sink below the waves and jade disks are shattered. Clouds can be threatening and winds bring sorrow in their wake. Though we knock at the door of the grave, it will not open. We may sigh for the dew on the shallot, but it will soon evaporate.³⁹ I, Chou Hsiu, and the others, occupying the position of colleagues, and mindful of the obligations of friendship, hereby offer up meat in sacrificial vessels, and decant wine into offertory goblets, in the hope that the spirit of the departed will deign to enjoy them. Should she be mindful of our eulogy on this sad occasion, may she come and partake thereof.

When the sacrificial ceremony was finished, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had thanked the participants, Wu K'ai and company led the group of officials to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their mourning garments and were served with tea. The boy actors started to play their instruments and sing for their entertainment as they sat down at their places to enjoy the collation that had been prepared for them. Their servants and attendants were also properly attended to. The chef then came out to supervise the presentation of the:

Three soups and five courses,
which were even more lavish than those served on the preceding two days, and kowtowed before the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, occupied the position of hosts, plying their guests with wine until:

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
while the three boy actors, Li Ming and company, with their:

Silver psalteries and ivory clappers,
played and sang to entertain the company. Meanwhile, outside, Hsi-men Ch'ing's managers and storekeepers saw to it that the carriers who had accompanied the official guests all received appropriate gratuities of silver according to precedent.

The officials remained in their places until mid-afternoon before getting up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not hear of it and, together with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and company, with large goblets in hand, endeavored to detain them, while telling Li Ming and the other boy actors to strike up their instruments and sing songs to them. They continued drinking and enjoying themselves until evening before the party broke up.

Hsi-men Ch'ing tried to persuade Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh to stay a little longer, but Wu K'ai said, “We've all been imposing on you for days on end, and you must be tired out yourself, Brother-in-law. We'd better go our respective ways and get some rest.”

Thereupon, they bade him farewell, and went home. Truly:

The verdant peaches in the celestial realm
are saturated with dew;
The red apricots that grow beside the sun

are enveloped in clouds.⁴⁰

If your family possesses immoderate wealth⁴¹
people will toady to you;

When you have ample means at your disposal
price is no consideration.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 65

ABBOT WU MEETS THE FUNERAL PROCESSION AND EULOGIZES THE PORTRAIT; CENSOR SUNG IMPOSES ON A LOCAL MAGNATE TO ENTERTAIN EUNUCH HUANG

Moved by the respect she always showed him,
he admired her gentleness;
Not having expected to be parted forever,
he can sing only sad songs.
The waning moon, hovering beside the clouds,
suspends its broken mirror;
Time's flowing light flies past as swiftly
as the shuttle on a loom.
Sorrow, like the color of verdant foliage,
fades by the end of spring;
Bitterness, suffusing the yearning heart,
serves to prolong the night.
If you should inquire how many tears have
fallen, only to evaporate;
They are as numerous as the autumn colors
in a grove of maple trees.

THE STORY GOES that the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month was the time for the second of the seven weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor, who had secured the job of presiding over the services on that day, brought sixteen Taoist priests to come to Hsi-men Ch'ing's home to conduct the flag-raising ceremony inviting the presence of the gods, and erect the ritual altar for the performance of the "Litany Addressed to the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East"¹ for the second weekly commemoration.

While they were setting up the altar that morning, a messenger came to deliver a letter from Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works, and Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was properly entertained before going on his way.

Abbot Wu had brought with him from the temple vessels for the meat of the three sacrificial animals, offerings of soup and rice, patisserie, vegetarian fare, imitation gold and silver ingots, paper money, and the like, along with a bolt of fabric, to serve as his sacrificial gifts. When the Taoist priests had circumambulated the coffin reciting their spells, Abbot Wu prostrated himself in front of the spirit tablet.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him in return, saying, "Your Reverence has put himself to considerable expense.

What can we do to be worthy of such largess?"

"I am most embarrassed," responded Abbot Wu. "I really should have provided for the recitation of an additional scripture to pray for the salvation of your lady, but my means would not permit me to do so. As for these coarse offerings of tea and rice that I have presented:

They are no more than tokens of my esteem.

I hope that Your Honor will see fit to accept them with a smile."

When the presentation of the sacrificial offerings had been completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to accept them and saw to the dismissal of the carriers who had brought them.

That day the sacred texts recited at the three morning, noon, and evening audiences included the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, or *Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens*,² a litany designed to destroy the Hells of the Nine Realms of Darkness,³ a ritual for attracting and summoning the soul of the deceased, a memorial written in red characters addressed to the above-mentioned Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, and the talismans notifying the various Perfected Beings of the rites that were being celebrated. These rituals were all performed in their entirety, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

The next day, the first person who came to offer a sacrifice to the deceased was Han Ming-ch'uan, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, who lived outside the city gate. At the time, Meng Yü-lou's younger brother, Meng Jui, who had been away from home as a traveling merchant for five or six years, had happened to arrive home the day before and, learning from his elder sister that there was to be a funeral observance at Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, chose to accompany his brother-in-law Han Ming-ch'uan in coming to offer a sacrifice to the deceased and acquire the appropriate mourning garment. He also brought with him something considerable in the way of gifts. After exchanging the customary amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing, he proceeded to Meng Yü-lou's quarters to pay his respects. By this time, there were some ten or more female guests on the premises, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had also provided a collation for their

entertainment. But no more of this.

At noon on the same day, the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, Li Ta-t'ien, the vice magistrate, Ch'ien Ch'eng, the assistant magistrate, Jen T'ing-kuei, the docket officer, Hsia Kung-chi, and the magistrate of Yang-ku district, Ti Ssu-pin, five officials in all, who had clubbed together to provide the necessary funds, came, attired in appropriate mourning garb, to burn paper money and offer their condolences. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a collation for them and saw that they were accommodated in the summerhouse. He had asked his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, along with Licentiate Wen, to help keep them company, and also engaged the services of the three boy actors to play their musical instruments and sing for their entertainment. The grooms that had accompanied them to tend their horses were also provided with platters of assorted snacks, which they carried to the place that had been set aside for them so they could sit down and eat.

Just as the guests at the party were devoting themselves to their cups and having a high time of it, as luck would have it:

Without coincidences there would be no stories.

It was unexpectedly announced that the secretary of the Ministry of Works, Huang Pao-kuang, who was the superintendent of the Imperial Brickyard, had come to offer his condolences. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hastily changed into his mourning clothes and went before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet to await his guest. Licentiate Wen, who had gone outside the front gate to welcome him, ushered him into the front reception hall, where he changed his clothes, and then led him inside. The servants who accompanied him, bearing incense sticks and candles, paper money, and bolts of satin brocade, arrayed on red lacquer trays, knelt down, holding up the incense in their hands.

After Huang Pao-kuang had offered up the incense and kowtowed before the spirit tablet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi had stepped forward to return his salutation, Huang Pao-kuang said, "Your pupil did not know of the death of your respected spouse. I have been remiss in offering my condolences. Forgive me. Forgive me."

"Your pupil has hitherto neglected to pay you his respects," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And now, venerable sir, you have not only condescended to express your condolences, but have deigned to bestow these lavish gifts upon me.

My gratitude will be impossible to contain."

When they had finished exchanging these amenities, Huang Pao-kuang was conducted to the summerhouse, where he was invited to sit down in the place of honor at the head of the table, while Hsi-men Ch'ing and Licentiate Wen sat down in the position of hosts to keep him company, and the attendants served them with tea.

Upon finishing his tea, Huang Pao-kuang said, "Yesterday Sung Ch'iao-nien asked me to convey his greetings to you. He has also learned of the demise of your respected lady and would like to have been able to offer his condolences in person. Unfortunately, however, he has a plethora of pressing matters on his hands. At present he is stationed in Chi-chou.

"You may not have heard about it yet, sir, but the Emperor is currently engaged in constructing the Mount Ken Imperial Park⁴ and has issued an edict ordering Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, to proceed to the Hu-Hsiang region of Chiang-nan to take charge of the Flower and Rock Convoys⁵ that will transport the rare flowers and rocks required for the embellishment of the park. The boats in these convoys are proceeding, one after the other, along the waterways, and the first contingent is about to arrive in the Huai River region.

"Moreover, the eunuch Huang Ching-ch'en, the defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, has been put in charge of the safe delivery of the rock formation known as 'The Fabulous Peak of Auspicious Clouds and a Myriad Shapes.'⁶ This object is twenty feet long and several feet thick and has been wrapped in yellow felt. A number of boats are involved in its transport, all flying yellow flags, and the convoy is proceeding through Shantung on the canal. But the water in the canal is low, and corvée laborers from eight prefectures have been requisitioned to tow the boats, with the result that:

The officials are in dire straits, and

The people are reduced to destitution.⁷

"His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien has been put in charge of the functionaries from the prefectures and districts and is personally involved in everything that happens.

The quantity of paperwork is mountainous, and

He is obliged to work both day and night,

without any respite whatever. On top of which, Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en is about to show up from the capital, and His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien is expected to lead the officials of the Two Provincial Offices in receiving him.

"Not being on familiar terms with anyone else in the area, he has deputed your pupil to respectfully ask if you would consent to allow your distinguished mansion to be used for his reception, and to host a banquet in honor of Defender-in-chief Huang. But I don't know if you will assent to this or not."

He then instructed an attendant to summon the servitors of His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien, whereupon two functionaries, dressed in black livery, knelt down in front of them, reached into a felt bag, and presented two bolts of satin brocade, a stick of aloeswood incense, two sticks of white wax, and a quire of "cotton paper," made from the bark of the paper-mulberry.⁸

"Those are the consolatory contributions offered by His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien," said Huang Pao-kuang. "These other two packets are the joint donations toward the banquet expenses presented by the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and eight prefectures. The twelve officials from the Two Provincial Offices have donated three taels apiece, and the eight prefectural officials have given five taels apiece, making twenty-two contributions, amounting to 106 taels in all."⁹

He handed these over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "May I trouble your worthy staff to take care of this, or not?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated to assent, saying, "Your pupil is currently in mourning. What am I to do? What am I to do?"

He then went on to inquire, "When is this reception to take place?"

"It's early yet," said Huang Pao-kuang. "It will not be until the middle of next month. Eunuch Director Huang Ching-ch'en has not even left the capital yet."

"The funeral procession for my late consort will not take place until the twelfth day of the tenth month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. But if I am directed to undertake this at the behest of the venerable Sung Ch'iao-nien, how could I refuse? And please extend my thanks for his generous consolatory offerings. With regard to these other contributions, however, you must take them back.

I absolutely refuse to accept them.

You have but to let me know the number of table settings needed. Your pupil will not fail to provide everything that is required."

"Ssu-ch'üan," said Huang Pao-kuang, "this proposal of yours is mistaken. Sung Ch'iao-nien entrusted me with the task of asking you to undertake this burdensome responsibility. These are the joint contributions of the officials from the entire province of Shantung and are not proffered by Sung Ch'iao-nien himself. How can you refuse them? If you should not accept them, your pupil would be constrained to report the fact back to Sung Ch'iao-nien, and he would not presume to trouble you any further."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he said, "In that case, your pupil will accept them for the time being."

He then directed Tai-an and Wang Ching to take possession of the contributions and put them away.

"How many table settings should be prepared?" he then went on to ask.

"For Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en," replied Huang Pao-kuang, "there should be a large table setting of the kind intended as much for display as for eating. For His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien and the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, individual table settings of the ordinary sort will do. And for the prefectural officials who rank below them, communal seating will suffice. The musicians required for their entertainment will be provided. There is no need for your household to engage any."

When he had finished speaking, after the tea had been twice replenished, he got up to leave.

Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to detain him, but Huang Pao-kuang said, "Your pupil must pay another call on the venerable gentleman Shang Liu-t'ang, who formerly served as district magistrate in my native place before being promoted to the post of prefectural judge in Ch'eng-tu. His son, Shang Hsiao-t'ang, is also a fellow student of mine, having passed the provincial civil service examinations the same year that I did."

"Your pupil was unaware, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you were on intimate terms with Shang Hsiao-t'ang. Your pupil and he are also acquainted."

When Huang Pao-kuang stood up to go, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Venerable sir, pray convey my sentiments to Sung Ch'iao-nien, and assure him that, when the time comes, he will find my humble abode respectfully at his disposal."

"Shortly beforehand," said Huang Pao-kuang, "Sung Ch'iao-nien will send someone to let you know. There is no need to be overly extravagant."

"Your pupil understands," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he escorted him to the front gate, where he mounted his horse and departed.

When the officials from the district yamen learned that the secretary of the Ministry of Works, Huang Pao-kuang, with other high-ranking officers from the regional inspector's office, had visited the premises, they were thrown into such consternation that they secreted themselves in the small summerhouse beneath the artificial hill as they drank their wine and ordered their subordinates to get their sedan chairs and horses out of the way.

On this occasion, when Hsi-men Ch'ing rejoined his guests in the summer-house, he told the assembled officials all about how the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was planning to lead the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and eight prefectures in welcoming Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en next month and had asked him to provide a reception in his honor.

On hearing this, the assembled officials, with one voice, said, "This visit will entail insuperable tribulation for the prefectures and districts involved. When such imperial emissaries come, all of the expenses for the attending personnel, provisions, public banquets, utensils, and corvée laborers are borne by the prefectures and districts, which, in turn, must extract them from the people. As a way of bringing about the utter depletion of both public and private resources:

Nothing could surpass this.¹⁰

We all hope, Ssu-ch'üan, that you will put in a good word with your superiors on our behalf in order to alleviate our plight. That would constitute a signal demonstration of our mutual esteem."

When they had finished speaking, they chose not to remain any longer, but got up, mounted their horses, and departed.

To make a long story short, when the time came for the third weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, Abbot Tao-chien of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city wall led sixteen Buddhist monks of high attainments to come and recite scriptures on her behalf. Wearing their cassocks of cloud-patterned brocade and their Vairocana hats, and accompanied by the music of large cymbals and large drums, in the morning they performed the ceremonies of "obtaining sacred water," "paying homage to the five directions," "invoking the Three Treasures," and "bathing the Buddha." At noon, they went on to perform the ceremonies of "soliciting the aid of the Tathāgata," "summoning the soul," "breaking out of Hell," reciting the *Litanies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty*,¹¹ and declaiming the dhāraṇīs of the *Sutra of the Peacock King*.¹² Everything was done with appropriate solemnity.

That evening, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and the wives of Hsi-men Ch'ing's employees, joined Yüeh-niang and company in participating in an all-night wake, during which they were entertained with puppet shows in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh, Wu K'ai, and Licentiate Wen, drank wine behind a screen at the eastern end of the temporary structure that had been erected in the courtyard.

The eighth day of the tenth month was the date for the fourth of the weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. For this occasion, Lama Chao, the head priest of the Pao-ch'ing Lamasery outside the west gate of the city, was engaged to bring sixteen monks and recite their foreign scriptures. They set up an altar, performed a shamanistic dance, scattered paper flowers and rice on the bier, and circumambulated it while burning incense and reciting dhāraṇīs. The oblations consisted of cow's milk, tea, cheese, and the like. The

suspended effigies were in the form of *pien-hsiang*, or transformation tableaux, representing nine horrific aspects of Māra, in which he was depicted wearing a chaplet of glass beads, with a necklace of skulls around his neck, in the act of devouring an infant, while seated astride an evil sprite, with serpents and hornless dragons encircling his waist. He was portrayed with four heads and eight arms, brandishing dagger-axes and halberds in his hands, with red hair and a blue face, presenting an incomparably ugly appearance.¹³ Once the noon vegetarian repast was over, the celebrants fell to consuming meat and wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home that day. Together with Yin-yang Master Hsü, he had gone to the family graveyard outside the city gate in order to break ground for the excavation of the tomb and did not return until the afternoon. That evening the rites were concluded and the lamas were dismissed.

The next day, he made arrangements for the transportation of the requisite accoutrements, wine, rice, table settings, and other culinary supplies to the grave site. He also deputed his managers and employees to go to his country estate and see to the erection of temporary structures at both the front and rear of the grounds, including four or five rooms to serve as wine depositories and kitchens, and also put up an eighteen-foot-wide covered structure by the graveside. The local residents and the neighbors who had previously been invited were entertained to a feast there with:

Unlimited quantities of meat and wine,
after which, when the party broke up, they returned home with their:

Shoulders and backs loaded with gifts,
but there is no need to describe this in detail.

On the eleventh, during the day, professional boy singers of funeral dirges and actors who performed exorcistic skits to the accompaniment of gongs and drums came to put on a farewell show before the spirit tablet of the deceased. The skits they played were entitled "The Five Devils Plague the Assessor,"¹⁴ "Celestial Master Chang Tao-ling¹⁵ Is Befuddled by Devils," "Chung K'uei¹⁶ Hoodwinks the Little Devils," "Lao-tzu Traverses the Han-ku Pass,"¹⁷ "The Six Traitors Plague Maitreya,"¹⁸ "The Plum Blossom in the Snow,"¹⁹ "Chuang Chou Dreams That He Is a Butterfly,"²⁰ "The Four Heavenly Kings Subdue Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind,"²¹ "Lü Tung-pin Beheads Huang-lung with His Flying Sword,"²² and "Emperor T'ai-tsu Escorts Ching-niang on a Thousand-Li Journey."²³

When this medley of vaudeville acts had been performed, the female guests, who had been looking on through a hanging screen, paid their farewell respects to Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and then went inside, after which the male relatives came in to bid farewell to the spirit tablet and burn paper money before it. Copious tears were shed.

The next day was the date for the funeral procession. Early in the morning, the funeral banner and all the various banderoles, portable pavilions, and pa-pier-mâché funerary objects were carried outside, and the Buddhist and Taoist monks, drummers, musicians, and carriers all assembled. In preparation for this event, Hsi-men Ch'ing had solicited the services of fifty military patrolmen from Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, all of whom came with their archery gear and horses, and were:

Attired in full-dress uniforms.²⁴

He left ten of them to guard his residence, while directing the remaining forty to divide themselves into two contingents and march in front of the casket on either side of the road. In addition, there were twenty orderlies from his yamen to clear the road ahead of the procession and look after the burial objects, while yet another twenty had been sent ahead to guard the gate to the family graveyard and receive whatever sacrificial offerings might be delivered there.

That day, the officials and gentry, relatives and friends, who came to take part in the funeral procession:

Created a hubbub with their horses and carriages,

Overflowing the streets and blocking the alleys.²⁵

The sedan chairs of the members of the Hsi-men family and their male and female relatives and guests alone numbered more than a hundred, in addition to which, there were several tens of smaller sedan chairs for the madams and painted faces from the licensed quarter.

Yin-yang Master Hsü had determined that 8:00 AM would be the right time for the ceremony of raising the coffin. Hsi-men Ch'ing left Sun Hsüeh-o and the two nuns to look after the house and ordered P'ing-an together with two orderlies to guard the front gate. His son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi performed the role of filial son by kneeling in front of the casket and smashing an earthenware crock to signal that the procession was about to begin. Sixty-four professional coffin bearers fastened the main carrying poles to the catafalque,²⁶ while an assistant coroner stood on a platform attached to one end of this structure, from which vantage point he beat a wooden clapper to provide a cadence as they hoisted it onto their shoulders and proceeded along the route of the procession. Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged beforehand for Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Temple of Kindness Required, to preside over the coffin-raising ceremony. The procession had no sooner turned onto Main Street and headed toward the south than:

Mountains and seas of people,²⁷

lined up to watch on either side. It happened to be a fine, clear day, and it was truly a spectacular funeral procession. Behold:

A genial breeze livens the handsome streets;

A tenuous drizzle moistens the fragrant dust.

In the eastern quarter the morning sun has just arisen;

In the northern sector the lingering mists clear away.²⁸

Tung-tung lung-lung,

The decorated funeral drums maintain

a constant din;

Ting-ting tang-tang,

The exorcistic players' gongs resound
night after night.
The funeral banner sways in the breeze,
Inscribed with large characters on
nine feet of red silk;
High-rising rockets soar into the sky,
Bursting asunder the yellow clouds
suspended in midair.
Fiercely and ferociously,
The Road-clearing Demon²⁹ nonchalantly
holds his golden battle-axe;
Prancing and swaggering,
The Spirit of the Perilous Paths³⁰ grimly
grips his silver dagger-axe.
Wandering freely and easily,³¹
The Eight Taoist Immortals appear surrounded
by tortoises and cranes;
Gracefully and seductively,
The four handmaidens come into sight followed
by tigers and by deer.
The exorcistic devils,
Flash by to a crashing of gongs;
The rack of fireworks,
Explodes into a myriad crackers.
Creating quite a stir,
A float of a lotus-gathering boat comes by,
Presenting skits of slapstick humor;³²
Lanky and large-sized,³³
Local mummers performing on lofty stilts,
Are dressed in armor, wearing helmets.
Clean-cut and good-looking,³⁴
A company of sixteen young Taoist acolytes,
Each attired in a roseate robe and Taoist cap,
Sound the bells from the court of Mt. K'un-lun,
And play eight gong-chimes hanging in a frame,³⁵
Producing strains of immortal music;
Big-bellied and overweight,³⁶
A band of twenty-four aged Buddhist monks,
Each one garbed in a cloud-patterned cassock,
Beat their large cymbals, and
Strike their great drums,
Paying homage to the five directions.
There are twelve large damask portable pavilions,
Each of which is conspicuous for its
dancing greens and flying reds;³⁷
And twenty-four little damask portable pavilions,
Every one of which exhibits clustering
pearls and kingfisher ornaments.
On the left,
Counterfeit open-air storehouses and underground
vaults follow one after another;
On the right,
Papier-mâché mountains of gold and mountains of
silver sweep past in formation.

Portable kitchens display containers of the
 eight culinary delicacies;
 Pavilions for incense and candles convey the
 three sacrificial libations.
 Six pavilions of artificial flowers,
 Parade their thousand spheres of brocade;
 The solitary soul-bearing palanquin,
 Exhibits a hundred knots of yellow ribbon.
 On the one hand,
 Artificial lotus blossoms and snowy willows
 vie with each other in brilliance;
 On the other hand,
 Jeweled canopies and silver-hued banderoles
 march with each other in formation.
 Banners inscribed in gold, and
 Banners inscribed in silver,
 Securely protect the catafalque;
 Canopies of white damask, and
 Canopies of green damask,
 Hover about the attached platform.
 Talismanic axes enveloped in clouds,
 Three on either perimeter,
 Are all depicted in vibrant colors;
 Presenting jugs and offering towels,
 Maidservants on both sides,
 Are made up so as to look lifelike.
 As directed by the mourning banner,³⁸
 The filial relatives set up a wail.
 Preceded by five pacesetters and
 six singing boys,
 The pyramidal pedestal, shaped like Mt. Sumeru,
 to which the soul banner is affixed,
 Sways up and down as it proceeds.
 The sixty-four pallbearers,
 Wearing black livery and white caps,
 Steadfastly support the bier
 and its baldachin,
 With its crimson, gold lamé floral designs,
 Decorated with images of the Five Ancients
 on their cloud-scaling cranes,
 And with tassels dangling from its four corners,
 That surmounts the brocaded catafalque,
 Majestic and unmoved.³⁹

Behold:

To either side, the orderlies who protect
 the procession and clear the road,
 All wear mourning caps on their heads,
 Black jackets on their bodies,
 Mourning girdles about their waists,
 Puttees on their legs,
 Long-legged boots on their feet,
 And hold staves in their hands,
 Clamoring in front and crowding behind.
 To either side, the equestrian acrobats
 who perform their stunts,

Are attired in sesame-patterned flat-topped caps,⁴⁰
 Held in place with hammered gold rings that
 float at the back of their heads,
 And two or three layers of satin jackets,
 The waists of which are enclosed in purple belts,
 While their feet are shod in four-seamed
 dark-tan eagle-talon boots,⁴¹
 Set off by variegated embroidered stockings
 depicting frolicking sea creatures.
 The acrobats resemble eagles or falcons,
 The horsemen are like gibbons or monkeys.
 Some brandish a gleaming spear in one hand,
 While flourishing a blue standard mounted on
 a vermilion staff with the other,
 Some do headstands or execute somersaults,
 Some perform feats of archery under the
 bellies of their mounts,
 Some assume the pose of "The Golden Cock
 Standing on a Single Foot,"⁴²
 Some adopt the posture of "The Immortal
 Crossing the Bridge,"
 While some do the trick of "Hiding Their
 Bodies in the Stirrups."⁴³
 Everyone expresses his admiration,⁴⁴
 One and all vying in their approval.
 Shoving shoulders and bumping backs,
 In their confusion, no distinction is made
 between the wise and the foolish;⁴⁵
 Pressing to see and crowding to watch,
 Amid the chaos, none discriminate between
 the distinguished and the humble.
 Chang the Third, who is clumsy and fat,
 Can only pant for breath;
 Li the Fourth, who is short of stature,
 Repeatedly stamps his feet.
 White-haired old gentlemen,
 Prop their beards upon their walking sticks;⁴⁶
 Black-haired young beauties,⁴⁷
 Bring their children to watch the procession.

Truly:

The thunder of gongs and drums mingles with
 the dust of the streets;
 Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade
 a myriad people look on.
 The sound of lamentation begins to fade away
 as the catafalque departs;
 This funeral procession can truly be said to
 outdo any in the capital.

Wu Yüeh-niang in a large sedan chair, headed up the ten or more chairs of Li Chiao-erh and the other members of the household in following, single file, in the wake of the casket. Hsi-men Ch'ing, attired in a palmetto hat and mourning clothes, led the assembled relatives and friends after them, while Ch'en Ching-chi accompanied the catafalque, keeping one hand upon it, until the procession arrived at the entrance to East Street.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had previously provided an honorarium and invited Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor to preside over the ceremony of displaying and dedicating the full-length portrait of Li P'ing-erh. His body was clothed in a Taoist vestment emblazoned with twenty-four cranes on a crimson background flying amidst variegated sunset clouds. On his head he wore a ninefold-yang thunder cap⁴⁸ adorned with a jade ring. His feet were shod in red shoes, he held an ivory tablet in his hands, and he was seated in an open sedan chair, borne by four bearers, as he came to meet the procession. When he held up the full-length portrait of Li

P'ing-erh in both hands, Ch'en Ching-chi knelt down in front of it, and the procession came to a halt. The crowd of spectators listened attentively as, from his elevated position, and in a loud voice, he intoned a eulogy to the portrait.

The hare scampers and the raven flies⁴⁹
west and then east;

The hundred years of a man's life are
like a windblown lamp.

The people of today do not understand⁵⁰
the meaning of no-birth;

Only at this time do they realize that
phenomena are ephemeral.

In solemn commemoration of the spirit of the late respected lady of Commandant Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, whose life in this world extended into her twenty-seventh year. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei*, and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period. We respectfully submit that: as the genteel daughter of a prominent family, and a winsome occupant of ornate chambers, she possessed a countenance reminiscent of blossoms and moonlight and was naturally endowed with an orchid-like fragrance. It was her salient virtue to be gentle and compliant, and she was by nature both temperate and mild. In her match with the gentleman Hsi-men Ch'ing, she demonstrated her fitness for wedded bliss. As a dweller in the women's quarters she was both worthy and chaste, exhibiting marital harmony like that between zither and cithara. Jade was planted in Indigo Field,⁵¹ only to perish like the orchids of Ch'u.⁵² Though she might have looked forward to a lifetime of prosperity, unfortunately the springtime of her life lasted only twenty-seven years.

Alas! The bright moon wanes all too soon, the finest objects are difficult to preserve.⁵³ Persons of worth suffer unexpected calamities, the length or brevity of life are predetermined. At present, the catafalque occupies the highway, and red pennants flutter in the breeze. Her husband stamps his feet in grief before the casket, while her relatives wail in lamentation along the alleys. The feelings engendered by separation are deep and difficult to dispel, but the longer we are deprived of her voice and appearance the easier they become to forget. Unworthy though we be to wear these caps and pins, we are ordained devotees of the Taoist religion. Though we unhappily lack the divine arts of a Hsin-yüan P'ing,⁵⁴ we faithfully adhere to the tradition bequeathed by Lao-tzu, the founder of the school of the Mysterious Origin. All we can do is display this mirrorlike portrait of Ts'ui Hui,⁵⁵ being unable to bring back the butterfly of Chuang Chou's dream. May she be enabled to imbibe sweet dew and bathe in the carnelian nectar of the gods, transcend her position as an immortal, and ascend to the Purple Elysium.⁵⁶ May she bedeck herself with a hundred jewels and be presented before the Seven Perfected Ones,⁵⁷ that they may enable her purified soul to escape from the road to the shades. Her one mind will then be without impediments, in realizing that the four elements are all illusory.



Desire to Share Her Afterlife Inspires a Lavish Funeral

It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
 The breath is transformed into a clear breeze,
 the form returns to earth;
 The numinous soul's true nature, once lost,
 will never be recovered;
 The head is altered and the face replaced
 an infinite number of times.
 Harken now to the final words. So:
 Nobody knows to what place her vital essences
 may have returned;⁵⁸
 Only her portrait remains to be passed on to
 later generations.

When Abbot Wu had finished intoning the eulogy, he sat upright in his sedan chair and it backed out of the way of the procession. Thereupon:

Drums and music resounded to the heavens, and
 The sounds of lamentation shook the earth,

as the funeral procession started up again and wended its way toward the South Gate of the city. The friends and relatives kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company in walking as far as the gate before they mounted their horses. Ch'en Ching-chi accompanied the casket on foot,

keeping one hand upon it, all the way to the family graveyard at Wu-li Yüan.

It so happens that Chang Kuan, the militia commander of Ch'ing-ho, at the head of two hundred troops, along with Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh, had already set up a tent on the high ground in front of the grave site, where wind and percussion instruments started to play, and the bronze gong and bronze drum were beaten, to welcome the funeral procession. As the mourners looked on, the papier-mâché burial objects were set up and burned:

The smoke and flames flaring up to the sky.⁵⁹

Within the graveyard there were arrayed ten or more sacrificial offerings for the wake, which had been provided by the courtesans of the two Music Offices. Marquees had also been put up for the accommodation of the female guests and relatives.

When the catafalque arrived and had been set down by the bearers, Yin-yang Master Hsü, leading several coroner's assistants, consulted his geomancer's compass⁶⁰ in order to assure the correct alignment of the casket in the grave. After sacrificing to the Earth God and the tutelary gods of the locality at 10:00 AM, the casket was duly interred, and covered with soil. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had changed his clothes, he presented a gift of two bolts of silk to Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command and asked him to perform the ceremony of dotting the spirit tablet.⁶¹

After the sacrificial rites were completed, the officials of the Ch'ing-ho Guard and the assembled relatives, friends, and employees competed with one another in offering wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Drums and music resounded to the heavens, and

The remnants of fireworks littered the ground.

The servitors responsible for the disposal of the sacrificial oblations did as they were directed, and the workers did not indulge in disorderly conduct. Refreshments for the mourners were provided in four or five places, the female guests were seated in the rear summerhouse, and each location had a set number of servants assigned to it. Everything was done on a festive and lavish scale, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

When the formal collation was finished, the owners of the adjacent estates had also set up tables at which they invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to partake of wine in celebration of the wake, which involved a considerable expenditure in the way of gratuities.

That afternoon, when it was time for the return of the spirit tablet, Wu Yüeh-niang sat in the sedan chair designated for the conveyance of the soul of the departed, holding the spirit tablet and the soul banner, while Ch'en Ching-chi walked alongside the bier that held the spirit bed, keeping one hand upon it. It was draped with a spirit shroud of jet satin and was invested in a jade-colored, gold lamé, waterproof canopy, with tassels dangling from its four corners. The procession also included the portable pavilion in which the full-length portrait of Li P'ing-erh was suspended, the large damask pavilions, the little damask pavilions, and the pavilions for incense and candles, and was accompanied on either side by sixteen drummers and musicians, and the young Taoist acolytes, all performing on their instruments.

Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Meng the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, as well as all the managers and employees of the household kept company with Hsi-men Ch'ing as he reentered the city, while the sedan chairs of the female guests brought up the rear. When they arrived at the gate of the residence they observed the custom of leaping over a fire before entering.⁶² After the spirit tablet had been set up in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, Yin-yang Master Hsü offered a sacrifice to the gods and performed a ritual purification in the front reception hall and then proceeded to paste pollution-dispelling spells on all the doors. Hsi-men Ch'ing brought out a bolt of silk and five taels of silver to thank Master Hsü for his services and then escorted him to the gate. The hired personnel were then dispatched, and twenty strings of cash were distributed between them, five strings for the military patrolmen from the Regional Military Command, five strings for the orderlies from the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and ten strings for the militiamen. Hsi-men Ch'ing also sent cards to express his gratitude to Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to set up tables and urged Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, and the rest of his guests to sit down and stay a little longer, but they all refused, said goodbye, and departed. Lai-pao came in and reported that the carpenters who had set up the temporary structures for the funeral observances were waiting outside and proposed to come back the next day to take down the structures.

"There's no need to take down the structures quite yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have them come back to take them down the day after the banquet ordained by His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is over."

The carpenters were consequently sent on their way.

Meanwhile, in the rear compound, the wife of Hua the Elder, along with Ch'iao Hung's wife and the other female guests, had waited until after Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet was set up to engage in a round of wailing, after which they, too, made their departure.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing:

He could not bear to part with her so precipitously.⁶³

That evening he went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters with the intention of spending the night by her spirit tablet. Once there, he saw that her spirit bed had been set up in the position of honor, with her full-length portrait hanging to one side, and her half-length portrait placed inside it, along with a little brocade quilt, a bed table, some clothing, a dressing case, and the like.

There was nothing that had not been provided.

There was even a pair of her tiny golden lotuses resting below it. On the table in front of it there were:

Incense, flowers, lamps, and candles,⁶⁴

Golden saucers, goblets, and vessels,
replete with every kind of offering.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wept incessantly and directed Ying-ch'un to make up his bed on the k'ang across from it. In the middle of the night, confronted with a lonely lamp and:

The slanting moon in the half-open window,⁶⁵
he tossed and turned, unable to sleep:

Giving vent to long sighs as well as short,
as he yearned for his vanished beauty. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Giving vent to long sighs as well as short,
he contemplates the window;
The solitary image of the dancing phoenix⁶⁶
is enough to break his heart.⁶⁷
The orchids have withered like those of Ch'u⁶⁸
during the rains of autumn;
The maple leaves have fallen on the Wu River,⁶⁹
succumbing to the night frost.
In our former lives we had already expressed
the wish to twine our branches;
But in this lifetime it is difficult to find
a soul-resuscitating incense.
If her pure spirit continues its existence
beneath the Nine Springs,
In the nether world as in this human realm
two hearts will be broken.

During the daylight hours, when the offerings of tea and rice were made to Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room to supervise the maidservants as they laid them out and then seated himself at a table facing the tablet and proceeded to eat with her, raising his chopsticks and asking her to partake with him as he did so. Thus he carried out the principle of:

Sacrificing to the spirits as if they were present.⁷⁰

When they saw this, the maidservants and waiting women could not help wiping the tears from their eyes.

The wet nurse, Ju-i, when no one else was about, constantly appeared before him:

Serving tea or serving water,
Touching him or bumping him,
Pinching him or teasing him,

interrupting him or engaging him in repartee. It did not take more than two or three nights of this before Hsi-men Ch'ing, having had too much to drink while entertaining someone one day, returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where Ying-ch'un helped him into bed. During the night, he wanted some tea to drink and called for Ying-ch'un, but she did not respond. Ju-i got up and brought him some tea, after which she noticed that his quilt was falling off the k'ang and, having collected the teacup, reached down with her hand to put it back in place. Hsi-men Ch'ing, seized by a momentary impulse, embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, sticking his tongue into her mouth, to which the woman responded by sucking his tongue, without saying so much as a word. Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to take off her clothes and get onto the k'ang with him, where the two of them proceeded to embrace under the quilt, where:

Unable to contain their pleasure,
they engaged in the sport of clouds and rain together.

"Since you have seen fit to favor me, Father," said Ju-i, "now that my mistress is dead, I am more than willing to remain in your household, and let you do with me as you will."

"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are content to cater to my desires with all your heart, you need not worry about my willingness to support you."

At this juncture, as far as the woman was concerned:

Upon the pillow and the mat,⁷¹

there was nothing she refused to do in order to please him. The two of them:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
as she bent herself to his will, which delighted Hsi-men Ch'ing no end.

The next day, the woman got up early in the morning, fetched Hsi-men Ch'ing's footwear for him, and folded his bedding, so that Ying-ch'un's services were no longer required.

Catering to him with the utmost assiduity,⁷²

There was no length to which she would not go.

Hsi-men Ch'ing unlocked the door to the inner room and sought out four of Li P'ing-erh's ornamental hairpins with which to reward her, and the woman kowtowed to him in thanks. Ying-ch'un realized that he had been intimate with her, and the two of them decided to ally themselves with each other. The woman, for her part, relying upon the favor that had been shown her, felt that she was on a firm footing and no longer sought help in any other quarter.



During a Nightly Vigil He Succumbs to the Scent of Rouge

Three days after Li P'ing-erh's burial, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from the ceremony of revisiting the grave, to which he had invited a host of officials, female guests, the singing girls Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter, along with the four boy actors Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un, it was observed that Ju-i had assumed a demeanor:

Different from that of former days.

What with her:

Phony eyebrows and bogus airs,

she made herself conspicuous among her fellow maidservants by the way in which:

She talked, and she laughed;

a fact which immediately caught the attention of P'an Chin-lien.

The next morning, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting with Ying Po-chüeh, it was suddenly announced that His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had sent someone to deliver a consignment of complimentary gifts for Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. These consisted of a table setting of gold and silver wine vessels, including two gold flagons, a pair of gold goblets on raised stands, ten little silver cups, two silver ewers with hinged lids, four silver loving cups, two crimson variegated python robes, two bolts of satin brocade, ten jugs of wine, and two carcasses of mutton.

The messenger also stated, "The defender-in-chief's boat has already arrived in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, and my master would impose upon Your Honor to make the necessary arrangements for the banquet in good time, so that the welcoming ceremony can

definitely take place on the eighteenth."

Hsi-men Ch'ing took careful possession of the gifts, rewarded the messenger with two taels of silver, and sent him back with a written reply. He then proceeded to weigh out the necessary silver to Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing, so that they could order the table settings, see to the preparation of the sweetmeats, and contract for all the other needed supplies, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "From the time that she first became ill, right up until the present moment, I haven't been able to relax for even a single day. I have barely been able to finish off the business of the funeral, when this kind of thing comes up, leaving me with:

Groping hands and floundering feet."⁷³

"There is no need for you to complain, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, you did not solicit this obligation. He sought you out and imposed it upon you. Even though this banquet stands to cost you a good deal of money, in the future, the fact that you have entertained the presiding officials from the whole province of Shantung, including the grand coordinator, the regional inspector, and miscellaneous military officers, not to mention the imperially commissioned defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, will only serve to shed glory on this household of yours, and further enhance your prestige."

"That's not the point," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I had hoped that it would be scheduled for some time after the twentieth, but now, contrary to my expectation, the welcoming event is to be held on the eighteenth. I'm feeling altogether too:

Pressured and pushed.

Moreover, the eighteenth falls within the fifth week after her death, and I've already paid Abbot Wu Tsung-che to draft the petitions for the observance scheduled for that day. How can I change it? But if I don't:

The ends of the fire tongs will get
entangled with each other.

How will I ever manage it?"

"That's no problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "As I calculate it, since Sister-in-law died on the seventeenth day of the ninth month, the twenty-first day of this month marks the end of the fifth week after her death. If you hold your banquet on the eighteenth, you can still schedule a scripture recitation on the twentieth without its being too late."

"You're right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send a page boy to tell Abbot Wu to reschedule the date."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got another suggestion to make. You should take advantage of the fact that at the present time Perfect Man Huang Yüan-pai from the Eastern Capital is in temporary residence at his temple. The Emperor dispatched him to the subprefecture of T'ai-an in order to present a hanging censer decorated with golden bells for the burning of imperial incense,⁷⁴ and officiate at a seven-day rite of cosmic renewal⁷⁵ on the sacred peak of Mount T'ai. This presents you with the opportunity, before he returns to the capital, to ask Abbot Wu to invite him to preside as the high priest at your ceremony on the twentieth. Thus you can avail yourself of his name to add luster to the occasion."

"To be sure," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I, too, have heard that this Perfect Man Huang is a very charismatic prelate. In that case I would have to make arrangements for a plenary service, with an additional twenty-four Taoist priests, in order to make a day and night ceremony out of it. The only problem is that Abbot Wu has already presented a sacrificial offering during the second weekly commemoration, and I also prevailed upon him to preside over the ceremony of displaying the portrait during the funeral procession, and to supply the Taoist acolytes who accompanied the catafalque. Not having any other way to compensate him, I engaged his services to officiate at this scripture recitation, meaning it to be:

No more than a token of my esteem.

Now if I should invite this Perfect Man Huang to act as the chief celebrant, is he not likely to be offended?"

"The responsibility for the ceremony as a whole," said Ying Po-chüeh, "will remain in the hands of Abbot Wu. He will only be inviting Perfect Man Huang to officiate, that's all. It will cost you a few more taels of silver, Brother, but, after all, it is for my sister-in-law that you are doing it, not for anyone else."

Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith instructed Ch'en Ching-chi to write out a card on his behalf addressed to Abbot Wu, enclosing another five taels of silver for the drafting of the ceremonial petitions, and requesting him to extend the invitation to Perfect Man Huang, reschedule the scripture recitation for the twentieth, supply an additional twenty-four Taoist priests, and expand the ceremony into a Water and Fire sublimation ritual extending over a day and a night. As soon as this was completed, he ordered Tai-an to go on horseback to deliver it.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off Ying Po-chüeh, he went back to the rear compound where Wu Yüeh-niang greeted him by saying, "Pen the Fourth's wife has purchased two gift boxes for us. She has come to kowtow and inform us that their daughter, Chang-chieh, has become engaged to someone."

"To whom has she become engaged?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Pen the Fourth's wife, who was wearing a blue damask jacket, a white damask skirt, and a black satin cloak, and her daughter, who was dressed in a jacket of crimson satin over a skirt of yellow damask, and whose hairdo was adorned with trinkets, kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times as formally as though inserting a taper in its holder.

"I didn't know about it either," said Yüeh-niang, who was standing to one side. "It turns out that this child is to be elevated to the position of a concubine in the household of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling. The engagement was only formalized yesterday, and she is to be carried across his threshold on the twenty-fourth. They have obtained a mere thirty taels of silver for her. If you stop to consider it, the child has already developed a good figure. She doesn't look like a fourteen-year-old, but more like a girl of fifteen or sixteen. It's been some time since we've seen her, and she's grown up to such an extent in the interim."

"The other day, at a drinking party," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he mentioned that he was planning to secure a couple of girls in order to have them trained as musicians, but I didn't know that you had offered your daughter to him."

Thereupon, he suggested to Yüeh-niang that she usher them into her parlor and invite them to stay for a cup of tea. Later on, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all came in to greet them and help keep them company. As they were about to leave, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang gave them a set of heavy silk brocade clothing and a tael of silver, while Li Chiao-erh and the others each gave them trinkets, handkerchiefs, cosmetics and the like.

That evening, Tai-an came back and reported that Abbot Wu had accepted the silver and understood what was wanted, that Perfect Man Huang was still in residence at the temple and would not return to the Eastern Capital until after the twentieth, and that he would come a day early, on the nineteenth, in order to set up the altar.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home to supervise the chefs in making advance preparations for the banquet, and see that everything was in proper order. Outside the main gate he erected a seven-story-high tower of variegated bunting in the shape of a mountain, and in front of the reception hall another one of five stories.

On the seventeenth, the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien sent two district officials to inspect the preparations for the banquet. They found that at the head of the reception hall:

The screens displayed their peacocks' tails, and

The floor was covered with woolen carpets;

The tablecloths were fabricated of brocade, and

The seat cushions flaunted floral designs.

The place of honor for Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en, from which he would be in a position to survey the feast, featured a large portable table with a setting of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, to be supplied with seasonal delicacies and other culinary specialties, cone-shaped piles of fruit and ingot-shaped cakes, as well as high-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery stamped with the images of the Five Ancients and richly decorated with brocade. There were two smaller portable tables beside it so that the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor could keep him company. Ranged along either side were the tables for the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, while the communal seating for the officials of the eight prefectures was in a temporary structure outside the reception hall. The arrangements for the officials seated on either side of the hall were to be individual table settings of the ordinary kind, provided with five appetizers and five dishes. When the district officials had finished their inspection of the arrangements they were entertained to tea by Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they got up and returned to report on their findings.

The next day, the grand coordinator Hou Meng and the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, at the head of an entourage of mounted men, proceeded early in the morning to meet the boat of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. The resulting procession was preceded by a large yellow banner emblazoned with the two words "Imperial Commission" in the Emperor's own hand. The local military officials, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the seal-holding officers of the left and right battalions of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, all attired in their martial uniforms and armor, at the head of their mounted subordinates, followed in its wake. Accompanied by an honor guard of soldiers bearing blue flags, tasseled spears, and tridents, the procession extended over several li in length.

Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en was dressed in a crimson robe emblazoned with the images of two pythons, one on the front and one on the back, done in variegated embroidery. He rode in a curtained sedan chair with a silver finial on top, carried by eight bearers, accompanied by eight outriders, and shielded by a tea-leaf-colored canopy above. The staff officers who followed in his entourage were without number, all of them mounted on mettlesome steeds that neighed as they proceeded. All in all, the procession resembled a glittering tapestry of a myriad figures, as it wended its way along the road, to the music of drums and wind instruments.

Clouds of yellow dust enveloped the highway;

Sounds of chickens and dogs were not heard;⁷⁶ and

Woodcutters and gatherers stayed out of sight.

As the cavalcade of men and horses passed through Tung-p'ing prefecture and entered Ch'ing-ho district, the area by the roadside was rendered black by the number of district officials kneeling there to welcome the procession. The attendants of the defender-in-chief ordered them to rise and assist in clearing the streets all the way to the main gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, where:

The beat of the Music Office drums,

Reverberated to the cloudy empyrean,

and the officers and functionaries, attired in black livery, were drawn up in order like the wings of a formation of wild geese.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal black attire, stood there waiting respectfully as he gazed at the approaching dust. It took some time for the escorting cavalcade to pass by, after which, the defender-in-chief finally alighted from his sedan chair and came inside, while the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor, at the head of the other officials, both high and low:

Swarmed inside as a single throng,⁷⁷

and entered the reception hall. Within the reception hall, the refined music of psaltery and mandola, metallophone and gong-chimes, dragon flutes and phoenix pipes,⁷⁸ was heard to resonate.

The first persons to formally present themselves to the visitor were the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, and the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, and the defender-in-chief responded to them with appropriate protocol.

Next came left provincial administration commissioner of Shantung, Kung Kuai,⁷⁹ left administration vice commissioner, Ho Ch'i-kao,⁸⁰ right provincial administration commissioner, Ch'en Ssu-chen,⁸¹ right administration vice commissioner, Chi K'an, left assistant administration commissioner, Feng T'ing-hu, right assistant administration commissioner, Wang Po-yen,⁸² investigation commissioner,

Chao No,⁸³ investigation commissioner, Han Wenkuang, surveillance vice-commissioner of education, Ch'en Cheng-hui,⁸⁴ assistant commissioner of the Military Defense Circuit, Lei Ch'i-yüan, and so forth. When the personnel of the Two Provincial Offices had finished presenting themselves, the defender-in-chief responded to them with somewhat less elaborate protocol.

When it came to Prefect Hsü Sung of Tung-ch'ang, Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing, Prefect Ling Yün-i⁸⁵ of Yen-chou, Prefect Han Pang-ch'i⁸⁶ of Hsü-chou, Prefect Chang Shu-yeh⁸⁷ of Chi-nan, Prefect Wang Shih-ch'i⁸⁸ of Ch'ing-chou, Prefect Huang Chia⁸⁹ of Teng-chou, and Prefect Yeh Ch'ien⁹⁰ of Lai-chou, the presiding officials of these eight prefectures presented themselves as a group, and the defender-in-chief merely responded to them with a low bow.

When the local military officials, including Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and so forth, presented themselves, the defender-in-chief simply remained sitting upright in his place, allowing them to dispose themselves as they would, standing in attendance outside the reception hall.

Finally, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling stepped up to pay their respects and offer their visitor tea, after the consumption of which, the grand coordinator, Hou Meng, and the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, came forward with cups in hand to offer toasts to the defender-in-chief. At this, the drums struck up beneath the dais, as the defender-in-chief was presented with floral ornaments of gold and toasted in jade goblets. Only after toasts had been exchanged and the wine replenished did the defender-in-chief take his seat in the place of honor, while the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor sat down in their positions below him to preside over the feast. The rest of the officials, including Hsi-men Ch'ing, then proceeded to sit down in their respective places.

When a director from the Music Office had presented an album listing the program of pieces they were prepared to perform, the music commenced. Every one of the performances, including both instrumental and vocal music, and ensemble dance pieces, was presented in appropriate order, displaying to maximum advantage the beauties of sound and color. During the feast, after a scene from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *P'ei Chin-kung huan-tai chi* (The story of P'ei Tu's return of the belts)⁹¹ had been performed, the chef came out to preside over the carving of the entrées of roast venison and pork, served with a soup of a hundred ingredients, other culinary specialties, and steamed open-topped dumplings. After this, four of the musicians, playing the psaltery, mandola, *p'i-p'a*, and harp, without any percussion instruments, sang a song suite in the Nan-lü mode, beginning with the tune "A Sprig of Flowers":

Holding office as one of the Eight Bulwarks of the state,
Drawing a salary of a thousand bushels,⁹² or thereabouts,
His deeds will be remembered for a hundred generations,
His name will be renowned for a myriad years of spring.
His strict propriety ensures his success and honesty.
Governing the realm and stabilizing the country⁹³
are his only considerations;
His mode of presiding over the vessels of state⁹⁴
is innovative.⁹⁵
In his adherence to protocol and leadership of
the loyal and true,
His only concern is to requite his ruler and
display magnanimity.
In relying upon the worthy and upright while
adhering to justice,
His sole endeavor is to clarify the laws and
transform the people.⁹⁶

By the time the singing was over, the second soup course had not yet been served, although three musical performances had been presented.

Meanwhile, the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, deputed two district officials to take care of the various servitors and attendants in the visitor's entourage in Hsi-men Ch'ing's summerhouse, where tables had been set up for their entertainment. As for Commandant Chou Hsiu, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the other local officials, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for them to be entertained in a guest room in the front compound, where seats had been provided for them.

At this point, Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en ordered his attendants to reward the serving staff with ten taels of silver, after which, he called for his sedan chair and prepared to make his departure. The various officials present, after having repeatedly endeavored to detain him without success, proceeded to see him out to the front gate.

The music of drums and pipes resounded once more, as

The clamor of his escort filled the adjacent streets.

Outriders prepared to clear the way, as

Men and horses lined up in formation.

The officials mounted their horses and proposed to escort him for some distance, but the defender-in-chief ordered them to desist, raised his hand in salute, got into his sedan chair, and proceeded on his way. Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Grand Coordinator Hou Meng ordered the guards officers serving under Militia Commander Chang Kuan to escort him all the way to the imperial vessel in which he had come, and then come back and report to them. The table settings and utensils that had been prepared for the visitor, along with the congratulatory offerings of mutton and wine, were turned over to Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-P'ing and Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, together with an accordion-bound album listing the perquisites involved, for them to deliver to the imperial vessel and hand over in person.

When Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien returned to the reception hall, together with Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, he thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Today we have imposed egregiously upon your illustrious household. We are profoundly

grateful, profoundly grateful. If our contribution to the expenses proves to have been inadequate, we will endeavor to make up the difference.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance,

saying, “Your pupil has repeatedly benefited from your instruction and consideration, and has often been the recipient of your lavish presents, not to mention the consolatory gifts you bestowed upon me the other day. As for these:

Paltry and insignificant expenses,

They are:

Hardly worth hanging on the teeth.⁹⁷

My snail-like abode is so inadequate I fear it may not have lived up to your expectations. My only hope is that Your Excellency will excuse my remissness. That would be fortunate indeed.”

No sooner had Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien finished expressing his thanks than he ordered his attendants to call for his sedan chair and departed, along with Grand Coordinator Hou Meng. The officials of the Two Provincial Offices and the eight prefectures, having said their farewells, followed suit, after which the various members of the serving staff that had been hired for the occasion:

Dispersed in a single tumult.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the reception hall, he arranged for the directors and musicians from the Music Office to be rewarded with food and drink, after which they, too, were allowed to depart. He retained only the services of the four boy actors that were on duty for the occasion. Whatever was left of the table settings that had been provided for the various officials both inside and outside the reception hall was carried off by their servants. But no more of this.

Observing that it was still relatively early in the day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the utensils cleared away and found that there was enough left over to supply four tables with a sumptuous repast. He then sent servants to invite his brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-ch'ueh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen the Fourth, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been up since the fifth watch that morning and was exhausted by all the matters he had been made responsible for, to join him for a drink.

It did not take long for the group of them to arrive. Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-ch'ueh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta were seated at the head table, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over the proceedings as host, and the various managers were arrayed to either side, while the servants brought out the wine to be served at the party.

“Brother, you've certainly had a busy day of it,” opined Ying Po-ch'ueh. “How long did Defender-in-Chief Huang stay, and was he pleased by the occasion, or not?”

“Today,” remarked Han Tao-kuo, “the venerable eunuch Huang, on seeing what a splendid banquet had been provided for him, could not have been anything but pleased. The grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor certainly felt that:

Their gratitude knew no bounds,

and expressed their gratitude again and again.”

“If any other household had attempted to put on a banquet of this kind, they could never have pulled it off,” stated Ying Po-ch'ueh. “They would not have the space available in this household of yours and would lack the number of hands that you have at your disposal. At a conservative estimate, you must have had more than a thousand people on your premises today, and they all had to be provided for. Even though it must have cost you a good deal of silver, Brother, it will have the effect of spreading your fame throughout the entire province of Shantung.”

“Even your pupil's mentor,” chimed in Licentiate Wen, “the venerable vice-commissioner of education, was present at the feast today.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him to explain, Licentiate Wen said, “His name is Ch'en Cheng-hui. He is the son of the venerable Ch'en Kuan⁹⁸ of the Remonstrance Bureau. His native place is Ch'uan-ch'eng district in Honan province. He began to compete in the examination system at the age of seventeen and became a metropolitan graduate in the year *jen-ch'en*.⁹⁹ At present he holds the local office of surveillance vice-commissioner of education and is renowned for his erudition.”

“This year then,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “he is no more than twenty-three years old.”

As they were chatting, soup and rice were served. After they had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing called up the four boy actors and asked them their names.

“Your servants are called Chou Ts'ai, Liang To, Ma Chen, and Han Pi,” they replied.

“You must be from Han Chin-ch'uan's place, aren't you?” said Ying Poch'ueh.

Han Pi knelt down and replied, “Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan are both my younger sisters.”

“Have you had anything to eat and drink?” asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

“Your servants have just finished our food and wine,” replied Chou Ts'ai.

Because the memory of Li P'ing-erh had come into his mind, and he had been disappointed at not being able to see her during the banquet that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the boy actors, “Fetch your instruments and come over here. Can you perform the song that begins with the words:

The flowers of Lo-yang,

The moon of Liang-yüan,¹⁰⁰

or not? I'd like you to sing it for me.”

Han Pi knelt down before him and said, “Your servant and Chou Ts’ai do know it.”

Thereupon:

Strumming the psaltery and plucking the mandola,¹⁰¹

To the beat of the clappers inlaid with red ivory,
they sang the song to the tune “The Whole Realm Rejoices”:

The flowers of Lo-yang,
The moon of Liang-yüan;¹⁰²
Fine flowers must be purchased;
The bright moon is only on loan.
Leaning on the balustrade, we viewed the flowers
as their blossoms proliferated;
With wine cups in hand, we interrogated the moon
on the nights we were together.
The moon waxes only to wane;¹⁰³
Flowers blossom only to wilt.
It seems that in this life the hardest thing
to bear is separation.¹⁰⁴
The wilting of the flowers means that
the end of Spring is near;
The waning of the moon indicates that
Mid-Autumn will soon come;
But once one’s loved one has departed
when will she ever reappear?¹⁰⁵

When they had finished singing this song, Ying Po-chüeh, who noticed that Hsi-men Ch’ing’s eyes were feeling sour and were on the brink of tears, said, “Brother, other people may not understand what is on your mind, but I know a thing or two about it. You asked them to sing this particular song because its words related to something in your heart. It must be because you were thinking of my late sister-in-law, and how the two of you used to be like intertwined branches, or the fish that swim in pairs, having only one eye apiece. Now that you are separated, how can you help longing for her?”

Observing that saucersful of sweetmeats were being brought out for them from the rear compound, Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “Brother Ying the Second, you may take exception to what I say, but when she was here she would have prepared these things with her own hands. Ever since she died, it’s been left to the maidservants to concoct them, with the result that they’re hardly worth looking at. There isn’t so much as a single tasty morsel for me to enjoy.”

“Confronted with such a lavish spread as this,” Licentiate Wen objected, “the venerable gentleman can hardly be said to lack a competent domestic staff. It is more than sufficient.”

“Brother,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “you really oughtn’t to talk that way. It may well be only because you can’t get over your heartache that you say such things, but they are likely to have a chilling effect on the feelings of my other sisters-in-law.”

As they continued to converse over their drinks, they were not aware that P’an Chin-lien was standing behind the hanging screen in order to listen to the singing. When she overheard what Hsi-men Ch’ing said, she went back to the rear compound and repeated it, word for word, to Yüeh-niang.

“You might as well let him say whatever he likes,” said Yüeh-niang. “After all, what can you do about it? Remember how, the other day, when she was still alive, I promised her that I would arrange to have Hsiu-ch’un work for the Second Lady. But when I tried to do so, he opened his eyes wide and shouted at me, saying, ‘How long has she been dead, after all, that you would presume to separate the maidservants from her quarters?’ I was reduced to having nothing further to say about it. And you, too, must have noticed, the last few days, how that wet nurse and her two maids have been carrying on. And if I so much as open my mouth about it, he accuses me of trying to get rid of them.”

“Mother,” said Chin-lien, “I also have noticed how that woman has altered her demeanor the last few days. I fear that that lousy shameless good-for-nothing of ours, who has been spending all day in her quarters, is making out with that woman. It would hardly surprise me. I’ve heard that, the other day, he gave her two pairs of ornamental hairpins, and that the woman has had the effrontery to wear them on her head, showing them off, first to this one, and then to that one.”

“Bean sprouts don’t lend themselves to being bundled,”
said Yüeh-niang.

Thus it was that, behind their backs, everyone:

Conveyed the clear impression that they were not happy.

Truly:

If one’s real work had ever found favor in the eyes
of one’s contemporaries;
One would not have had to spend money on rouge
in order to paint peonies.¹⁰⁶

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Beneath the terrace of King Hsiang of Ch’u¹⁰⁷
the water flows on unhurried;
A single case of heartsickness¹⁰⁸ is able to
produce sorrow in two places.¹⁰⁹

The moon itself is completely oblivious of
the changes in human affairs;
As, late at night, it continues to shine on
the crest of the plastered wall.¹¹⁰

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 66

MAJORDOMO CHAI SENDS A LETTER WITH A CONSOLATORY CONTRIBUTION; PERFECT MAN HUANG CONDUCTS A RITE FOR THE SALVATION OF THE DEAD

The translucent windows on all eight sides
open one after the other;
Yielding a view of her girdle pendants as she
descends the jasper terrace.
Outside the boudoir door the Spring colors
blend with the new willows;
On the mountain ridges the cold plum blossoms
bedeck the verdant slopes.
The shadows of the plum branches begin to stir
as the bright moon ascends;
A breeze agitates the bamboos along the path,
auguring a friend's arrival.
The beauty, having left behind a specimen of
her mandarin duck brocade;
It is up to the Lord of the East to decide
what should be done with it.¹

THE STORY GOES that on that day, as Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and company, he asked Han Tao-kuo, "When is the convoy of merchant vessels with its armed escort scheduled to start out, so we can get things packed up in advance?"

"Yesterday someone came to inform me about it," said Han Tao-kuo. "The boats will start out on the twenty-fourth."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we can wait until after the scripture service on the twentieth to pack up."

"Which two people are you sending on this expedition?" asked Ying Pochüeh.

"I'm sending three people in all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I plan to have Ts'ui Pen return first next year with a boatload of merchandise from Hang-chou, while Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao go on to the five entrepôts below Sung-chiang to acquire cotton goods for sale. I have enough in the way of satin and silk fabrics already in stock."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what you propose is right on the mark. As the saying goes:

You've got to have everything in stock
in order to do good business."

By the time this conversation was finished it was already the first watch and Wu K'ai got up to go, saying, "Brother-in-law, you've been wearing yourself out for days on end, and we've already had enough to drink. We had better take our leave so you can get yourself some rest."

Hsi-men Ch'ing objected to this and endeavored to retain them a little longer, ordering the boy actors to serve them with wine and sing a few more songs for their entertainment. Only after each of his guests had downed another three goblets of wine did he allow them to leave the premises.

Hsi-men Ch'ing proposed to reward the four boy actors with six mace of silver, but they repeatedly refused to accept the gratuity, saying, "His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien issued summonses mandating our attendance. How could we accept Your Honor's generous reward?"

"Even though you were here on official orders," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this is my personal expression of appreciation. What are you afraid of?"

Only then did the four of them kowtow in gratitude, accept the gratuity, and depart. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to go back to the rear compound and go to bed.

The next day, he got up early and went off to the yamen.

Early that morning, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor sent a disciple of his, along with two vergers, to take charge of setting up the altar space in the large reception hall. At the upper end of the altar space were placed images of the Three Pure Ones and the Four August Ones.² In the middle was placed an image of the Grand Monad Heavenly Worthy Who Saves from Distress,³ with images of the Gods of the Eastern Peak and Fengtu⁴ to either side of it. At the lower end of the altar space were placed images of the Ten Kings⁵ who rule over the Nine Realms of Darkness that constitute the underworld; the two marshals with their Divine Tiger talismans that guard the altar; the Four Great Celestial Lords Huan,⁶ Liu,⁷ Wu,⁸ and Lu;⁹ the Divine Empress of the

Moon; the Seven Perfected Jade Maidens who govern the fates of deceased women; and the seventeen divine marshals of the Tribunal for Suspended Lives whose job it is to summon up the souls of the dead.¹⁰

Both within and without the altar space,
Everything is arranged in perfect order;
The incense, flowers, lamps, and candles,
Are arrayed in glittering resplendence.
Censers are supplied with the famous
“hundred-blend” incense;¹¹
Hanging lamps are suspended loftily
around the sacred area.
The scripture lecterns are in place,
Curtained off by drapes of gold lamé;
Ritual drums are situated on high stands,
Surrounded by cranes in variegated clouds.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home and saw the preparations that had been made, he was utterly delighted. After seeing to it that the disciple and the two vergers had been supplied with a vegetarian meal before returning to their temple, he immediately told Licentiate Wen to write out cards inviting Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Meng Jui, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Wu Shun-ch'en, and all the other relatives and female guests to attend the scripture reading on the following day. He also directed the chefs that had been hired for the occasion to make the advance preparations for the oblations that would be required. But no more of this.

The next day, at the fifth watch, the cohort of Taoist priests that had been engaged for the occasion waited for the opening of the gate in the city wall before being allowed to enter and proceed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Once there, after calling for the opening of the front door, they went directly to the altar space that had been set up for the scripture reading, where they lit the lamps and candles, washed their hands and ignited the incense, struck up their musical instruments, and began the recitation of the sacred texts, beginning with the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*.¹²

Meanwhile, outside the main gate, the vergers suspended a long banner announcing the rites to be performed, hung up a placard with an inscription describing the nature and purpose of the ceremony, and pasted parallel statements, written on yellow paper in large characters, to either side of the doorway. The parallel statements read:

The Sovereign of the East displays benevolence,
Enabling the souls of the dead to transcend
the position of immortals and
ascend to the Purple Elysium.
The Celestial Lord of the South forgives sins,
Enabling purified souls, after undergoing
the refining of sublimation, to
mount to the Vermilion Height.

The inscription on the placard read as follows:

In order to uphold the Way and save the soul of the departed, her devoted husband, the faithful office holder Hsi-men Ch'ing, resident of such and such a precinct of the Ch'ing-ho district of Tung-p'ing prefecture in Shantung province of the Great Sung Empire, together with his entire household and the assembled relatives and guests, wish on this day to express their sincere devotion, and appeal to your powers of compassionate magnanimity on behalf of the spirit of his consort, née Li, whose life in this world extended into her twenty-seventh year. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei* and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period. I respectfully submit that: As our connubial feelings were profound, I cannot but sigh over the untimely parting of the male and female phoenixes; since the moon shines coldly on her boudoir, I deplore the fact that we can no longer harmonize like zither and cithara. Merely grieving over her memory is unbearable, yet I cannot but think longingly of her voice and appearance. Light and darkness alternate all too swiftly,¹³ and it is already time for the fifth weekly commemoration of her death. Wishing to rescue her incarcerated soul, I respectfully tender my ardent expectations. On this twentieth day of the present month I have reverently engaged the services of these duly ordained Taoist officiants to come to my house of mourning and erect an altar for the performance of a sublimation ritual of the sworn alliance with the perfected, including the promulgation of the talismanic texts inscribed on jade tablets; and the nine recitations according to hallowed precedent of the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, and invocations from the sacred texts contained in the precious storehouse of the Taoist Canon. We solicit the attendance of the deities riding on their lion steeds to bestow the light of their beneficence, so that their golden lamps can dispel the darkness; and the conferment of their talismans in dragon script that abolish guilt, so that its pain may be as surely impeded as by iron pillars. In the deep of night, may the souls of the departed be enabled to cross the variegated bridge to the tinkle of their jade pendants; and may they be able to dine on the evening mist, ascend to the azure empyrean and meet with the Golden Perfected. It is our humble desire that the Supreme Deity may confer his benevolence from the jade steps of his palace, and that the Lord of the East may vouchsafe his attention from the vantage point of his Verdant Abode. May they broadly extend the benevolence of their compassion, and greatly display their powers of salvation, so that the souls of the departed may soon mount to the realm of freedom and ease, and the incarcerated spirits may all be able to ascend to the Celestial Paradise. May the relatives of the household, both living and dead, enjoy propitious auspices, and may their kindred be able to attain the Taoist shore. It is to be hoped that all those who participate in this rite of redemption shall be enabled to achieve salvation. Such is the purpose of this placard.

The placard is dated such and such a day, in such and such a month, of such and such a year of the Cheng-ho reign period.

The officiant is the Savant of the Highest Purity Great Cavern Scriptures and Registers, the Grand Master of the Golden Gates of the Nine Heavens, the Assessor of the Jade Palace of the Divine Empyrean, the Superintendent of the Various Thunder Bureaus, the Prelate of Lofty Attainments Who Elucidates Tenuity, Amplifies the Way, Embodies the Mystery, Cultivates Simplicity, and Upholds the Doctrine, the Superintendent of the Temple of the Supreme Unity, the Precursor of the Imperial Altar, and Director of Taoist Affairs throughout the Empire, the High Priest Huang Yüan-pai.¹⁴

Over the altar space that had been set up for the scripture reading in the main reception hall there was suspended a twenty-character announcement of the rite to be performed, written in a large script, which read:

Litany to be addressed to the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, including the dispatch of talismanic announcements, on the occasion of the scripture recitation on the fifth weekly commemoration of the decease of the departed, on the ritual altar for the performance of a Water and Fire sublimation rite of salvation.

That day, Perfect Man Huang, dressed in a crimson robe, riding in an ivory sedan chair, girt with a golden girdle, surrounded by his

attendants, with his outriders shouting to clear the way, did not arrive until the sun was already high in the sky. Abbot Wu, at the head of his cohort of Taoist priests, ushered him up to the altar space and went through the ceremonies of greeting, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in white clothing and a mourning cap, paid his respects. After tea had been served, a lectern for the scripture reading was set up beside the altar table, supplied with a crimson gold lamé altar cloth and a figured seat cushion. Two Taoist acolytes stood in waiting to either side of him. Perfect Man Huang had a distinguished demeanor, wore a cap of black satin with a jade ornament in front, and was dressed in a robe of crimson silk that featured a *tou-niu* design,¹⁵ and a pair of black shoes. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a bolt of satin brocade to present to him when he was ready to dispatch the documents.

When the documents had been signed and he was ready to ascend the altar, Perfect Man Huang changed into a ninefold-yang thunder cap, a crimson Taoist robe embroidered with golden clouds and white cranes, the pattern of which extended to its flying sleeves,¹⁶ soft white satin socks, and vermilion cloud-scaling ceremonial slippers. An outward-facing Pavilion of Heaven and Earth was set up, covered by two gilded flabella, where Golden Lads presented incense, and Jade Maidens scattered flowers, while holding aloft pennants and standards. As for the divine marshals who guard the altar, the talismanic functionaries of the Three Worlds, the four duty officers in charge of the year, the month, the day, and the hour,¹⁷ the God of Walls and Moats, the divinity of the soil, the local tutelary god, and his attendants, there were none whose presence was not invoked. On the high priest's incense table were arrayed five talismanic writs for summoning the celestial sovereigns, a black pennant for evoking thunder deities, the jade ruler of the celestial general T'ien-p'eng,¹⁸ a sword incised with a diagram of the seven stars of the Dipper, and a ritual ewer of purified water.

Only when the lector had finished declaiming the text of the announcement, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, as the ordainer of the rites, had washed his hands and presented incense, did two thurifers, swinging their hand-held censers and facing outwards, perform the ceremony of presenting incense three times in order to invite the presence of the various deities invoked. At this point, the high priest rapped his tablet of authority on the table and burnt incense in order to dispel pollution and cleanse the altar space, sent flying talismans in order to summon the generals, dispatched all the relevant documents and talismans,¹⁹ petitioned the Three Heavens, and enunciated the covenant to the Ten Courts of the Underworld. After the three sacrificial libations had been offered, music was struck up, paper money was burned, and the rite of circumambulation while burning incense was performed. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi, carrying hand-held censers, followed in the wake of the procession, while orderlies shouted to clear the way. In front and behind there were four gold lamé flabella, as well as three pairs of tasseled standards.

The relatives of the family were all lined up outside the front gate, where a temporary structure housing the spirit tablet of the deceased was erected in the street, and orderlies were deputed to look after the soup, rice, and other purified offerings that were presented before it. When the circumambulatory parade returned, and the consecration of the ritual altar was complete, a vegetarian repast was provided in the summerhouse. That day, the relatives and friends, neighbors, and employees of the household who came to make sacrificial contributions:

Arrived in an unbroken stream.²⁰

Hsi-men Ch'ing had Tai-an and Wang Ching accept these gifts, make a record of them, and bestow gratuities on the servants who took back the boxes in which they were contained.

After the morning invocation the Three Treasures were invited to authenticate the covenant, the various talismans and texts were promulgated, and the ceremonies of "breaking out of Hell" and "summoning the soul" were performed. Music was struck up again, and a ritual for attracting and summoning the soul of the deceased was performed in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. During the morning audience, the table that held her spirit tablet was placed at the foot of the altar so that while paying court before the jade steps²¹ she might hear the scriptures and achieve enlightenment. The high priest, seated on his elevated throne, recited the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, and burnt petitions addressed to the Grand Monad, the Gods of Feng-tu and the Eastern Peak, and the Ten Kings of the courts of the underworld, dressed in their caps and capes, and riding in their cloud chariots.

At the noon audience, the high priest, attired in his formal headgear and vestments, proceeded to:

Pace the stars and tread the Dipper,²²

respectfully presented a memorial written in red characters to the Verdant Abode of the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, requesting him to dispatch the divine marshals to fly down to Mount Lo-feng.²³



Perfect Man Huang Petitions for the Salvation of the Dead

It so happens that Perfect Man Huang was about thirty years old, and:

His demeanor was out of the ordinary.

When he was garbed in his formal regalia in order to preside over the noon audience, he looked just like a living god or immortal. Truly, what did he look like? Behold:

His star-embellished cap is enhanced with leaves of jade;
His crane-decorated robe is embroidered with gold clouds.

His spirit is as pure as the hoary moon
over the Yangtze River;

His visage is as ancient as a tall pine
on the summit of Mount Hua.

When treading the stars, his red shoes
traverse the glowing clouds;

When pacing the void, his sacred texts
float amid auspicious vapors.

With his long beard and broad cheeks,

He has practiced austerities until attaining
the Heaven of No Imperfection;
With his white teeth and bright eyes,²⁴
He has mastered the registers that give him
command over the Five Thunders.
The Three Isles and the Ten Continents,²⁵
he visits by conserving his nature;
The grotto heavens and blessed abodes,
he explores by self-induced trance.
Loftily he dines upon the evening mist;
Quietly he attends upon the Primordial.
When he traverses the moon at the third watch
the cries of the phoenix are distant;
When he mounts the clouds for ten thousand li
his seat on the crane's back is high.²⁶
It is as if the Grand Master of the Immortals
has come to visit the mundane realm;
Or just as though the Perfect Man Kuang-hui²⁷
has chosen to visit the world below.²⁸

Once the memorials had been presented, Abbot Wu presided over the altar, where he dispatched the *Sheng-t'ien pao-lu*, or *Precious Registers for Rebirth in Heaven*, and the *Shen-hu yü-cha*, or *Jade Talismans of the Divine Tigers*. After the rite of circumambulation while burning incense had been performed at noon, the celebrants returned to the summerhouse where a vegetarian repast had been prepared for them. Perfect Man Huang was placed before a large table setting, replete with ingot-shaped cakes, Abbot Wu and the other Taoist officiants were provided with somewhat smaller-scale table settings, and the rest of the Taoist company had individual table settings of the ordinary kind. Perfect Man Huang and Abbot Wu were each given a bolt of satin, the four officiants who were entitled to wear figured vestments each received a bolt of woven silk, and each of the remaining Taoist priests was rewarded with a bolt of cotton fabric. The table settings were turned over to servants to take back to the temple, and the Taoist priests had their disciples put the bolts of fabric they had received into their trunks, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

After the midday vegetarian repast was over, the Taoist celebrants thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing for his hospitality and then proceeded to wander through the various pavilions, terraces, and grottoes in the garden as they digested their meals. Meanwhile, the utensils were cleared away, and new table settings of greater and lesser elaborateness were provided with vegetarian fare, of which Wu K'ai and the other relatives and friends of the household were invited to partake.

As they were eating, it was suddenly announced that Majordomo Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital had sent a courier to deliver a letter. Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went out to the reception hall and invited the messenger to come in. It turned out to be one of the factotums on the staff of the grand councilor's establishment, dressed in black livery, with tight-fitting trousers, wearing a flat-topped cap and dark-tan boots, and equipped with a complete set of bow and arrows. After he had come forward and bowed in greeting, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned the compliment, he pulled out a letter and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who found that the outer envelope contained a packet of ten taels of silver as a consolatory contribution.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked the courier his name, he replied, "Your humble servant's surname is Wang, and his given name is Yü. I have been commissioned by His Honor Chai Ch'ien to deliver this letter to you. He didn't know about your bereavement. It wasn't until a letter from His Honor An Ch'en arrived in the capital that he learned about it."

"When did His Honor An Ch'en's letter arrive?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"His Honor An Ch'en's letter did not reach the capital until sometime in the tenth month," replied the courier. "Because his one-year appointment to be in charge of expediting the delivery of imperial lumber has expired, he has been promoted to the position of secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works. Right now, he has been imperially commissioned to take charge of the repair work on the Grand Canal and will not return to the capital until that task is completed."

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had questioned him for a while, he told Lai-pao to provide him with a vegetarian meal in one of the side rooms in the front courtyard and directed him to return the next day to pick up his reply.



Major-domo Chai Sends a Letter with a Consolatory Present

“Where does Han Tao-kuo reside?” the courier asked. “I have a letter for him here from his daughter in Chai Ch’ien’s household. After seeing him, I have to go on to deliver a letter in Tung-p’ing prefecture.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing immediately summoned Han Tao-kuo, and, after keeping the courier company as he ate his vegetarian meal, the two of them went off to Han Tao-kuo’s house together.

Hsi-men Ch’ing opened the letter to see what it was about and then happily took it to the summerhouse to show to Licentiate Wen, saying, “You can draft a letter in reply to this one, and I’ll also send him ten crepe handkerchiefs, ten satin handkerchiefs, ten low-grade gold toothpicks, and ten black gold wine cups as a return gift. The courier is coming back tomorrow to pick up the reply.”

Licentiate Wen took the letter and proceeded to peruse its contents, which read as follows:

Respectfully indited by his devoted servant in the capital, Chai Ch’ien, for the perusal of the newly promoted officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, his distinguished kinsman Hsi-men Ssu-ch’üan:

Since the day when we shook hands and bade each other farewell at my residence in the capital, I have not had the opportunity for a leisurely chat with you, which I profoundly regret. As for those matters which you entrusted to me, I have already laid them out before His Honor the grand councilor.

It is only recently, in a letter received from An Ch’ien, that I learned that my venerable kinsman was drumming on a basin and sighing²⁹ over the death of his wife, but the fact that I have not been able to express my condolences in person is an occasion for sorrow. What is one to do? What is one to do? I respectfully hope that the observance of the rites will serve to moderate your grief. In addition, I offer a consolatory contribution, as a paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings, in the hope that you will deign to accept it with a smile.

I have long admired the way in which, in your distinguished post, you have conspicuously devoted yourself to the promotion of virtuous government, with the result that the populace sing of their five pairs of trousers,³⁰ and you are renowned for their having tried three times to prevent you from relinquishing your position. At this year’s merit rating you are certain to receive a promotion. The other day, the officers in charge of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys reported on their last two missions, and I have already spoken to His Honor the grand councilor about adding my kinsman’s name to the list of deserving officials. When the memorial on the completion of the Mount Ken Imperial Park is submitted, you are sure to be the beneficiary of imperial largess. My kinsman will have the pleasure of being promoted to the office of judicial commissioner, while Hsia Yen-ling, on the basis of the annual end-of-year evaluation, will be transferred to the position of commander of the escort for imperial processions in the capital. I respectfully provide advance notice of this in the humble expectation that you will give it your highest attention. I am unable to express myself more fully.³¹

PS. This letter is for your perusal alone. No word of it should be allowed to reach his ears. It is strictly confidential. Strictly confidential.

PPS. His Honor Yang Chien died in prison on the twenty-ninth day of last month.

Indited during the first decade of the first month of winter.

To resume our story, when Licentiate Wen had finished reading the letter, he was about to put it in his sleeve when Ying Po-chüeh snatched it away from him, read it over, and then handed it back to him, saying, “Venerable sir, whatever happens, do your very best to compose a well-written reply. In Master Chai Ch’ien’s household there are many men of talent, and we wouldn’t want to give them any occasion for mirth at our expense.”

Licentiate Wen replied:

“When sable-tailed cap ornaments run out,

They can only be supplanted by dog tails.³²

Your pupil is lacking in talent. How could I:

Show off my skill with an axe before the gate

of Lu Pan, the master carpenter?³³

All I can do is endeavor to fulfill my responsibilities.”

“The venerable gentleman will have his own ideas about how to go about it,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “What does a dog like you know about such things?”

Before long, when they had finished with the midday vegetarian repast, Hsi-men Ch’ing directed Lai-hsing to see to the delivery of the leftover delicacies to the homes of the various relatives and neighbors. But no more of this.

Tai-an went to deliver return gifts to the six establishments in the licensed quarter that had sent contributions toward the cost of the ceremony, namely, those of Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, Han Chin-ch’uan, Hung the Fourth, and Ch’i Hsiang-erh. Each of them received a bolt of muslin and a tael of silver.

During the course of the afternoon, the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, were called upon to entertain the company.

After some time, the group of Taoist celebrants once again ascended to the altar space, where they proceeded to beat their drums, pay reverence to the celestial court, perform the ritual of penance, conduct the lamp-lighting ritual,³⁴ take temporary leave of the altar, and then perform the rite of seeing off the celestial worthies.

In the waning light, by the time the preparations for the *chiao* ritual had been completed, it was already the first watch. Hua Tzu-yu, who resided outside the city gate, was invited to stay overnight by Hsi-men Ch’ing and so did not take his leave. Ch’iao Hung, Brother-in-law Shen, and Meng the Second said farewell and went home before the others. This meant that only Wu K’ai, Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Ch’ang Shih-chieh, and the group of employees remained behind to observe the Water and Fire sublimation rite of salvation that was to take place that evening.

In the temporary structure outside the large reception hall, an elevated throne had been set up, a variegated bridge of papier-mâché had been constructed, a basin containing water and a basin containing fire were put in place, and food for the souls of the dead was provided. Offerings were neatly arrayed before the table that held Li P’ing-erh’s spirit tablet, under its own marquee. Her soul banner was placed beside it, together with a red banner and a yellow banner, and above it was suspended an inscription that read:

Overcome demons and guarantee the opportunity,³⁵

To undergo sublimation in the Southern Palace.

The cohort of Taoist priests and musicians were already arrayed on either side, while four Taoist acolytes stood in waiting to either side of the ritual throne, grasping tallies, and holding a ritual ewer and a sword. Perfect Man Huang, wearing a yellow gold demon-subduing cap and a crimson silk robe embroidered with variegated sunset clouds, ascended to the elevated throne, and:

Recited an incantation.

At this point, the music stopped, and two thurifers, swinging their hand-held censers, declaimed a gatha:

May the benevolent worthy, the Grand Monad,

order his carriage to descend,

And the somber gates of the valley of night

to open one after the other;

In order to let the acolytes, pair by pair,

go in front and lead the way,

That the dead souls may undergo sublimation³⁶

and mount the cloudy stairs.

Perfect Man Huang, having fumigated his vestments, performed his ablutions, and burned incense, went on to chant an invocation, as follows:

We humbly submit that: The Mysterious Sovereign, in founding our religion, opened up a way of salvation from the road to the shades; the sect of Orthodox Unity, in transmitting its rites, has enabled us to refine the bodies of the dead so they may achieve transcendence. These mercies extend to incarcerated souls; these benefits ameliorate the fate of hungry spirits. Diligently dispersing genuine incense, we sincerely invoke the attendance at this sacred rite of the Great Compassionate and Merciful Occupant of the Palace of the Eastern Apogee Who Listens to the Voices of the Distressed and Is Moved to Respond to Their Needs, the Grand Monad Heavenly Worthy Who Saves from Distress, i.e., the Sovereign Deity Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East and Presides over the Nine Yang, his avatars, the Great Perfect Men Who Save from Distress of the Ten Directions, the celestial and terrestrial transcendents, the officers of the Three Worlds, the deities of the Five Peaks, the Ten Kings of the Underworld, and the worthies of the Water Bureau and Mount Lo-feng. We respectfully hope that your lion throne will float through the void,³⁷ and your dragon pennant sparkle in the sunlight, that you may dispense the malachite elixir that dispels distress, and the sweet dew and ambrosia that generously alleviate the hunger of bereaved souls. Today, we dedicate a provisional offering upon the table holding the spirit tablet of the deceased and transmit the talismans that will abolish the guilt of those incarcerated in the Nine Realms of Darkness, so that their interrogations may be ended and their punishments cease. We humbly observe that the human beings who dwell in this world of dust are daily entangled in mundane affairs. Oblivious of their impending death, they merely seek to covet life. Few are able to plant the roots of goodness; most, consequently, fall into evil ways. Too befuddled to achieve enlightenment, they give free rein to their desires, resorting to covetousness and anger. In the expectation that they will live forever, they do not believe how easily death may come. When the day arrives and they suddenly pass away, everything reverts to nothingness.³⁸ Karmic encumbrances beset their bodies, as they suffer torments in the court of the underworld. At present, in accordance with the Way, we humbly observe that because the spirit of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s deceased consort, née Li, has relinquished its worldly ties and been engulfed for some time in the eternal night, if it is not rescued from the impediment of its sins, it is sure to find it hard to avoid a painful retribution. We respectfully hope that the Heavenly Worthy, whose name has been renowned for untold kalpas, and whose pneuma coordinates the Nine Yang, will exercise his benevolent nurture of life by rescuing those souls that cry out in pain; asperse his sweet dew so as to nourish the diverse species; shed his auspicious light in order to illuminate the paths of darkness; order the Three Officers to relax the protocols of interrogation; command the Kings of the Ten Courts of the Underworld to set aside their adjudicatory brushes; liberate the incarcerated and set free the imprisoned; forgive their transgressions and dispel their enmities; allowing each one of them to follow the talismanic functionaries in escaping completely from the somber gates. May they all

experience the purification of the basins of water and fire in order to bathe the yellow efflorescence of their refined bodies, so that they may all be reborn, and hope to regain the Taoist shore.

The high priest then recited the *Wu-ch'u ching*, or *Scripture of the Five Feasts*,³⁹ and the sacred spell that transmutes the food offerings, thereby distributing the ritual foodstuff to the hungry spirits. The high priest then continued to declaim, as follows:

As I have heard: the Nine Pneumas float in Heaven, though the Nine Pneumas came into existence before the Great Void;⁴⁰ the Nine Realms of Darkness lie clustered beneath the Earth, and the Nine Realms of Darkness are concealed beneath stacks of layered Yin. When the Nine Pneumas are properly arrayed,⁴¹ the myriad beings are all brought to life,⁴² which is why they are the root of Heaven and Earth. Each being is conceived in the womb⁴³ and depends for its nurture on the Three Origins.⁴⁴ The reason why human beings suffer from death and decay is that they are unable to cherish their forms, preserve their spirits, value their pneumas, and solidify their roots,⁴⁵ thus forsaking their true natures.⁴⁶ In order to be reborn, their forms must be bathed in the Great Yin, and their substance refined by the Great Yang, so that the Nine Pneumas may cause them to coalesce, and the Three Origins re-create them in the womb, thereby giving renewed shape to their forms. Were they not able to rely upon the immutable laws of the Most High, and the esoteric commands of Lao-tzu, the founder of the school of the Mysterious Origin, how could they hope to find a way of salvation for their incarcerated souls, or expect the restoration of their original bodies, enabling them to mount the auspicious clouds and attend upon the Primordial,⁴⁷ while overcoming demons and being guaranteed redemption? To this end, we shall reverently present the true talisman of the Numinous Treasure for the refinement of the bodies of the dead.

The Lord of Grand Tenuity summons
with his yellow pennant,
The deity of Florescent Nonbeing
directs the soul banners.⁴⁸
Attracting and summoning the dead
from their eternal night,
They provide a way of salvation for
their resurrected souls.⁴⁹

The Taoist celebrants first took Li P'ing-erh's soul banner, immersed it in the basin of water, and burnt a talisman addressed to Chieh-lin, or the Ladies of the Moon, after which they exchanged it for the red banner. They then put this in the basin of fire and burnt a talisman addressed to Yü-i, the Emperors of the Sun, after which they replaced it with the yellow banner.⁵⁰ The high priest then declaimed the words:

The Heavenly number one begets water,
The Earthly number two begets fire;
When water and fire are refined together,
They give birth to the true form.⁵¹

Once the sublimation ceremony was completed, the soul of the deceased, attired in its formal cap and cape, was invited to cross the golden bridge, pay court before the jade steps, and confess her allegiance to the Three Treasures.⁵²

The assembled celebrants then intoned the three refuges and presented the "Five Offerings"⁵³ before each of them:

HOMAGE TO JADE CLARITY

In the Taoist school we honor,
The Lord of Jade Clarity.
The primordial chaos, devoid of light,
harbored the Brahma pneumas;
The myriad phenomena in their diversity
were in a grain-sized pearl.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.

HOMAGE TO UPPER CLARITY

In the Taoist school we honor,
The Lord of Upper Clarity.
In the Ch'ih-ming era the graphs appeared,⁵⁴
disclosing the end of days;
The primordial net flowed out,⁵⁵ penetrating
the mysterious illimitable.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.

HOMAGE TO GRAND CLARITY

In the Taoist School we honor,
The Lord of Grand Clarity.
The Way embraced Heaven and Earth from the
outset of the Mysterious Origin;
For countless kalpas it has provided a way
of salvation for befuddled souls.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.

The high priest then said, "Having acknowledged the three refuges, we should proclaim the nine precepts:

- 1st precept: Be respectful and courteous; filially
nourish your father and mother.
- 2nd precept: Be diligent and industrious; exhibit
loyalty toward your rulers.
- 3rd precept: Do not kill; compassionately preserve
all living creatures.
- 4th precept: Do not engage in venery; be upright in
your approach to others.

5th precept: Do not steal; promote justice even at
your own expense.
6th precept: Do not give way to anger; abusing others
in the heat of wrath.
7th precept: Do not be dishonest; practicing deception
and harming the good.
8th precept: Do not be arrogant; proudly indifferent to
the truly virtuous.
9th precept: Do not be duplicitous; obey these precepts
with a single mind.⁵⁶

You must listen attentively. Take heed! Take heed!”

When he had finished enunciating the nine precepts, the Taoist priests performed an interlude of music, after which Perfect Man Huang intoned the appropriate talismanic commands, followed by an incantation addressed to the ten classes of homeless souls,⁵⁷ to the tune “Hanging Chains of Gold”:

May the Great Compassionate and Merciful,
Imperial Savior of the Blue Heaven of the East,
Whose lion throne floats through the void,
Who is able to miraculously transform departed spirits,
Purify this offering of food for the dead,
And appear before the scorched demons of Hell,
So that the homeless souls that crowd the underworld,
Can come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who campaign to north and south,
The soldiers who don armor and wear uniforms,⁵⁸
Who risk death and forget life,
In order to repay their debt to their country,
Who after a single burst of cannon fire,
Are left to lie upon the battlefield;
The homeless souls who perish in battle,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those good boys and good girls,⁵⁹
Serving others as their slaves or servants,
Who are cursed at night and beaten in the morning,
Whose clothes do not cover their bodies,
Who are driven out of their masters' gates,
To lie helplessly in the long streets;
The homeless souls who starve to death,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May sedentary traders and traveling merchants,⁶⁰
As well as itinerant Buddhist and Taoist priests,
Who are compelled year in and year out,⁶¹
To seek their sustenance away from home,
Who find themselves afflicted with illness,
And with no one to rely on in their wayside inns;
The homeless souls who die upon the road,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May criminals guilty of assault and battery,
Who must wear the cangue and chains in prison,
And are beheaded, strangled, or sliced to death,
Thus forfeiting their lives in the long streets,
According to the clear articles of the statutes,⁶²
For the crime of violating the law of the land;
The homeless souls who suffer capital punishment,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May enemies from a previous incarnation,⁶³
Who encounter each other in this life,
And resort to secret schemes or covert plots,
To disrupt each other's bowels with poison,
So that vapors arise from their nine apertures,
With the result that they lose their lives;
The homeless souls who die of poisoning,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who breast-feed infants for three years,⁶⁴
Demonstrating the illimitable kindness of parents,
Who bear the fetus in their wombs for ten months,⁶⁵
Enduring the rigors of accouchement and parturition,
While their lives are hanging by a thread,
The babies and mothers who return to the shades;
The homeless souls who die in childbirth,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those endangered by grave misfortunes,
The threats of which are difficult to avoid,
Those burdened by private debts and tax arrears,
For which they are dunned day after day,
Who slit their own throats or hang themselves,
Thereby severing their three inches of breath;
The homeless souls who are driven to suicide,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who suffer from prolonged illness,
Abdominal distension, paralysis, or consumption,
Scabrous suppurations, or flesh wounds,
Whose entire bodies reek of purulent discharges,
With no relatives to proffer them beans or water,
For whom prescribed medications offer no cure;

The homeless souls who perish of disease,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those beset by huge waves, windblown breakers,
Or spreading floods that surge up to the heavens,⁶⁶
Whose hawsers break and whose vessels sink,
So that their bodies are lost in the long river,
Who are homesick for their native places,⁶⁷
But have no one to send them even a letter;
The homeless souls who go to watery graves,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those encountering fire, with wind and smoke,
Who are caught by surprise and unable to escape,
From the fierce conflagration that knows no mercy,
Whose entire bodies are subjected to the flames,
Leaving them with singed scalps and scorched heads,⁶⁸
So that even in death they are smoke-cured ghosts;
The homeless souls who perish in the flames,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May the sprites and goblins who inhabit the trees,
As well as other varieties of ungovernable demons,
And the fish, crustaceans, and feathered creatures,
None of whom would not like to be reborn as humans,
Look up to the Most High and compassionate one,
To widely extend the scope of his benevolence;
So that the ten classes of homeless souls,
Can come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

Once the sublimation ritual was completed, Perfect Man Huang came down from his elevated throne, and the Taoist priests struck up their music as they escorted him outside the front gate where paper money was burnt and a coffer of papier-mâché goods for the dead was incinerated. Once they came back inside, the ceremony was officially over, and the Taoist celebrants changed their clothes while the vergers proceeded to take down the scrolls depicting the Taoist deities.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing had already ordered that:

Painted candles be set alight, and

An array of banquet tables set out,

in the large reception hall, where the three boy actors were on hand to play their musical instruments and sing for the assembled relatives and friends.

Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by offering a toast to Perfect Man Huang, while his attendants proffered him a bolt of ultramarine cloud-crane brocade, a bolt of variegated satin, and ten taels of silver.

After kowtowing to him four times, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My deceased consort has this day, as a result of the efficacy of the scripture recitation conducted by my reverend teacher, been enabled to gain salvation and attain reincarnation. For all of which my gratitude is profound. These insignificant gifts are no more than an expression of my heartfelt feelings."

Perfect Man Huang replied, "Unworthy though I am to wear this cap and vestment and claim to be a devotee of the Taoist religion, what virtue could I possess that would enable me to affect mankind or Heaven? It is only owing to the effect of Your Honor's sincere devotion that your revered lady has been enabled to mount the auspicious clouds and attend upon the Primordial. Were I to accept these gifts, it would truly be a cause of embarrassment."

"These gifts are paltry in the extreme," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I humbly beseech you to accept them with a smile."⁶⁹

Only then did Perfect Man Huang direct a young acolyte to take charge of them.

After toasting Perfect Man Huang, Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to offer a toast to Abbot Wu and presented him with a bolt of satin brocade and five taels of silver, in addition to the fee of ten taels of silver as payment for arranging the scripture reading.

Abbot Wu would only accept the fee for the scripture reading, and refused the other gifts, saying, "Whatever efforts I may have expended in arranging for the scripture recitation designed for the salvation of your lady, so that she could be reborn in the immortal realm, were no more than the fulfillment of my responsibilities. I ought not even to accept this fee, let alone these other lavish gifts."

"Your Reverence is wrong," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Although Perfect Man Huang may have presided over the ceremony, all of the documents and protocols for the ritual were arranged for by you. These gifts are merely intended to compensate you for your efforts. How can it be right for you to refuse them?"

Only then did Abbot Wu feel that he had no alternative but to accept them, and he thanked him profusely.

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had presented a toast to the entire group of Taoist priests, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and the others came up to assist Hsi-men Ch'ing in enjoying the food and drink that had been offered in sacrifice.

Wu K'ai presented the toast, Ying Po-chüeh held the flagon, Hsieh Hsi-ta proffered some viands, and they all knelt down in front of him, while Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, you have held this ceremony today, invited Perfect Man Huang to preside over it, and availed yourself of the efforts of Abbot Wu. Just now, as the paper money was being burnt at the conclusion of the ritual, I saw a vision of my sister-in-law, wearing a phoenix cap on her head, dressed in white clothing, with a feather fan in her hand, mounting into the clouds on the back of a white crane. This is all due to the efficacy of Perfect Man Huang's rites of salvation, your own sincere heart, and my sister-in-law's good fortune, and it is a source of delight to me as well."

Thereupon, he filled a cup of wine and handed it to Hsi-men Ching.

"I am indebted to all of you gentlemen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "for all you have done during the last few days. I cannot thank you enough. I am scarcely worthy of your surpassing generosity."

When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Drained it in one gulp.

Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to fill another cup of wine, saying, "Brother, in drinking wine, you should make a twosome out of it, rather than confining yourself to a single cup."

Hsieh Hsi-ta hastened to proffer him a chopstick-serving of viands, which he promptly consumed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished toasting the company, they all sat down at their places, while the boy actors entertained them by playing their musical instruments and singing, and the chef came out to present the first serving. That night, during the course of the banquet, what with:

Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits, and

Performing on woodwind and string instruments,

the party continued until the second watch and Hsi-men Ch'ing was half inebriated before the company said farewell, got up to go, and went their ways.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then came inside, rewarded the boy actors with three mace of silver, and returned to the rear compound. Truly:

During this life, if wine is on hand,

you might as well get drunk;

Not a single drop has ever been known

to reach the Nine Springs.⁷⁰

There is a poem that testifies to this:

One day, you may swear to live your lives together,
But, one night, your oath will vanish like a cloud.
Her flying phoenix golden hairpin will tumble out,
The soaring phoenix precious mirror will fracture.
Your delight in her salvation will prove ephemeral,
While your lasting mortification will not diminish.
Only by frequent resort to the contents of the cup,
Can you gain temporary relief from your affliction.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 67

HSI-MEN CH'ING APPRECIATES THE SNOW WHILE IN HIS STUDIO; LI P'ING-ERH DESCRIBES HER INTIMATE FEELINGS IN A DREAM

Throughout the livelong day I think of you,
but I cannot see you;¹
The sounds of the drum and the cold bugle
are difficult to bear.
The ruptured mirror in your dressing case only
reflects the waning moon;
The remaining clothes in your chest are but
clusters of broken clouds.
The shivering sparrow finds it hard to perch
upon the sparse branches;
The migrating goose breaks formation and cries
as it deserts the flock.
The jade hairpin may be smashed to pieces, but
emotion is hard to shatter;
When I envisage you, it is heartbreaking that
my recollections are unreal.

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the rear compound he was so exhausted that he slept until the sun was high in the sky without getting up.

Lai-hsing came in at this point and reported, "The carpenters are waiting outside and want to know if they are to dismantle the temporary structures that they put up for the funeral rites."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded irritably to Lai-hsing, saying, "As for the dismantling, just go ahead and have them do it. What need is there to bother me about it?"

The carpenters outside then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to take down the matting, cordage, and pine planks of the structures in question and transport them to the building across the street for storage. But no more of this.

Yü-hsiao came into the room and reported, "The weather outside is really threatening."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to fetch his clothes from on top of the heated k'ang and prepared to get up and put them on.

"You were tired out last night," said Wu Yüeh-niang, "and the weather looks threatening. Why don't you get a good sleep before getting up. Why should you feel compelled to crawl out of bed so soon? You might just as well not go to the yamen today."

"I'm not planning to go to the yamen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm afraid that messenger from our kinsman Chai Ch'ien will come by looking for a reply, and I'll need to be here to send him off with it."

"In that case," said Yüeh-niang, "you might as well get up. I'll have a maidservant heat some congee for you to eat."

Without even performing his morning ablutions, and leaving his hair in disarray, Hsi-men Ch'ing threw on a woolen robe, donned a felt cap, and headed straight for his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto in the front garden.

It so happens that, ever since Shu-t'ung had absconded, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for Wang Ching to look after the garden and the keys to the two doors on either side of his studio there, and deputed Ch'un-hung to take care of cleaning up and sweeping his other studio in front of the large reception hall. During the winter months, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent his leisure time in the studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. On the surface of the bed frame over the k'ang, which was heated by an underground firebox, there was also a brazier of yellow brass. Warmth was retained in the room by a hanging portiere of thin oiled silk, decorated with a motif of the moon amid the plum branches. The outer parlor was embellished with an oleander, a variety of chrysanthemums;

Cool slender bamboos, and

Turquoise-hued orchids.

The studio itself was furnished with:

Brushes, inkstones, and a plum in a vase;

Zither and books were elegantly displayed.

On the bed frame over the k'ang there were:

A madder red strip of felt lying on top of,

A brocade mat figured with silver flowers.

The pillow was decorated with water birds;

The hanging curtains were of mermaid silk.

Hsi-men Ch'ing lay down casually on the bed frame, while Wang Ching hastened to retrieve some ambergris incense from an ivory box on the table and ignited it in a small gilded censer.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Wang Ching, "Go find Lai-an, and tell him to go invite Master Ying the Second to come join me."

Wang Ching accordingly went out and sent Lai-an off on this errand.

Whom should Wang Ching run into at this juncture but P'ing-an, who came up to him and said, "Little Chou, the barber, is waiting outside."

Wang Ching went back into the studio and told this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had him call Little Chou inside.

When Little Chou had kowtowed to him, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You've come at just the right moment to comb my hair and give me a massage."

He then went on to ask, "Why is it that you haven't shown up for such a long time?"

"On hearing that your Sixth Lady had died," said Little Chou, "I imagined that you were probably preoccupied, so I didn't come."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, seated himself on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair, let down his hair, and told him to trim and comb it for him.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-ch'ueh, who had been summoned by Lai-an. He was wearing a felt hat on his head, a green woolen jacket on his torso, a pair of old black boots on his feet, and a palmetto cloak, as he lifted aside the portiere, came in, and bowed in greeting.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose hair was in the process of being combed, said, "There's no need for you to perform an obeisance. Pray sit down."

Ying Po-ch'ueh pulled a chair over and sat down next to the brazier.

"How come you're dressed that way today?" enquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You may not be aware of it," said Ying Po-ch'ueh, "but snow is falling outside, and it's extremely cold. Yesterday, it was so late when I went home that the rooster had already crowed. You sent a servant to see us on our way, but we could hardly walk by that point. When I saw how overcast it was, I asked for a lantern and made my way home together with your brother-in-law, Wu K'ai. Today, I could hardly crawl out of bed. If Lai-an hadn't come to call for me, I'd be asleep yet. Brother, you're quite a stout fellow to be able to get up this early. If it were me, I couldn't manage it."

"Luckily, you've been a witness to it all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I haven't had a moment's peace. Ever since the day of her burial, I've been preoccupied with entertaining Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en and arranging for the scripture reading ceremonies, so that, from that time to this, my mind has been perturbed. This morning, my wife said, 'You're tired out. Why don't you get a good sleep before getting up?' But I was worried that the messenger from my kinsman, Chai Ch'ien, would come by for a reply to his letter, and I also had to see to the dismantling of the temporary structures that were erected for the funeral rites. On the twenty-fourth, I'm sending off Manager Han Tao-kuo and some other employees on a trip and need to see that everything is packed up, and the statement of account written out. The various funeral arrangements have also put people to a lot of trouble. As far as the relatives and friends are concerned, it might be all right, but when it comes to the gentry and officials, if you fail to pay them a personal visit to thank them for their generosity, it will constitute a breach of propriety."

"That's so," said Ying Po-ch'ueh. "I, too, have been concerned about your need to pay these personal visits to thank people for their generosity. You'll have to do it, I guess, but you might as well select only the most important households, and let it go at that. As for the rest, since you're on good terms with them, if you run into each other, all you need to do is apologize, that's all. Who doesn't know how busy you've been? You can rely on their mutual understanding."

As they were speaking, what should they see but Wang Ching, who lifted aside the portiere to allow Hua-t'ung to bring in a square box of painted lacquer, with two teacups of carved lacquer inlaid with silver, containing boiled cow's milk flavored with butterfat and crystallized sugar.

Ying Po-ch'ueh picked up a cup and cradled it in his hand, admiring the way in which the glistening white goose-fat-like butterfat floated on the surface, and said, "What a wonderful treat. It's boiling hot, and if you hold it in your mouth, it's:

Fragrant, sweet, and delectable."

Without any trouble at all, he managed to finish it off with a few swallows. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on the other hand, waited until Little Chou had finished with his hair and then told him to clean the wax out of his ears, setting the milk aside on a table, without drinking any of it.

"Brother," said Ying Po-ch'ueh, "why don't you drink some of it? It would be a pity to let it get cold. If you drink a cup of this first thing every morning, it's sure to have a restorative effect on your constitution."

"I'm not going to drink it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can have it. In a little while I'm going to eat some congee."

This was just the signal Ying Po-ch'ueh had been waiting for, and, picking it up in his hand, he:

Finished it off with a single gulp,²

after which Hua-t'ung took the cups away.

When the wax had been cleaned out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ears, he told Little Chou to take the wooden roller and go over his body with it, employing the art of massage and the therapeutic gymnastic techniques called "guiding and pulling."³

"Brother," asked Ying Po-ch'ueh, "now that your body has been gone over with the roller, do you feel any improvement in your sense of well-being?"

"There is no reason for me to deceive you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The fact is that in the evening my body regularly starts to hurt,

and I feel pain in my lower back. If I didn't get this kind of going over, I don't know how I'd stand it."

"For someone with such a corpulent figure as yours," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "and one who eats such rich food every day, it is hardly surprising that you should suffer from phlegm-fire."

"The other day," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Jen Hou-ch'i said to me, 'Venerable sir, although you possess an imposing stature, you suffer from an excess of vacuity.' He gave me a jar of life-prolonging restorative pills and said that they were concocted from a prescription made up for the use of His Majesty the Emperor by Perfect Man Lin Ling-su, and that I should take one every morning, and wash it down with human milk. I've been so distracted the last few days, however, that I haven't taken any of them yet. You all say that I've got a plethora of bedmates at my disposal, and indulge in this business every day, but ever since she died, I haven't been in the mood to consider such matters."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Han Tao-kuo, who came in, bowed in greeting, and sat down, saying, "Just now, all the parties concerned have come to terms about our expedition. The boats have been chartered and we are all set to embark on the twenty-fourth."

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave instructions that Manager Kan Jun should prepare the accounts and weigh out the silver so that they could wrap things up the next day.

He then went on to ask, "How much silver in the way of profits from the two shops is available?"

"It comes to something over six thousand taels altogether," said Han Tao-kuo.

"I'll weigh out an allotment of two thousand taels," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and turn it over to Ts'ui Pen so he can go to Hu-chou to buy silk. As for the other four thousand taels, you and Lai-pao can proceed to Sung-chiang to purchase piece goods. You must try to be on time to join the first fleet of boats that returns north in the new year. Each of you can take an advance of five taels of silver to cover the expenses of packing up for the trip at home."

"I've got another problem," said Han Tao-kuo. "As the holder of a hereditary corvée labor obligation on the staff of the Prince of Yün, I have to report for duty in person at periodic intervals and am not permitted to pay a fee for hiring a substitute. What am I to do about it?"

"Why can't you pay a fee to hire a substitute?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Lai-pao also holds a nominal appointment on the staff of the Prince of Yün, and he merely pays three mace of silver a month to avoid having to report for duty."

"As for Brother Pao's case," said Han Tao-kuo, "his right to do so was stipulated in the document of appointment from the grand preceptor so no one dares to interfere with him. In my case, it's a hereditary position which mandates the drafting of another able-bodied adult male from my clan if I am unable to serve."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you draft a memo about it, and I'll ask Jen Hou-ch'i to speak to Attendant Wang on the prince's staff, and have your name removed from the roster of those whose corvée service is mandated, so that you can commute your obligation to regular payments in money. Every month all you'll have to do is depute a reliable person from your household to go make the necessary payment for you."

Han Tao-kuo bowed to him to express his gratitude.

"Brother," chimed in Ying Po-chüeh, "once you've taken care of this problem for him, he'll have an easier mind while out on the road."

Before long, after Little Chou had finished massaging him with the roller, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound to comb his hair and directed that Little Chou should be given something to eat.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back out wearing a white velveteen "loyal and tranquil hat" on his head and a fine woolen robe on his body. He rewarded Little Chou for his services with three mace of silver and then sent Wang Ching to summon Licentiate Wen.

Before long, Licentiate Wen came in, formally attired in the typical garb of a scholar:

A high hat and a wide girdle.⁴

When they had finished exchanging greetings, the servants set out a table and brought in the congee. This repast included four side dishes, namely, a bowl of slow-boiled ham hocks, a bowl of blanched donkey meat flavored with chives, a bowl of blanched chicken wonton flavored with pickled fish, and a bowl of slow-boiled squab, along with four bowls of congee made from nonglutinous rice. Four pairs of ivory chopsticks were also provided. Ying Pochüeh together with Licentiate Wen were seated at the head of the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing played the role of host, and Han Tao-kuo was seated to one side.

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Lai-an, saying, "Fetch another bowl of congee and a pair of chopsticks, and ask our son-in-law to come have some congee with us."

Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi arrived, wearing a mourning cap on his head, an outer robe of white pongee cut like that of a Taoist priest, over a loose undergown of pale green satin, and rush sandals with velvet socks. After bowing to Ying Po-chüeh and the others, he also sat down to one side. In a little while, when they had finished the congee and the utensils had been cleared away, he departed, and Han Tao-kuo also got up to go, leaving only Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen sitting in the studio.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Licentiate Wen and asked, "Have you finished writing the reply, or not?"

"Your pupil has already prepared a draft, which I have brought with me," said Licentiate Wen. "I won't copy out the final version until you have had a chance to peruse it, venerable sir."

He then pulled it out of his sleeve and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to look over. The letter read as follows:

Earnestly indited by his devoted servant in Ch'ing-ho, Hsi-men Ch'ing, in response to His Eminence of surpassing virtue, the pillar of state Chai Ch'ien, his venerable kinsman:

Since I forsook your illustrious countenance after exchanging views during our meeting at your residence in the capital, without my being aware of it, half a year has abruptly elapsed. Your pupil having been so unfortunate as to suffer the loss of his consort, is especially grateful for the receipt of his kinsman's consolatory contribution, conveyed from a distance, as well as his admonitory advice, which suffices to demonstrate the profundity and generosity of his efforts on my behalf. I am both moved and impressed more than words can tell, and shall not forget my debt of gratitude as

long as I shall live.⁵ My only fear is that if I should ever be remiss in the performance of my official duties, since I depend upon your influence, I should fail to live up to your expectations. The fact that I can rely upon you to protect my interests before the venerable minister is something for which your pupil will remain forever grateful, since it is entirely due to his kinsman's largess. At present, taking advantage of a convenient messenger, I wish to respectfully enquire after your well-being, and to convey my unsurpassable regard. I humbly expect that you will comprehend my sentiments, and am not able to express myself more fully.

In addition, I am sending ten handkerchiefs of Yang-chou crepe, ten handkerchiefs of variegated satin, twenty low-grade gold toothpicks, and ten black gold wine cups, as a paltry expression of my sentiments from afar, in the hope that you will accept them with a smile.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the draft, he told Ch'en Ching-chi to get out the presents there in the studio and assist Licentiate Wen in wrapping them up. The letter was then copied out on brocade notepaper, after which the envelope was securely closed, and a seal affixed to it. A packet containing five taels of silver was also sealed up as a gratuity for the courier, Wang Yü. But no more of this.

After a while, they noticed that the snow was falling more heavily, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Licentiate Wen in the studio so they could appreciate the snow together. The table was wiped off, and some appetizers were provided to go with their wine. What should they see at this juncture but someone lifting aside the portiere and peeking inside.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who it was, and Wang Ching replied, "Cheng Ch'un is here."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to come in. Holding a pair of boxes up high in his hands, Cheng Ch'un came in and knelt down in front of the company. There was also a little square box adorned with gold tracery balanced on top of the other two.

"What's in the boxes?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"My elder sister, Ai-yüeh," Cheng Ch'un replied, "knowing that Your Honor is tired out from the scripture-reading ceremony for the Sixth Lady yesterday, and having nothing better to offer, has sent these two boxes of tea pastries for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like."



Hsi-men Ch'ing Appreciates the Snow White in His Studio

When he proceeded to open them, one box turned out to contain stuffed cream puff pastries, while the other one turned out to hold butterfat "abalone shell" sweets.

"These were made by my sister Ai-yüeh with her own hands," said Cheng Ch'un. "She knows that Your Honor is fond of these sweets and has sent them as a sign of her filial respect."

"I am already beholden to your establishment for the gifts you provided yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and today your sister Ai-yüeh has taken the trouble to send these things as well."

"Wonderful!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Bring them over here so I can taste them. Having lost one daughter who was adept at making these things, another daughter who is good at the same task has appeared."

Picking one up and sticking it in his mouth, Ying Po-chüeh also chose another one and handed it to Licentiate Wen, saying, "Venerable sir, have a taste of this. Once you have eaten it:

Your loose teeth will grow again;⁶

You'll feel like a new individual.⁷

Even to gaze upon such an exotic object,

Is superior to gaining ten years of life."⁸

When Licentiate Wen proceeded to savor it, he found that:

It melted on entering the mouth,
and said, "This delicacy must come from the Western Regions. It is not something known to the human world.

It irrigates the lungs and transfuses the heart.
Surely it is a rare specialty from the Realms Above."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask, "And what's in the little box?"

Cheng Ch'un calmly knelt down in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing and opened the box, saying, "This is a personal gift from my sister Ai-yüeh to Your Honor."

Hsi-men Ch'ing put the box on his knee and was about to take a look at the contents, when Ying Po-chüeh snatched it away with one hand and opened it up himself. Inside there was a tasseled peach-red satin handkerchief with a diapered, double-patterned, border and a meticulously worked motif of overlapping antique cash coins and joined hearts in the shape of interlocking lozenges, containing a package of melon seeds which the donor had cracked with her own teeth. Ying Po-chüeh tossed the handkerchief back to Hsi-men Ch'ing but proceeded to cram the melon seeds into his mouth in two handfuls and gobble them up.

By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to grab them back, there were hardly any left, and he expostulated, "You crazy dog! Are you suffering from such:

Acute consumption or avid craving?

If you leave me so much as a glimpse of them, it will show that you have a human heart after all."

"They were a gift from my daughter," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If she didn't intend to show her filial feelings toward me, to whom should she display them? As I see it, you ordinarily have more than enough to eat."

"Since Licentiate Wen is here," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can hardly give you the cursing you deserve. You dog! That's hardly acceptable conduct."

With that, he tucked the handkerchief into his sleeve and told Wang Ching to take the boxes back to the rear compound. Before long:

The cups and plates were duly arrayed,⁹
and the wine was served.

They had only finished one round of wine when Tai-an came in and reported, "Li Chih and Huang the Fourth have finally received payment and have come to deliver the silver they owe you."

"How much does it come to?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They say they've brought a thousand taels," said Tai-an, "and that they'll deliver the remainder at a later date."

"Just take a gander at those two goddamned characters," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They've been keeping me, too, in the dark, without telling me what they're up to. It's no wonder they never showed up for that scripture-reading ceremony of yours yesterday. They must have gone to Tung-p'ing prefecture to collect their silver. Now that you've received this repayment, you'd better not let them have any more silver in the future. These two "bare sticks" owe money to so many people that I fear, in the future:

Their reserves will prove to be inadequate.¹⁰

The other day, Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter was so upset at this prospect that he said he planned to go to Tung-p'ing prefecture himself, and bring back the silver he was due in person. I fear that if that:

Old ox with his rapacious snout,¹¹
makes off with the whole bundle, you may have difficulty recovering the remainder of your investment."

"I'm not afraid of the likes of him," stated Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It doesn't matter to me whether it's Eunuch Director Hsü or Eunuch Director Li. How do you suppose he would like it if I were to have his servant detained in the lockup? There's no reason to fear that he would fail to cough up the silver."

Turning to Ch'en Ching-chi, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Take the steelyard out with you, and take care of weighing his silver and putting it away. That should settle the terms of the contract. There's no need for me to go out."

After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi came back and reported, "I've weighed out the silver, which comes to exactly a thousand taels, and taken it back to the rear compound for the First Lady to put away. Huang the Fourth says that he'd like you to go outside and have a few words with him."

"Tell him I'm busy entertaining someone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, the only thing he wants to discuss is the renegotiation of the contract. Tell him to come back after the twenty-fourth."

"It's not that," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "There's a different matter that he'd like to solicit your help with. He's asking you to go outside so he can explain it to you in person."

"I wonder what it could be," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'd better go out and see."

When he got to the reception hall, Huang the Fourth kowtowed to him and then stood up and said, "The thousand taels of silver that I brought with me has already been accepted by your son-in-law and I am prepared to write a promissory note for the remainder. But there is another matter that I would like to solicit Your Honor's assistance with today."

As he spoke he knocked his head on the floor and wept.

Hsi-men Ch'ing helped him to his feet and said, "What is it, actually. Tell me about it."

"My father-in-law Sun Ch'ing," said Huang the Fourth, "employs a manager named Feng the Second to handle his cotton business in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. Who could have anticipated that this Feng the Second had a son named Feng Huai who:

Was not the sort to abide by his lot,

but was in the habit of locking the door of the shop at night and going out to patronize prostitutes. One day, two large bales of cotton were found to be missing, and when my father-in-law, Sun Ch'ing, complained about it, Feng the Second punished his son with a few strokes of the cane. His son, consequently, engaged in an affray with my brother-in-law, Sun Ch'ing's son, Sun Wenhsiang, in which he managed to knock out one of his antagonist's teeth and also suffered a head injury himself, before the other employees were able to break it up. Who could have anticipated that his son would develop a case of tetanus and die in his home half a month later? His father-in-law, who is a notorious local tyrant named Pai the Fifth, nicknamed Moneybags Pai, who operates as a fence for stolen goods in the area west of the Grand Canal, incited Feng the Second into preparing a deposition and lodging a complaint at the yamen of the regional investigating censor, who has muddle-headedly deputed Lei Ch'i-yüan, the assistant commissioner of the military defense circuit, to hear the case. But His Honor Lei Ch'i-yüan is so busy facilitating the Imperial Flower and Rock Convoys that he has assigned the case to Prefectural Judge T'ung. The Pai family has bought off Prefectural Judge T'ung and suborned the neighbors into falsely testifying that my father-in-law, Sun Ch'ing, egged on his son from the sidelines during the affray, so that, at present, a warrant has been issued for my father-in-law's arrest. My only hope is that, whatever happens, Your Honor will deign to take pity on me by writing a letter to Lei Ch'i-yüan requesting him to hold my father-in-law in custody for a few days before submitting a final decision. Only if His Honor Lei Ch'i-yüan has the time to hear the case is there any chance that my father-in-law may escape with his life. The fact that the two of them engaged in an affray had nothing to do with my father-in-law, and moreover, the death of Feng Huai did not take place until after the event, when the period of responsibility for the crime had elapsed. After all, Feng Huai had already been beaten by his father, Feng the Second, so why should Sun Wen-hsiang alone be held responsible for his death?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing glanced over his explanatory note and saw that it said, "Please look with favorable eyes on the two prisoners, Sun Ch'ing and Sun Wen-hsiang, who are currently being detained in Tung-ch'ang prefecture."

He then went on to say, "Although it is true that Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan did attend a banquet here some days ago, I have only met him that once and am not well acquainted with him. Under the circumstances, it would hardly be appropriate for me to address a letter to him."

At this, Huang the Fourth knelt down, weeping and wailing, and appealed to him, saying, "If Your Honor does not take pity on them, my father-in-law and his son will both, most likely, be fated to die. As things now stand, if Sun Wen-hsiang must lose his head, so be it, but if you could only contrive to have my father-in-law removed from the case:

My obligation to you could not be greater.

My father-in-law is fifty-nine years old this year and has no one at home to tend to his needs. If he remains incarcerated during the cold winter months, he will be as good as dead."

Hsi-men Ch'ing pondered this for some time and then said, "All right then, I'll ask His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house to intervene on his behalf. He and Lei Ch'i-yüan are fellow graduates, both having obtained the *chin-shih* degree in the year *jen-ch'en*."¹²

Huang the Fourth then proceeded to kowtow once again, after which he pulled a promissory note for "one hundred piculs of white rice"¹³ out of his sleeve and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, at the same time also extracting two packets of silver from the wallet at his waist.

Hsi-men Ch'ing refused to accept these offerings, saying, "What would I want with these monetary inducements of yours?"

"If Your Honor sets no store by them," said Huang the Fourth, "they may just as well be used to thank Ch'ien Lung-yeh."

"That's not a problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If the request is successful, I'll buy an appropriate gift to thank him."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying Po-chüeh, who emerged from the postern gate to the garden, saying, "Brother, you ought not to intervene on Huang the Fourth's behalf. This is a case of someone who:

At leisure, doesn't bother to burn incense, but

When in a jam, embraces the legs of the Buddha."¹⁴

Yesterday, when you were holding the scripture-reading ceremony, he didn't even bother to send a gift, or come to pay a visit. Yet today, he shows up and asks you to do him a favor."

Huang the Fourth responded by bowing to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "My good Uncle Two, you're killing me. I've been running myself ragged over this matter for the last half month. Since when have I had any leisure? Yesterday I had to go to the prefectural yamen to collect this silver due to His Honor. This morning Brother Li the Third got up early to report for duty, and I came straight to His Honor's place here to turn over the silver and solicit his intervention in this affair in the hope of saving my father-in-law. If His Honor persists in his refusal to accept these presents, it will indicate that he no longer intends to patronize me."

When Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was being offered a hundred taels of "snowflake" government silver, he went on to ask, "Brother, are you going to speak up on his behalf, or not?"

"I am not on familiar terms with Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so, at present, I plan to ask Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house to say a word on his behalf. In the future, I can buy a gift to thank the venerable Ch'ien Lung-yeh. That ought to suffice. So why should I accept these presents from him?"

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what you propose to do is not appropriate. Do you mean to say that when someone comes to solicit a favor from you, you should be put to the expense of having to buy a thank-you gift on his behalf? That doesn't make any sense. If you refuse to accept what he is offering, it looks as though you disdain it as being insufficient, which leaves him in an awkward position. You ought to take my advice and accept these presents of his. Although you may not set much store by them yourself, they may be drawn upon just as well in thanking Ch'ien Lung-yeh."

"And as for you, Brother Huang the Fourth," he went on to say, "listen to what I have to say. The fate of your father-in-law and brother-in-law hangs in the balance, and if it should happen that, as a result of the letter you have solicited, they are fortunate enough to

escape unscathed, His Honor here has clearly not been swayed by your money, and it would be only appropriate for you to lay on a feast in the licensed quarter to provide us all with a day's entertainment."

"Uncle Two," said Huang the Fourth, "in view of your efforts, it goes without saying that your humble servant will host a party, and I'll have my father-in-law buy a present and come to kowtow to you in gratitude. There is no reason for me to deceive you, but on account of this affair of the two of them, father and son, I have been running around, day and night, high and low, without being able to find any way out of their predicament. If His Honor will not take pity on them, I will be at my wit's end."

"Don't be silly," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Since you embrace his daughter as your wife, if you were not really concerned about him, who would be?"

"My wife does nothing but cry at home," said Huang the Fourth. "Even if my father-in-law had been able to hide out somewhere, there would have been no one at home to deliver food to him."

At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having allowed himself to be persuaded by Ying Po-chüeh, agreed to accept the promissory note for a hundred taels but told Huang the Fourth to take back his additional gifts.

"Venerable sir," said Huang the Fourth, "you don't seem to realize what a momentous matter this is, that you should quibble so about it."

Upon saying which, he started to go outside.

"Come over here," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Let me have a word with you. When do you need this letter by?"

"Life and death are hanging in the balance at this moment," said Huang the Fourth. "If His Honor will deign to produce a letter today, and depute someone to deliver it, I'll send my son to accompany him first thing in the morning."

He then proceeded to implore him again and again, saying, "Which of your honorable servants do you intend to send, so I can have a chance to get together with him?"

"I'll write the letter for you right away," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then called over Tai-an and told him, "You go to deliver it tomorrow, along with Young Master Huang."

When Huang the Fourth saw Tai-an, he said goodbye to Hsi-men Ch'ing and went out the door. When he got to the front gate, he asked Tai-an for the return of the bag in which he had brought the silver. Tai-an went back to the master suite in the rear compound, where he found Yüeh-niang, together with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü, engaged in tailoring some clothes.

When she saw Tai-an standing there waiting for the bag, Yü-hsiao said, "We're busy and don't have the leisure to empty it right now. You might as well have him come back for it tomorrow."

"Huang the Fourth is anxiously waiting for it right now," said Tai-an. "Tomorrow morning he has to get up early and go to Tung-ch'ang prefecture, so he can't come back then. Why don't you just empty it for him?"

"You had better go get it for him," said Yüeh-niang, "rather than keeping him waiting."

"The silver is still lying where we left it on the surface of the bed, isn't it?" said Yü-hsiao.

Going into the inner room she proceeded to dump the silver out of the bag onto the bed, after which, she brought the bag out with her, saying, "You crazy jailbird! Did you think someone had eaten this bag of his, that you should be as persistent as a leech in sucking it out of us?"

"If someone had not wanted it," said Tai-an, "what reason would I have had to come back to the rear compound for it?"

Thereupon, he took it out with him, and, when he got as far as the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds, gave it a shake, when what should fall out but a mushroom-shaped lump of silver, worth about three taels. It so happens that the paper packet in which it was wrapped had broken when Yü-hsiao dumped the silver carelessly out in her fit of pique, so that this lump had fallen out and remained in the bottom of the bag.

"What a stroke of luck," said Tai-an to himself. "I've managed to pick up something for nothing."

Thereupon, tucking it into his sleeve, he went out to the front compound, where he turned the bag over to Huang the Fourth and arranged to set out with him first thing in the morning.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to his studio, where he proceeded right away to instruct Licentiate Wen to compose the letter and turn it over to Tai-an. But no more of this.

Having noticed that outside the door:

Fluttering and swirling,
the snow was coming down just like:

Windblown willow catkins,¹⁵ or

Wildly dancing pear blossoms,

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the opening of a jug of high-quality Ma-ku wine and told Ch'un-hung to strain it through a cheesecloth sieve and serve it. Meanwhile, Cheng Ch'un was standing to one side, strumming his psaltery and singing in a low voice. Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to sing the song suite that begins with the words:

Beneath the willows the breeze is gentle.¹⁶

As he was singing, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in and said, "Uncle Han Tao-kuo asked me to show you this note."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read it, he said, "You deliver it to the residence of Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i outside the city gate and get him to speak up on his behalf. Ask him to go tomorrow and speak to Attendant Wang on the staff of the Prince of Yün about it, in order to have Han Tao-kuo's name removed from the roster of those whose corvée labor is mandated."

"It's late today," said Ch'in-t'ung. "I'll go early tomorrow morning."

"That will be all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Not long afterwards, Lai-an came in bearing a square box that contained eight bowls of delicacies. These included one bowl of braised yams with chicken, one bowl of minced pork with leeks, one bowl of yams with pork meatballs, one bowl of slow-boiled sheep's head, one bowl of roast pork, one bowl of soup flavored with tripe and lungs, one bowl of broth flavored with blood and intestines, one bowl of beef tripe, and one bowl of quick-fried pork kidneys, as well as two large plates of steamed pastries with rose-flavored stuffings, made of dough kneaded with hot water, and basted with rendered goose fat. When the four of them, including Ch'en Ching-chi, had eaten their fill, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Wang Ching to take a tray with two bowls of delicacies and a plate of pastry and give them to Cheng Ch'un to eat. He also awarded him two large goblets of wine.

Cheng Ch'un knelt down and said, "I can't drink the wine."

"My good child!" said Ying Po-chüeh, "It's ice-cold outside. How can you refuse it when it's awarded to you by your master? How is it that your elder brother drinks what he is provided?"

"My elder brother may drink wine," said Cheng Ch'un, "but I don't drink it."

"Just drink one goblet," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and I'll get Wang Ching to drink the other one for you."

"Master Two," said Wang Ching, "I can't drink it either."

"My child," insisted Ying Po-chüeh, "just drink some of it in his stead. It's not as though you'd be doing him a big favor, or anything like that. It has always been true that:

When an elder bestows something, a junior
does not presume to refuse it."¹⁷

Standing up, he then went on to say, "No matter what happens, I'm going to see to it that you drink this cup."

Wang Ching, while holding his nose with one hand, managed to drink it off in one gulp.

"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If the young good-for-nothing doesn't drink, why should you force him to do so? There's still half a cup left over. Let Ch'un-hung drink it for him, after which he can clap his hands to keep time and sing some southern songs for us."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, "Let's play a game of forfeits with Licentiate Wen. Whenever, in the course of the game, anyone has to pay a forfeit by drinking a cup of wine, he can sing to accompany it. That should make it more interesting."

Thereupon, he directed Wang Ching to fetch the dicebox and suggested that Licentiate Wen should start the game off.

"How could your pupil be so presumptuous?" said Licentiate Wen. "It would be more appropriate for the venerable Master Ying to do so."

He then went on to say, "May I enquire, venerable sir, what is your courtesy name?"

"My courtesy name is Nan-p'o, or Southern Slope," replied Ying Pochüeh.

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, with tongue in cheek, "let me explain it to you. His wife takes on such a large number of customers that, at night, when it is time to empty the commode, there is so much shit in it that he is embarrassed to empty it anywhere close by and has a maidservant lug it all the way to the southern edge of the city and dump it underneath the wall of the district granary. That is the origin of his courtesy name, Nan-p'o, or Southern Slop."

Licentiate Wen laughed, saying, "That is a different character pronounced *p'o*, which is composed of the water radical on the left and the character *fa*, or 'to transmit,' on the right. The *p'o* character he means is composed of the earth radical on the left and the character *p'i*, or 'skin,' on the right."

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you've deciphered it correctly. His wife is besieged by skinheads all day long."

"How can you bring yourself to say such a thing?" laughed Licentiate Wen.

"You may not be aware of it, sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he has forever been adept at offending other people."

"It has always been true," opined Licentiate Wen, "that:

Language which is not off-color fails to amuse."

"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're interrupting our game of forfeits. What's the point of arguing with him? He's forever given to:

Hurting other people with his shitty mouth,¹⁸
so why pay any attention? There's no need to make excuses for him."

"Well then," said Licentiate Wen, "whatever number comes up when you throw the die, you must quote a line, whether it be from a poem, a lyric, a song, or a rhapsody, in which the word 'snow' occurs in the position corresponding to the number you have thrown. If you come up with an appropriate quote, you must drink a small cup of wine. If you fail to come up with one, you must drink a large cup of wine."

Thereupon, Licentiate Wen threw a one-spot and said, "I've got a line:

Snow has melted off the water birds
for some time now."¹⁹

He then passed the dicebox to Ying Po-chüeh, who threw a five-spot.

Ying Po-chüeh, after pondering for what seemed like half a day and coming up blank, said, "I can't think of anything for the life of me."

After a further interval, he said, "I've finally managed to dredge something up:

Snow-clad plum blossoms²⁰ in snow
are blooming.²¹

How will that do?"

"Venerable sir," said Licentiate Wen, "you've committed an error by introducing the word 'snow' twice. There's a redundant occurrence of the word 'snow' at the head of your line."

"The initial instance refers only to light snow," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "whereas the second instance denotes a heavy snow."

"You dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."

He then told Wang Ching to pour him a large goblet of wine, while Ch'un-hung, clapping his hands to keep time, sang a southern song to the tune "Stopping the Horse to Listen":

On this cold night, needing some tea,
I plod toward the village ahead
in search of an inn.
This snow lightly sprinkles the monks' quarters,
While densely bespattering the sing-song houses,²²
And distantly delaying the homebound watercraft.
Along the riverbank people seize the chance
to admire the plum blossoms;
Within their courtyards they enjoy the scene
while burning silver candles.
As far as the eye can see,²³
As far as the eye can see,
Like the willow catkins at the Pa River Bridge,²⁴
It fills the sky as it flutters down.²⁵

Ying Po-chüeh was about to take up his forfeit of wine to drink when whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in from the rear compound carrying several saucers of snacks for them to eat. These included a saucer of stuffed pastries, a saucer of cream puff pastries, a saucer of baked chestnuts, a saucer of sun-dried dates, a saucer of hazelnut kernels, a saucer of melon seeds, a saucer of snow pears, a saucer of apples, a saucer of dried caltrops, a saucer of water chestnuts, a saucer of butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, and a saucer of black spherical dumplings wrapped in orange leaves. When Ying Po-chüeh picked one of these up and smelled it, he found that it exuded a pungent fragrance, and when he put it in his mouth, it tasted like a mixture of malt sugar and honey, being fine-textured, sweet, and delicious, but he couldn't identify it.

"Why don't you take a guess?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They must be sugared torreya nuts?" Ying Po-chüeh ventured.

"Sugared torreya nuts don't taste nearly as good as that," declared Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I would have said they were sugared plum bonbons," said Ying Po-chüeh, "were it not that they have kernels."

"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Come over here and let me tell you. You wouldn't arrive at the right answer even in your wildest dreams. These were brought to me the other day by one of my employees on the boat from Hang-chou. They are called 'coated plums.' They consist of red bayberries, covered with a paste of distilled medicinal spices and honey, with an outer coating of peppermint, and wrapped in orange leaves. That's why they have such a pleasing flavor. If you let one dissolve in your mouth first thing in the morning every day, it will engender saliva, strengthen the lungs, eliminate bad breath, reduce phlegm, relieve hangovers, and control the appetite. They are much superior to sugared plum bonbons."

"If you hadn't told me," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how could I have known?"

He then turned to Licentiate Wen and said, "Venerable sir, let's each have another one, shall we?"

After which, he said to Wang Ching, "Fetch a sheet of paper, so I can wrap up two of them to take home for my wife."

He also picked up one of the "abalone shell" sweets and said to Cheng Ch'un, "Were these 'abalone shell' sweets really prepared personally by your sister Ai-yüeh?"

Cheng Ch'un knelt down and said, "You don't mean to suggest that I would dare tell a lie do you? I don't know how much care my sister Ai-yüeh devoted to preparing these few samples in order to show her filial respect for His Honor."

"Thanks to her skill," said Ying Po-chüeh, "she's twisted each of their surfaces into the spiral shape of a snail shell, and made two kinds, one pink, and one white."

"When I see these things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can't help feeling sore at heart. The late Sixth Lady was the only member of my household that could make these sweets, and now that she's dead there's no one left who knows how to make them."

"Did I not say earlier," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "that I have no cause for regret? Having lost one daughter who was adept at making these 'abalone shell' sweets in order to show her filial respect for me, another daughter who knows how to make them has turned up. You're amazingly gifted at finding such people, and they all turn out to be real stunners, to boot."

This caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to:

Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,
and he went after Ying Po-chüeh and gave him a playful slap, saying, "You Dog! All you ever do is talk nonsense."

"You two venerable gentlemen," remarked Licentiate Wen, "are certainly on as intimate terms as you can get."

"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you may not know it, but he's just like a member of your humble nephew's family."

"In fact," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been a regular customer of his establishment for twenty years."

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the two of them were getting increasingly indecent with each other, he got up and went away, while Licentiate Wen merely covered his mouth with his hand and laughed.

Before long, Ying Po-chüeh finished off the large goblet of wine, and it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn to throw the dice.

Thereupon, when his throw ended up with seven spots, after pondering for what seemed like half a day, he said, "I've come up with a quote from a song to the tune 'A Girdle of Fragrant Silk,'" and proceeded to sing it:

Spring is taking flight;
Pear blossoms are like snow.²⁶

"You've committed an error," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The word 'snow' is in the ninth position rather than the seventh. You'll have to drink a large goblet of wine."

Thereupon, he filled a chased silver goblet to overflowing and placed it in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing, telling Ch'un-hung to sing, and challenging him by asking, "My child:

If you saw that date pit in your stomach to pieces,
How many pieces can you ever hope to come up with?"²⁷

Ch'un-hung responded by clapping his hands to keep time and singing to the same tune:

On all sides dark clouds are hovering,
When I look around me, the rivers and mountains
stretch to the horizon.
This snow is as light as willow catkins,²⁸
As fine as goose down,
And whiter than plum blossoms.
The twisting paths on the hillside
become even muddier;
The insipid wine in the villages
becomes more costly.
Heavenly flowers flutter down in profusion,
Heavenly flowers flutter down in profusion.
The moats are leveled, the ditches are full;
It is enough to make one sigh in amazement.²⁹

As they were enjoying their drinking bout, evening arrived, and candles were lighted.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished drinking his penalty cup, Ying Pochüeh said, "Since your son-in-law is no longer here, it is the turn of the venerable gentleman Licentiate Wen to finish the game."

Licentiate Wen, accordingly, took up the dicebox and threw a one-spot. After thinking for a while, he noticed that there was a pair of framed hanging scrolls on the wall of the studio, on which a couplet was inscribed in gold-flecked characters, that read:

Wind ruffles the flaccid willows beside the
level bridge at eventide;
Snow sprinkles the cold plum blossoms in the
small court at springtime.³⁰

So he quoted the second line of the couplet.

"That doesn't count. That doesn't count," objected Ying Po-chüeh. "It's not something you came up with out of your own mind. You'll have to drink a large goblet of wine."

Ch'un-hung, accordingly, proceeded to fill the goblet for him. Licentiate Wen:

Could not handle the effects of the drink,

but found himself dozing off on his chair, and asked to be excused. Ying Pochüeh was unable to persuade him to stay.

"That's enough. That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The venerable gentleman is a man of culture and is not accustomed to carousing."

He then turned to Hua-t'ung and said, "You take good care of Master Wen, and escort him across the street to get some rest."

This was just the signal Licentiate Wen had been waiting for, and he said goodbye and departed.

"It seems that Wen Pi-ku is not up to it today," opined Ying Po-chüeh. "How much wine did he have, after all, before getting drunk like that?"

Thereupon, after drinking together for some time more, Ying Po-chüeh got up to go, saying, "It's dark underfoot, and I've had enough to drink."

He then went on to say, "Brother, be sure to have Tai-an deliver that letter on his behalf first thing tomorrow morning."

"Weren't you aware of it?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already given him the letter and told him to deliver it tomorrow morning."

When Ying Po-chüeh lifted aside the portiere and saw that the sky was dark and the ground was slippery, he asked for a lantern and set off together with Cheng Ch'un. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Cheng Ch'un five mace of silver for himself and also put a canister of "coated plums" in the box that he had brought with him, for him to take back and present to his elder sister Cheng Ai-yüeh.

As they were on their way out the door, Hsi-men Ch'ing joked with Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "See that you two brethren take good care of each other."

"You're wasting your breath," responded Ying Po-chüeh.

“When a father and son hike together,

It’s a case of each man for himself.”³¹

I might just as well go now and have a word with that little whore, Cheng Aiyüeh.”

As he finished speaking, Ch’in-t’ung escorted them out the gate.

Hsi-men Ch’ing, having watched while the utensils were cleared away, leaned for support on Lai-an, who held a lantern for him as they went through the postern gate. As they passed by the door of P’an Chin-lien’s quarters, he saw that the side gate was closed and silently made his way past it to the gate of Li P’ing-erh’s quarters, where he proceeded to rap gently at the door. Hsiu-ch’un opened the door to let him in, and Lai-an then went back out of the garden.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing entered the parlor, he saw Li P’ing-erh’s portrait and asked if the daily offering of soup and rice had been presented before it, or not.

Ju-i then came out and replied to his question, saying, “The maidservants and I just finished presenting it.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then went into the bedroom and sat down on a chair, while Ying-ch’un served him with tea, after which, he asked her to help him undress. Ju-i, realizing that he intended to spend the night there, hastily proceeded to spread out the bedding and heat the quilt by inserting a hot-water bottle until it was good and warm, whereupon, she helped him into bed. Hsiu-ch’un locked the postern gate, and the three of them then laid out their bedding on wooden benches in the parlor and prepared to go to sleep.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing called for another serving of tea, the two maidservants, who understood the state of affairs, encouraged the wet nurse to go inside and sleep with him. The woman, accordingly, took off her clothes and burrowed her way under his quilt. Hsi-men Ch’ing, exhilarated by the wine he had drunk, took a dose of the aphrodisiac and fastened the clasp on his member. The woman then lay faceup on the k’ang, raised her legs, and allowed him to peg away at her for all he was worth. Slamming away at her recklessly, he kept it up until:

The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and

Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,³²

while she called out “Daddy” incessantly. In the quiet of the night the noise that they made could be heard several houses away.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw that the woman’s flesh was as soft as cotton wadding, he embraced her with both arms and then directed her to squat down under the quilt and suck his cock. There was nothing the woman would not debase herself to do in ministering to his pleasure.

“My child,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “it turns out that the flesh of your body is every bit as fair as that of your late mistress. When I embrace you, it feels just the way it did when I slept with her. If you try your best to cater to me, I will look after you.”

“It hardly needs saying, Father,” the woman replied, “but, how can you compare Heaven to Earth? You’ll be the death of me yet. How can I be compared to my mistress in any way? Seeing that your servant’s husband is already dead, whenever the spirit moves you, early or late, if you don’t reject me for my homeliness, all you have to do is tip me a wink, and I’ll be at your service.”

“How old are you?” Hsi-men Ch’ing went on to ask.

“Since I was born in the year of the hare,” the woman replied, “this year I’m thirty years old.”

“It turns out then,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “that you’re a year younger than I am.”

He was impressed by the fact that she was both glib with her tongue and fond of the pillow-top game of breeze and moonlight.

The next morning, when it was time to get up, the woman got out of bed first in order to minister to him by fetching his shoes and socks, and helping with his morning ablutions.

Catering to him with the utmost assiduity, she succeeded in putting Ying-ch’un and Hsiu-ch’un in the shade.

She also made a request of Hsi-men Ch’ing, saying, “I’d like to have a piece of pale green pongee to make into a jacket so that I can wear mourning for my mistress.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing agreed to everything she asked, sending a servant to get three lengths of pale green pongee from the shop, and saying, “Each of the three of you can make a mourning garment for yourselves.”

As a result of this night together, having had two or three encounters with her, Hsi-men Ch’ing’s heart was moved, and, behind Yüeh-niang’s back, he began to supply her with silver, clothing, and jewelry, in fact, there was nothing he refused her.

The next day, when P’an Chin-lien learned that Hsi-men Ch’ing had spent the night in Li P’ing-erh’s quarters sleeping with the wet nurse, Ju-i, she went straight to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, “Elder Sister, you’d better have something to say to that lousy shameless good-for-nothing of ours. Yesterday, he made his way surreptitiously into her quarters next door and spent the night with that woman, the wet nurse. He is just like someone whose:

Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin.

What kind of a good-for-nothing is he, to pick up whatever comes his way, no matter whether it be good or bad:

Neither light nor dark?”³³

In the future, if she should produce a child, whose would it be? She’ll be just like Lai-wang’s wife was:

Assuming privileges above her station.

What kind of a spectacle would that create?”

“All you seem bent on doing,” said Yüeh-niang, “is to get me to do the dirty work of accusing him of having an affair with the servant woman of his deceased lady, while you play the role of an innocent bystander behind my back. Do you think you can simply:

Put a water crock over my head?

What sort of a fool do you take me for? If you want to take him to task, go ahead and do it. I'm not going to get myself involved in your idle undertakings."

When Chin-lien heard Yüeh-niang's response, she did not have another word to say, but simply went back to her quarters.

Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early that morning and, seeing that the weather was clear, proceeded to dispatch Tai-an on his errand to deliver the letter to Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh's office. After he had gone to the yamen and returned home, P'ing-an came inside and reported that the messenger from Chai Ch'ien's place had come back to pick up his reply.

After giving him the letter, Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask, "How come you didn't come back to pick it up yesterday?"

"Your humble servant," the messenger replied, "had to deliver another letter to His Honor Hou Meng, the grand coordinator of Shantung province, and was held up for two days."

When he finished speaking, he took the letter and went out the gate.

After eating a meal, Hsi-men Ch'ing went over to the house across the street to supervise the weighing out of the silver, the packing up, and the writing out of the statement of account, so that on the twenty-fourth he could burn propitiatory paper money and send off the managers, Han Tao-kuo, Ts'ui Pen, and Lai-pao, along with the young men, Jung Hai and Hu Hsiu, the five of them, on their expedition to the South. He also saw to the writing of a letter to be delivered by them to Miao Ch'ing, thanking him for his lavish presents.

By the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth day of the month, Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished paying the personal visits to relatives and friends to thank them for their condolences during the funerary rites for Li P'ing-erh.

One morning, as he was sitting in the master suite after eating his breakfast, Yüeh-niang said to him, "The first day of the coming month is the birthday of our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's daughter Chang-chieh. We really ought to buy something in the way of a gift and have it sent over there. As the saying goes:

A betrothal, once made, should not be altered.

We ought not to cease extending these courtesies merely because our son is dead."

"Of course we should send something," agreed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he told Lai-hsing to buy two roast geese, a set of pig's trotters, four fresh chickens, two smoked ducks, a platter of birthday noodles, an outfit of figured satin clothing, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a box of costume jewelry. When this had been done, he wrote a note to accompany them and had Wang Ching deliver them.

When he had finished taking care of this, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the garden in the front compound and sat down in his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who had come back after delivering the letter to report on his errand.

"His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh," he said, "on seeing your note, immediately wrote a letter and sent one of his functionaries to accompany me and Huang the Fourth's son to deliver it to Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan at the office of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. His Honor, in turn, dispatched an order requesting Prefectural Judge T'ung to forward to him the documents in the case, along with the defendants, so that he could conduct a new hearing of the case. As a result, Sun Ch'ing, as well as his son Sun Wen-hsiang, have been exonerated. The latter has been assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to pay for the burial expenses of the deceased and has only been charged with the crime of manslaughter, for which the penalty of seventy strokes with the heavy bamboo is redeemable for a cash payment. I then had to return to the customs house in order to report back to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh, and obtain a reply from him, before I could come home."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how competently Tai-an had performed his task, he was delighted. When he opened the reply, he found that Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan's note in reply to Ch'ien Lung-yeh was also included, and read as follows:

Your behest has already been fully complied with. In view of the fact that Feng the Second had previously beaten his son, and that, moreover, both his son and Sun Wen-hsiang had sustained injuries as a result of their affray, and that the ensuing death of his son took place after the period of responsibility for the crime had already expired, to sentence Sun Wen-hsiang to the death penalty would hardly be equitable. It has therefore been adjudged that the defendant shall be assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to compensate Feng the Second for his burial expenses, and the appropriate measures have already been carried out.

Respectfully indited in reply.

Your devoted fellow graduate Lei Ch'i-yüan humbly salutes you.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading this document he was very pleased and went on to ask, "Where is Huang the Fourth's father-in-law now?"

"Upon being released, they have both gone home," replied Tai-an. "Tomorrow, he will come with Huang the Fourth in order to kowtow in gratitude to you. Huang the Fourth's father-in-law also gave me a tael of silver."

"You can keep it to buy shoes for yourself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Upon this, Tai-an kowtowed and went out.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then sprawled out on the k'ang frame and went to sleep, while Wang Ching lit some incense in a small burner on the table and then quietly made his way out of the room.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly heard the sound of someone lifting aside the portiere, when whom should he see but Li P'ing-erh abruptly entering the room. She was dressed in a violet blouse over a white damask skirt:

Her raven locks were carelessly coiled, and her complexion was sallow.

Advancing up to the bed, she cried out, "My Brother, you're asleep here, are you? I've come to pay you a visit. That wretch has lodged a formal complaint against me, as a result of which I have been locked up in prison, where:

I am dripping with blood,³⁴

befouled by my own filth, and have been suffering torments all this time. But the other day, as a result of the appeal you lodged with the court on my behalf, the charges against me have been reduced by three degrees. That wretch, however, adamantly refuses to accept this verdict and is angrily determined to file a complaint against you, and have you taken into custody. I wouldn't have come to tell you about this, but I feared that, sooner or later, you might find yourself the unexpected victim of his venomous skullduggery. Right now, I am going to look for a place of refuge for myself. You had better be on your guard. If you are not obliged to, try to avoid going out drinking at night, and, wherever you do go, come home early. Whatever happens, keep my words firmly in mind, and don't forget them."

When she had finished speaking, the two of them embraced each other and then burst out crying.

"Sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Tell me where it is that you are going."

But, suddenly, she broke away from him with a jerk, revealing it to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch.³⁵

When Hsi-men Ch'ing awoke from his dream, he found himself to be weeping. Upon seeing the shadows of the blind that pervaded the studio, he realized that it was already noon. When he recollected the dream, he couldn't help feeling sorely distressed at heart. Truly:

When the blossoms fall and are buried in the earth
their fragrance is not perceptible;

The mirror is void of the image of the phoenix mate³⁶
when he first awakes from his dream.

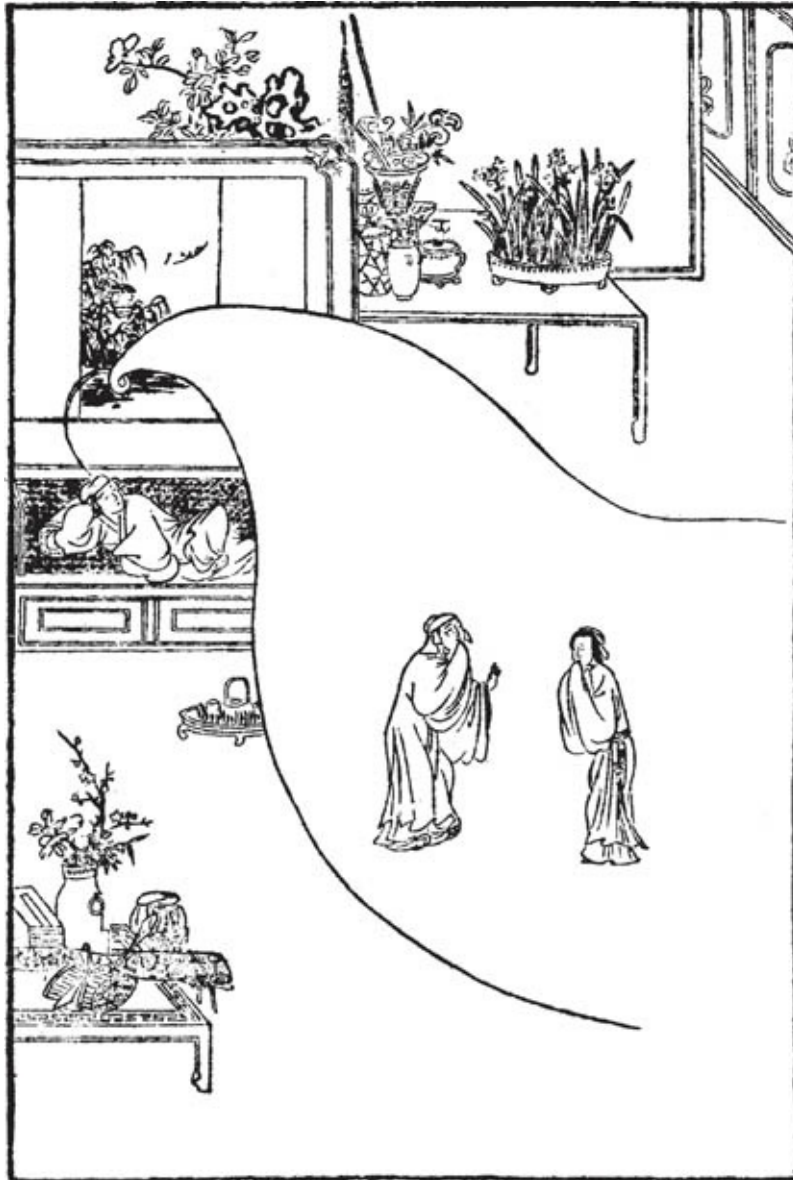
There is a poem that testifies to this:

The dwindling snow, having just cleared,
illuminates the paper window;
The embers in the brazier have burnt out,
and cold penetrates the couch.
The lovers, having chanced to encounter
each other in a lovelorn dream;
Wind wafts the fragrance of plum blossoms
inside the drapery of the bed.³⁷

Who could have anticipated that, in response to the presents that had been sent to the Ch'iao household that morning, Ch'iao Hung's wife sent Ch'iao T'ung to deliver a card inviting Yüeh-niang and her sister wives to a party? When the page boy told them that Hsi-men Ch'ing was asleep in his studio, no one dared to disturb him, and Yüeh-niang merely decided to entertain Ch'iao T'ung, for the time being, in the rear compound.

"Give me that card," said P'an Chin-lien. "Let me go ask him what to do about it."

Thereupon, she abruptly proceeded out to his studio. She was wearing a blouse of jet satin that opened down the middle, had a diapered border with purpled gold lamé edging, and was adorned with a row of five gold buttons decorated with a three rivers pattern. Underneath this she wore an overskirt of light silk, above an underskirt of Lu-chou silk with a gold-spangled border, fastened in front with a girdle of communion,³⁸ braided out of mermaid silk, and displaying the motif of a pair of amorous water birds. On her feet, the upturned points of her golden lotuses peeked out beneath her red brocade ankle leggings. On her head, her cloudy locks were enclosed in a chignon. Altogether, she was made up as if:



Li P'ing-erh Describes Her Intimate Feelings in a Dream

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,
while from her ears there dangled a pair of pendant onyx earrings.

Pushing open the door of his studio and finding Hsi-men Ch'ing sprawled on the k'ang frame, she proceeded to park her posterior on a chair, saying, "My child, what are you doing here, talking to yourself all by your lonesome? No wonder you were nowhere to be seen. It turns out you've been here all the time, catching up on your sleep."

As she spoke, she cracked melon seeds with her teeth.

She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How come you've been rubbing your eyes until they're all red?"

"I must have fallen asleep on my face," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Actually," said the woman, "it looks more as if you've been crying."

"You crazy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why should I have been crying for no good reason?"

"It seems more likely to me," said Chin-lien, "that you've happened to remember something about someone who is uppermost in your mind."

"Don't talk such nonsense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who could there be who is either uppermost or undermost in my mind?"

"Li P'ing-erh is uppermost in your mind," said Chin-lien, "and her wet nurse is undermost in your mind, while the rest of us are completely outside your mind, not even worth taking into account."

"You crazy little whore!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're indulging once again in your:
Ridiculous blatherskite."

He then went on to inquire, "What I say to you now is serious. On that earlier occasion, when you were dressing your sister Li in her burial clothes, what kind of garments did you put on the lower part of her body?"

"Why do you ask?" responded Chin-lien.

"For no particular reason," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I just thought I'd ask."

"There must be a reason behind your asking," said Chin-lien. "On the outside, she was dressed in two outfits of satin brocade, underneath which she wore a white satin jacket and a skirt of yellow pongee, over a purple satin camisole, a petticoat of white pongee, and a pair of scarlet underdrawers."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by nodding his head in recognition.

"Do you suppose," Chin-lien remarked, "that:

After practicing veterinary medicine for twenty years,

I would fail to diagnose the stomach ailment of an ass?

If you weren't thinking of her, why should you ask?"

"I had just seen her in a dream," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Chin-lien said:

"Dreams are produced by what is on your mind;³⁹

Sneezes are induced by a tickle in your nose.⁴⁰

Even though she's dead, you're still so preoccupied with her, it would seem that the rest of us no longer tickle your fancy. In the future, when we die, I fear, there will be no one to commemorate us. You're so preoccupied with her that your mind is in a daze."

Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up, reached out with one hand, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss, saying as he did so, "You crazy little oily mouth! You've certainly got:

A sharp mouth and a sharp tongue,

don't you?"

"My son," responded Chin-lien, "do you really think this old mother of yours is oblivious to the fact that:

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail?"

As she spoke, she transferred the mouthful of melon seeds she had been cracking from her mouth into his. The two of them then fell to sucking each other's tongues for a while, until he became aware that:

Her sweet spittle transfused his heart,⁴¹

Her scented lips were imbued with rouge, and

The odor of orchid and musk from her body

assailed his senses.

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Pulling her onto the bed where he was sitting, he leaned against the comb-back-shaped back rest, exposed his organ, and told the woman to indulge him by "toying with the flute." The woman then actually proceeded to:

Bend low her powdered neck, and

Engulf and release it with her mouth.

As she moved back and forth:

The sound of her sucking was audible.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that her head was adorned with a gold tiger-shaped tiara, her fragrant tresses were studded all round with plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and the hair behind her temples was embellished with a profusion of pearl headgear, he could hardly contain his excitement.

Just as they were approaching their climax, they suddenly heard Lai-an, from outside the portiere, saying, "Master Ying the Second is here."

"Invite him to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

This threw the woman into such consternation that she called out inarticulately, "Lai-an, you louse! Don't you let him come in until I've had a chance to get out of the way."

"He's already come in," said Lai-an, "and is waiting in the little courtyard."

"Why don't you go tell him to stay out of the way?" said the woman.

Lai-an, accordingly, went out and said to him, "Master Two, you'd better get out of the way for the time being. There's someone in the room with him."

Ying Po-chüeh then went out beside the juniper hedge, where he could contemplate the sight of the bamboos, embellished as they were with snow. Wang Ching lifted aside the portiere, and all that could be heard was a swish of her skirts as Chin-lien disappeared in a puff of smoke on her way back to the rear compound. Truly:

Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets

is not seen until they fly;

Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots
is not known until they speak.

Ying Po-chüeh then went inside, greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, and sat down.

"How come you haven't been around the last few days?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've been stuck at home, where things have been as aggravating as can be."

"What's been aggravating you?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tell me about it."

"It's embarrassing to have to explain it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The fact is, I'm short of money at home right now. Yesterday, that concubine of mine went and produced another child for no good reason. It's possible for a person to cope with such contingencies by daylight, but it happened during the third watch in the middle of the night. My wife is incapacitated, suffering from:

Seven pains and eight ailments,

so I had to crawl out of bed, collect the necessary absorbent grass paper and bedding, check on how the mother was doing, and then go out to find the midwife. On top of everything else, Ying Pao was not at home, my elder brother having sent him out to his country estate to bring back some fodder. Not having anyone else at hand in this emergency, I had to take a lantern and go off myself to engage Midwife Teng, who lives at the mouth of the alley. By the time she came through the door, the baby was already born."

"What was the sex of the child?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"She gave birth to a baby boy," replied Ying Po-chüeh.

"You silly dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she's produced a son for you, isn't that a good thing? What have you got to be annoyed about? Was it that slave of yours, Ch'un-hua, who gave birth to him?"

"It was, indeed, your sister-in-law Ch'un-hua," Ying Po-chüeh responded with a laugh.

"That lousy bitch of a leg-wagging slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever recommended that you take her on in the first place? And now you're complaining simply because you had to go looking for the midwife."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you don't understand the situation. During these cold winter months, our situation is not to be compared with that of well-to-do households like yours. You not only have plenty of money, but also hold an official position with prospects of future advancement, so that, if a son is born to you, it is just like:

Adding a flower to a piece of brocade.⁴²

No wonder you are happy. Whereas, right now, I've got one shadow too many as it is. And I've got to provide food and clothing for that nestful of people in my household. On top of which, for the last several days, I've been driven out of my mind by matchmaking problems. Ying Pao is tied up every day with his corvée labor obligations, and my elder brother, for his part, doesn't pay any attention to my problems. Although my eldest daughter has been married off, thanks to Heaven above, as well as the assistance you rendered, Brother, as you have seen with your own eyes, my second daughter is growing up and will be twelve years old next year. Yesterday, a matchmaker came and asked for a card giving the year, month, day, and hour of her birth. I said it was early days yet and told her to hold off for the time being. It was really driving me to distraction, and then, all of a sudden, in the middle of the night, this new karmic encumbrance turned up. When one has to:

Grope one's way in the dark of night,⁴³

where can one go to convert anything into ready cash? When my wife saw the state of perturbation I was in:

For lack of any alternative option,⁴⁴

she took one of her silver stick-pins and gave it to the midwife in order to settle the matter. Tomorrow is the time for the third day lustration ceremony,⁴⁵ so everyone in the neighborhood will find out about it. When it comes time for the full-month celebration,⁴⁶ where am I going to find the wherewithal to pay for it. When the day comes, I guess I'll have to vacate the house, make myself:

As free as you please,

and go off to stay at some Buddhist monastery for a few days."

"If you do make yourself scarce," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you'll only open the way for one of the monks to take your place in the warm bedding. You dog! When you get right down to it, all you ever care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself."

He continued to laugh at his expense, but Ying Po-chüeh only made a deliberate pout with his lips, and remained silent.

"My son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't be so annoyed. How much silver do you need? If you just tell me, I'll take care of it for you."

"Who knows how much it will take?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"You'll need enough to take care of things satisfactorily," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And if you find yourself short in the midst of things, you can always go pawn some of your clothes, after all."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if you deign to help me out, twenty taels of silver ought to suffice. I'll write a promissory note for you on the spot. I'm putting you to so much trouble and expense that I've found it difficult to broach the subject. I wouldn't presume to quibble over the amount. Whatever you decide, Brother, will be fine by me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing refused to accept his promissory note, saying, "Don't talk such rot! Among friends, who needs a promissory note?"

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in with a serving of tea.

"Put down those teacups," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to the servant, "and go tell Wang Ching to come here."

Before long, Wang Ching came in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "You go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady to look on top of the cabinet on the rear wall of the bedstead in the inner room for the two packets of silver that were provided by His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien on the occasion of the banquet we put on for him the other day, and bring

one of them back to me.”

Wang Ching nodded his assent and was not gone for long before coming back with the silver.

Hsi-men Ch'ing handed it over to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, “This packet contains fifty taels of silver. You can take all of it and use whatever you need, thus sparing me the trouble of opening it, since:

The original seals have not been tampered with.⁴⁷

You can open it and see for yourself, if you want.”

“It’s too much,” said Ying Po-chüeh.

“If it’s more than you need at the moment,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “you can keep the remainder on hand. At present, seeing that your second daughter has reached marriageable age, you can use it to pay for the making of some shoes, footbindings, and clothing for her, so that she’ll appear to advantage during the full-month celebration.”

“Brother, what you say makes sense,” said Ying Po-chüeh.

When he opened the packet of silver and saw that it did, indeed, contain the joint contributions made by the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and the eight prefectures, in ingots of three taels apiece of the highest grade of incised silver stamped with the mark of the Sung-chiang mint, he was utterly delighted.

Hastily bowing in thanks, he said, “Who could match Brother’s magnanimous feelings? Are you really unwilling to accept my promissory note?”

“You silly child!” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “Why should I treat you the way I would anyone else? After all, I’m in the position of your parent. Were that not the case, would you presume to come pester me over every problem that comes up? This child is not even your own child but may be considered the product of our joint efforts. The truth of the matter is that at the time of the full-month ceremony, if you should make that slave Ch’un-hua of yours available to serve me for a while in lieu of interest, it would not be asking too much of you.”

“Your sister-in-law Ch’un-hua, these last few days,” responded Ying Pochüeh, “has become just as emaciated by the demands made upon her as your wife.”

We will say no more at this point about the banter between the two of them in the studio.

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, “What has happened with regard to that predicament of Huang the Fourth’s father-in-law?”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in giving him a complete account of Tai-an’s mission, said, “Upon receiving Ch’ien Lung-yeh’s letter, Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch’i-yüan dispatched an order requiring that the defendants in the case be sent back to his jurisdiction so that he could conduct a new hearing of the case, as a result of which he exonerated both Sun Wen-hsiang and his father Sun Ch’ing. Sun Wen-hsiang has been assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to cover the burial expenses of the deceased and has only been charged with the offense of manslaughter, for which the penalty of seventy strokes with the heavy bamboo is redeemable for a cash payment. Thus the matter has been brought to a successful conclusion.”

“What a stroke of luck for him!” exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. “If he had lit a lantern to look for help, where else could he have found anyone capable of doing him such a favor? If you persist in refusing to accept what he is offering you, that’s up to you; but though you may not set much store by it yourself, it would be a good idea to keep it in order to compensate Ch’ien Lung-yeh. Don’t let him off the hook. Whatever happens, you should get him to lay on a lavish drinking party somewhere in the licensed quarter and invite us to partake thereof. If you don’t want to suggest it to him, I’ll be happy to do so. You’ve prevented his brother-in-law from being charged with a capital offense, after all, which is not an inconsequential matter.”

To resume our story, while they were talking in the studio, after Yüeh-niang in the master suite had located the silver and given it to Wang Ching to deliver, whom should she see but Meng Yü-lou, who came into the room and said that her younger brother, Meng Jui, was at her brother-in-law Han Ming-ch’uan’s place.

“Right now,” she went on to say, “he is planning to set out before long on an expedition to buy miscellaneous merchandise in Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region and has come today to say goodbye to Father. He’s sitting in my quarters. Wherever Father happens to be, Sister, could you send a page boy to let him know about it?”

He’s in his studio in the garden, visiting with Ying Po-chüeh,” said Yüeh-niang.

“As to inviting Father to come inside,” she went on to say, “a while ago, Sister P’an the Sixth did a fine job on her mission of inviting him back here. Ch’iao T’ung had delivered an invitation card and was waiting for a chance to speak to Father in order to get a verbal reply, so that we would know whether or not to prepare to go out tomorrow. I kept him here in the expectation of getting a response and served him with tea, but despite:

Waiting for long periods as well as short,

Father never showed up, and when Ch’iao T’ung could endure it no longer, he got up and left. After what seemed like half a day, lo and behold, Sister Six came back from the front compound, and when I asked her if she had fulfilled her mission or not, she was at a loss for words, merely saying, ‘Oops! I completely forgot to mention it to him, and, in a little while, Ying the Second came in and I had to leave. Who has the patience to:

Stick around and wait forever,⁴⁸

just for the chance to say a word to him? The card is still in my sleeve.’ This caused me to say to her:

‘When biting the stalk of a crisp vegetable,

start with the root end.

Luckily it wasn’t a matter of critical importance, but you’ve kept everybody waiting. You’re just a good-for-nothing creature who lacks the tail to follow up with.’ Who knows what she was up to out there that kept her from coming back inside for half a day, only to report

that she hadn't remembered to say what she went for? After I had given her a piece of my mind, she took herself off to the front compound."

A little while later, Lai-an came in, and Yüeh-niang sent him to summon Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Tell him that Brother-in-law Meng the Second is here."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then got up, but told Ying Po-chüeh to stay where he was, saying, "Don't you go anywhere. I'll be right back."

When he arrived in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang first told him that Ch'iao Hung's household had sent them an invitation.

"On the day in question," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "You ought to go by yourself. While we are still in mourning, it would hardly be appropriate for the whole family to go."

"Brother-in-law Meng the Second has come to say goodbye to you," said Yüeh-niang. "He's planning to set out in the next day or two on an expedition to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region. He's sitting in his sister's quarters over there waiting to see you."

She then went on to ask, "A while ago, when you asked for that packet of silver, who did you want to give it to?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained the whole situation to her, saying, "Last night Brother Ying the Second's concubine Ch'un-hua gave birth to a son, and he asked me to loan him a few taels of silver. He also said that his second daughter had reached marriageable age and he was feeling as hard up as could be about the situation. So I decided to help out by lending him a few taels of silver."

"He's lucky enough, at his age, to finally beget a son," said Yüeh-niang. "His wife must be very happy about it. Tomorrow, we'll have to send them some rice for making congee."

"That goes without saying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When the time comes for the full-month celebration, I'm not going to let that beggar off the hook, but put him to the trouble, no matter what, of issuing invitations to the lot of you to visit his home, where you can take a look at what sort of a woman Ch'un-hua is."

"In any case," laughed Yüeh-niang, "she's bound to resemble those in your own household in having a nose, and having eyes. How could she be any different?"

She then sent Lai-an to invite Brother-in-law Meng the Second to join them. It was not long before Meng Yü-lou and her younger brother came in to pay their respects. When they had done with the customary amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing chatted with him for a while and then invited him to accompany him to his studio in the front compound, where he introduced him to Ying Po-chüeh. He also told a servant to fetch something to eat from the rear compound.

Thereupon, a table was set up, and wine and delicacies were laid out so that the three of them could have a drink together.

Hsi-men Ch'ing further instructed the servant, saying, "Fetch another wine goblet and pair of chopsticks, and go invite Master Wen from across the street to come and help keep Brother-in-law Meng the Second company."

Lai-an came back in a little while and reported, "Master Wen is not at home but has gone to visit Master Ni P'eng."

"Ask our son-in-law to join us then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, saluted Meng the Second with a bow, and sat down to one side.

Hsi-men Ch'ing questioned Meng Jui, saying, "Brother-in-law, when are you setting out on your expedition, and how long will you be gone?"

"I'm scheduled to set out on the second day of next month," replied Meng Jui, "but how long I'll be gone is impossible to say. I've got to go to Ching-chou to buy paper, and to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region to purchase incense and wax. When you get right down to it, it's likely to take no less than a year or two before I'll be able to purchase everything I need and return home. On this expedition I will take the overland route by way of Honan, Shensi, and Han-chou on the way out, and return on the water route by way of the Yangtze Gorges and Ching-chou. The round-trip will amount to seven or eight thousand li."

"How old are you, Mr. Meng?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"I'm twenty-five," replied Meng Jui.

"It's remarkable that someone as young as you are should be so familiar with the various routes on the rivers and lakes," said Ying Po-chüeh, "while people like myself have grown old in vain, sitting around at home."

Before long, a new serving of delicacies was brought in, and:

The cups and plates were duly arrayed.

Meng the Second remained drinking with them until the sun began to set in the West before he said goodbye and took his leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off and then came back to rejoin Ying Po-chüeh and drink a while longer.

Lo and behold, at this point, two coffers for burnt offerings to the dead were brought in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'en Ching-chi to take charge of preparing them, and to ask Yüeh-niang for two outfits of Li P'ing-erh's brocade clothing, along with imitation gold and silver paper money, to put into the coffers.

He then said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Today is the date for the sixth weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, and, rather than holding a scripture-reading ceremony, we are going to burn these two coffers for her."

"How swiftly time flies," said Ying Po-chüeh. "My sister-in-law has already been dead for a month and a half."

"The fifth day of the coming month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the time for the final weekly commemoration of her death. We will have to have a sutra reading for her then."

"So, on that occasion," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the recitation of a Buddhist sutra will suffice."

"My wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has reminded me that, while she was still alive, after the birth of her son, she promised two of the Buddhist nuns that frequent our household that they could preside, together with some other nuns that will be engaged for the purpose, over a recitation of the *Hsüeh-p'en ching*, or *Blood Pool Sutra*, and other litanies of repentance, on her behalf."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh, observing that it was getting late, said, "I'd better be off, so that you

can proceed with the ceremony of burning paper money for my sister-in-law.”

He then made a deep bow and said, “As the unworthy recipient of Brother’s profound generosity:

I will find it hard to forget either dead or alive.”⁴⁹

“My son,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “whether you find it hard to forget or not, you’d better not pretend to be:

Still asleep in dreamland.

When it comes time for the full-month ceremony, your whole bevy of mothers will buy presents and show up at your place.”

“What need is there for them to purchase gifts,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “If I have to kowtow to each one of them, whatever happens, I would like to invite the entire group of my sisters-in-law to condescend to visit my humble household.”

“When the day comes,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “whatever happens, I hope you will get that slave of yours, Ch’un-hua, to doll herself up, and trot her out so I can take a look at her.”

“Your sister-in-law Ch’un-hua,” responded Ying Po-chüeh, “has remarked that now she has a son, she has no further use for you.”

“That’s enough of your lies,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “When I see that slave, I’ll know what to say to her.”

Ying Po-chüeh, thereupon, nonchalantly took himself off with a laugh, while Hsi-men Ch’ing told the page boys to clear away the utensils and then went over to Li P’ing-erh’s quarters.

Ch’en Ching-chi and Tai-an had already completed the task of preparing the coffers. That day, the Temple of the Jade Emperor, the Temple of Eternal Felicity, and the Temple of Kindness Requited had all sent over effigies to be burned at the ceremony. That from the Taoist temple was an effigy of the Perfected Lord of Precious Solemnity and Manifest Accomplishment,⁵⁰ while those from the two Buddhist temples were effigies of the Great King of Transformation who sits in judgment over the Sixth Court of the Tribunal of the Underworld.⁵¹ The household of Brother-in-law Hua Tzu-yu outside the city gate sent a box of steamed dumplings and ten quires of paper money for the use of the dead, and the household of Wu K’ai did likewise.

Hsi-men Ch’ing looked on as Ying-ch’un put the offerings of soup and rice in place, with the steamed dumplings below them, and lit the incense and candles. He then sent Hsiu-ch’un back to the rear compound to invite Wu Yüeh-niang and the other ladies to join him. After Hsi-men Ch’ing had finished burning the offering of paper money to Li P’ing-erh, he had the coffers carried out and deputed Ch’en Ching-chi to supervise their incineration outside the front gate. But no more of this. Truly:

Her fragrant soul has probably not perished

along with the dying ashes;

But has gone to perpetuate its old affinity

in the incarnation to come.⁵²

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 68

CHENG AI-YÜEH FLAUNTS HER BEAUTY AND DISCLOSES A SECRET; TAI-AN PERSEVERES ASSIDUOUSLY IN SEEKING OUT AUNTIE WEN

Snow buries the scattered red blossoms
that have fallen overnight;
As day dawns, beyond the window blinds,
it continues to blow about.
The numerous branches of emerald leaves
vainly confront each other;
The myriad remnants of fragrant souls
cannot be recalled to life.
Only the dream in the Ch'ang-lo Palace¹
relieves his spring sadness;
Once the fisherman of Wu-ling has left²
even the waters are remote.
The sound of a jade flute perpetuates
his lingering remorsefulness;
As it penetrates the window casement,
propelled by the east wind.³

THE STORY GOES that after Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished the ceremony of burning paper money on Li P'ing-erh's behalf, he went to P'an Chin-lien's quarters, where he spent the night.

The next day, first, Ying Po-chüeh's household sent over a box of noodles in celebration of their birth of a son, and then, Huang the Fourth, along with his young brother-in-law, Sun Wen-hsiang, came to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, bringing with them offerings of a newly slaughtered pig, a jug of wine, two roast geese, four roast chickens, and two boxes of fruit.

Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly refused to accept these things, until Huang the Fourth knelt down and groveled around on his knees, saying, "Your Honor has done Sun Wen-hsiang:

The favor of saving his life.

My entire family:

Feels profoundly grateful to you.⁴

Now, we have nothing with which to express our filial respects but these few paltry gifts for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like. How can you refuse to accept them?"

After persisting in his refusal to accept the proffered gifts for what seemed like half a day, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally consented to accept only the pig and the wine, saying, "They will serve as well as anything else to send to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh to thank him for his intervention on your behalf."

"In that case," said Huang the Fourth, "I will have no way of fully expressing what I only intended to be:

A token of my gratitude."

After reluctantly agreeing to take back the other proffered comestibles, he went on to ask, "When does Your Honor have any free time available? I have already consulted Uncle Ying the Second and would like to invite you to a party in the licensed quarter."

"You shouldn't pay any attention to his foolery," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It is only putting you to further expense. But the best time would be sometime during the New Year's celebrations."

At this juncture, Huang the Fourth and his young brother-in-law took their leave with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

while Hsi-men Ch'ing tipped the bearers that had brought the gifts and sent them on their way.

On the first day of the eleventh month, Hsi-men Ch'ing, after coming home from the office, went to attend a party hosted by the magistrate, Li Ta-t'ien, in the district yamen, while Yüeh-niang:

All by her solitary self,⁵

dressed herself in white mourning, got into a sedan chair, and went to celebrate Chang-chieh's birthday in the home of Ch'iao Hung. As a consequence, neither of them was at home.

That afternoon, Nun Hsüeh from the Lotus Blossom Nunnery, who had learned of Yüeh-niang's plan to arrange for her to engage

the services of eight other nuns and come to the house on the fifth in order to preside over the final weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, recite scriptures, and perform the litany of the *Blood Pool Sutra*, proceeded, while keeping Nun Wang in the dark, to buy two boxes of presents, and come to pay a call on Yüeh-niang.

Since Yüeh-niang was not at home, Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou invited her to stay for a cup of tea and said, "The First Lady is not here but has gone to the home of our kinsman Ch'iao Hung in order to celebrate their daughter Chang-chieh's birthday. You'd better stay until she comes home in order to see her. She wants to talk to you, and to pay you for the drafting of the petitions that will be needed for the observance in question."

Nun Hsüeh, consequently, continued to sit and wait.

P'an Chin-lien, meanwhile, happened to remember having been told by Yü-hsiao that Yüeh-niang had only been able to conceive after taking a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh. Moreover, ever since the death of Li P'ingerh, Hsi-men Ch'ing had continued to frequent her quarters, where he had established a liaison with the wet nurse. She was afraid that if the wet nurse should produce a child, she might succeed in usurping her favored position. As a result, she took the opportunity to invite Nun Hsüeh to accompany her to her quarters in the front compound, where there was no one else about, and surreptitiously appealed to her, offering her the inducement of a tael of silver, to concoct a fertility potion for her that would enable her to conceive, and, with this end in mind, to acquire for her the afterbirth of a firstborn male child. But no more of this.

That evening, when Yüeh-niang returned home, she invited Nun Hsüeh to stay overnight, and the next day she asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for five taels of silver and gave them to her to contract for the drafting of the ceremonial petitions. Nun Hsüeh, for her part, kept Nun Wang and the abbess of the Kuanyin Nunnery in the dark, without saying a word to them about it.

On the fifth day of the month, together with the eight nuns she had engaged for the occasion, she proceeded to set up an altar in the summerhouse in the garden, post announcements on hanging scrolls at each of the doorways, preside over the recitation of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*,⁶ the *Diamond Sutra*, and the litany of the *Blood Pool Sutra*, the scattering of paper flowers and rice, and the recitation of the *Sutra of the Names of the Thirty-five Buddhas*.⁷ That evening, the ritual of distributing food in order to save the hungry ghosts with their burning mouths was performed.⁸

On this occasion, Wu K'ai's wife and Hua Tzu-yu's wife, along with the male guests Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, were invited to partake of the vegetarian repast. The nuns did not make an elaborate performance out of the rites, choosing merely to accompany themselves by striking the wooden fish and the hand chime as they recited the sutras.

That day, Ying Po-chüeh brought with him a servant from Huang the Fourth's household with an invitation for Hsi-men Ch'ing to attend a party at Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter on the seventh day of the month, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the invitation, he laughed and said, "I'm not free on the seventh since I have an engagement to attend a birthday party at the home of Chang Hsi-ts'un that day. But I am free tomorrow."

He then went on to ask, "Who else will be there?"

"He's not inviting anyone else," said Ying Po-chüeh, "other than myself and Brother Li the Third to keep you company. But he has gone to the trouble of engaging four girls to sing scenes from the *Hsi-hsiang chi*."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that Huang the Fourth's servant was given some vegetarian fare to eat and then sent him on his way.

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, "That day, when Huang the Fourth came to thank you, what had he purchased in the way of presents?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, thus and so, "I didn't accept all that he brought. He kowtowed to me repeatedly, but I only consented to accept the pig and the wine. After adding to these two bolts of silk decorated with a silver pheasant motif, two bolts of capital brocade, and fifty taels of silver, I sent them off to thank Ch'ien Lung-yeh for his intervention in the case."

"It would have been more than sufficient if you had refused to accept his silver," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, you certainly deserved it. Those four bolts of fabric must be worth thirty taels of silver, at the very least. Where could he have hoped to obtain such a favor for a mere twenty taels of silver? You're letting him off easy. After all, you saved his father-in-law's and brother-in-law's lives."

That day, they continued to chat together until evening before breaking up.

"You'll come by again tomorrow, won't you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Ying Po-chüeh.

"I understand," replied Ying Po-chüeh as he took his leave.

The eight Buddhist nuns prolonged the fuss of their ritual performance until the middle of the first watch before concluding the ceremony, burning the coffers, and going on their way.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to the yamen in the morning.

To resume our story, when Nun Wang got wind of these events, she made her way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house first thing in the morning, complained that Nun Hsüeh had usurped the privilege of putting on the ritual performance, and demanded her share of the fee.

Yüeh-niang took exception to this, saying, "Why didn't you show up yesterday? Nun Hsüeh said that you had gone to the home of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second, to celebrate a birthday."

"That was just a trick on the part of that old whore of the Hsüeh family," said Nun Wang. "She told me that your household had changed the date and were not going to hold the scripture reading until the sixth. So she made off with the entire fee, leaving me with nothing at all."

"But, at this late date, you failed to take part in the rite," said Yüeh-niang, "and the fee for the performance and the drafting of the petitions has already been paid to her in full. Luckily, I still have a bolt of fabric on hand to compensate you with."

She then instructed Hsiao-yü, saying, "Quickly, serve up some of the vegetarian fare left over from yesterday for her to eat, and give her that bolt of blue cloth."

Nun Wang muttered to herself as she cursed, saying, “The old whore made off with a tidy amount of the Sixth Lady’s silver behind my back while negotiating for the printing of those sutras. And it was originally agreed that the two of us should share the fee for this sutra-reading rite, but you’ve made off with the whole thing for yourself.”

“Nun Hsüeh,” remarked Yüeh-niang, “claims that you received five taels of silver from the Sixth Lady as compensation for the recitation of the *Blood Pool Sutra* on her behalf. How is it that you have failed to recite it for her?”

“On the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of her death,” responded Nun Wang, “I arranged for four nuns to recite it, and they kept at it for half a month.”

“If you did recite it,” said Yüeh-niang, “why did you keep it to yourself, without mentioning it to me? If you had told me about it, I might have given you something more for your pains.”

Nun Wang did not have another word to say but sat there in embarrassed silence for a while, before going off to Nun Hsüeh’s place to have it out with her.

Gentle reader take note: black-clad Buddhist nuns of this ilk ought never to be patronized under any circumstances.

 Their faces may be like the faces of nuns,

 But their hearts are the hearts of whores.⁹ It is simply the case that:

 Their six senses are unpurified,

 Their basic natures are unclear,

 Their vows are entirely ignored,

 Their sense of shame is effaced.

 Though falsely boasting of their compassion,

 They are driven entirely by profit and lust.

 Ignoring karma and the wheel of transmigration,

 They think solely of the pleasure of the moment.

 Having inveigled the frustrated young maidens

 of humbler households,¹⁰

 They set their sights on the susceptible wives

 of prominent families.¹¹

 At their front doors they welcome

 benefactors and donors,

 At the back doors they dispose of

 their unwanted fetuses.¹²

 When not promoting illicit liaisons,

 They are devising adulterous trysts.¹³

There is a poem that testifies to this:

 At Buddhist gatherings, monks and nuns

 are the members of one family;¹⁴

 The wheel of the law turns unceasingly¹⁵

 at the Dragon Flower Assembly.¹⁶

 Yet creatures of this ilk are either

 preoccupied with procreation;¹⁷

 Or the wrongful use of metal implements

 in order to effect abortions.¹⁸

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch’ing returned from the yamen, before he had even finished his meal, Ying Po-chüeh showed up.

Attired in a newly blocked satin cap, an aloeswood-colored tunic, and white-soled black boots, he bowed in greeting to Hsi-men Ch’ing and said, “It’s already approaching noon, so we’d better be off. They have already sent a servant to urge us on our way more than once. We oughtn’t to make things difficult for them.”

“I think I’ll invite Licentiate Wen to go with us,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, and, turning to Wang Ching, he said, “Go across the street and ask Master Wen to join us.”

Wang Ching went off on this errand and returned before long, saying, “Master Wen is not at home but has gone out to visit a friend. Hua-t’ung has gone after him to extend the invitation.”

“We ought not to wait for him,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “These scholarly types carry on:

 As though they don’t know any better.

If he’s gone out to visit a friend, who knows when he’ll show up? We ought not to let him spoil the occasion.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing accordingly turned to Ch’in-t’ung and said, “Saddle up that sorrel horse for Master Ying the Second to ride.”

“I don’t wish to ride a horse,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “It would be a good idea to keep a low profile, without:

 Ringling bells and beating drums.

I’ll just go a step ahead of you, and you can come along at your leisure in a sedan chair.”

"What you say makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You go on ahead of me."

Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to raise his hand in farewell and set off first, while Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung, and four orderlies to get ready a closed sedan chair and prepare to accompany him.

Just as he was about to go out the door, P'ing-an suddenly came in from outside in a state of obvious agitation, holding in his hand an accordion-bound calling card, and reported, "His Honor An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works is on his way to pay you a visit and has sent a functionary ahead to deliver a calling card. His Honor is right behind him and will be here any minute."

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such a state of consternation that he ordered the servants to have some food prepared and sent Lai-hsing out to purchase platters of ready-made snacks for the occasion. After some time, Secretary An Ch'en duly arrived, along with a sizable entourage, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, came out to receive him. The secretary was dressed in a figured round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square featuring an egret in the clouds,¹⁹ and a girdle with a decorative plaque that was both embossed and gilded. When he had entered the gate, and the customary exchange of salutations had taken place, they sat down in the positions of guest and host, while attendants served them with tea. Having finished their tea, they proceeded to a discussion of:

What had occurred since their last meeting.²⁰

"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I very much regret to say that I have not yet had the chance to congratulate you on your illustrious promotion. The other day, when I received the elegant epistle and lavish gifts that you bestowed upon me, I was so busy with the funeral arrangements that I was unable to wait upon you in person, for which I can only apologize."

"Your pupil," said An Ch'en, "is guilty of failing to offer his condolences in person. Upon my arrival in the capital, I spoke to Chai Ch'ien about it, but I don't know whether you have received a gift from him, or not."

"It is the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I have occasioned my kinsman Chai Ch'ien the trouble of sending a consolatory gift from a great distance."

"Ssu-ch'üan," said An Ch'en, "this year you yourself are sure to have an occasion for congratulation before long."

"Your humble servant," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the possessor of slight ability and an insignificant office. How could I presume to hope for more than I deserve?"

"Venerable Sir," he continued, "this illustrious promotion to an important office that you have just received will provide you with the opportunity to further develop your:

Outstanding talent and bold vision.²¹

The success of your repair work on the Grand Canal is something:

The entire empire looks forward to."²²

"Ssu-ch'üan," responded An Ch'en, "You do me too much honor. I am nothing but:

An insignificant Confucian scholar,²³

who has been fortunate enough, by means of the examination system, to qualify for a humble post in the bureaucracy. It is thanks to the support of the venerable gentleman Ts'ai Ching that I occupy a position in the Ministry of Works and have undeservedly been made responsible for the irrigation and transportation system. For the past year I have been so busy traveling back and forth in the Hu-Hsiang region that:

Engaged upon the ruler's business,²⁴

I have not had a minute's respite.

At present, I have also been ordered to take charge of the repair work on the Grand Canal, at a time, moreover, when:

The people are impoverished and finances are depleted.²⁵

Recently, when the imperial vessels were engaged in the Flower and Rock Convoys, they:

Demolished the dikes and destroyed the embankments,

Leaving nothing but a trail of havoc in their wake,

so that:

Public and private resources are totally exhausted.²⁶

At present, all along its route, in Kua-chou, Nan-wang, Ku-t'ou, Yü-t'ai, Hsü-p'ei, Lü-liang, An-ling, Chi-ning, Su-ch'ien, and Lin-ch'ing, the Grand Canal is in a state of disrepair. The southern branch of the Yellow River has overflowed its banks and moved further south, silting up the canal to such an extent that its bed is dry in places, leaving the populace of the eight prefectures in dire straits. Moreover:

Bandits interfere with the repair work, and

Fiscal resources are utterly deficient,²⁷

so that even if we were able to deploy:

The power of gods or the art of ghosts,

It would not avail to execute the task."²⁸

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you but exert the talent and faculties that you possess, you will have everything in good order before long and are certain to be rewarded with a substantial promotion."

He then went on to ask, "Venerable sir, does your imperial commission have a time limit, or not?"

"The imperial commission is for a period of three years," said An Ch'en. "When the repair work on the Grand Canal is completed, His Majesty will depute an official to come and offer sacrifices to the God of the River."

While they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that a table should be set up, but An Ch'en said, "The truth of the matter is that your pupil still intends to pay a visit to Huang Pao-kuang's place."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "stay a little longer, and I will arrange for your attendants to have something to eat."

Before long, a table was set up and provided with a platter of cold hors d'oeuvres and an assortment of other delicacies to go with the wine, served in a set of sixteen matched bowls, containing slow-boiled appetizers such as chicken feet, goose and duck, fresh fish, sheep's head, tripe and lungs, blood and intestines, soup flavored with pickled fish, and so forth, along with congee made from pure white, fresh, nonglutinous rice, served in silver-mounted bowls, and flavored with granulated sugar, hazelnuts, and pine and melon seeds. These were accompanied by small gold cups of heated vintage wine. The attendants, for their part, were provided with platters of assorted snacks as well as meat and wine.

At this repast, Secretary An Ch'en, after downing only three cups of wine, took his leave and got up to go, saying, "Your pupil will return to seek your instruction another day."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to detain him any longer and saw him to the gate, where he got into his sedan chair and departed.

On returning to the reception hall, Hsi-men Ch'ing divested himself of his official hat and girdle, replacing them with a cap and headband, dressed himself in a long gown of purple velvet featuring only a mandarin square with an embroidered lion, and sent to ask if Licentiate Wen had come home, or not.

Upon coming back, Tai-an reported, "Master Wen has not yet returned home, but Cheng Ch'un, along with Lai-ting from Huang the Fourth's place, have been here to urge you on your way for half a day already."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, went out the gate, got into his sedan chair, and, accompanied by his attendants, set out directly for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. When he arrived at the gate of the quarter, the "cribbers" and the "ball clubbers"²⁹ stayed out of his way, and only the file leaders from the Music Office on duty that day stood to attention on either side, not presuming to kneel down and receive him, while Cheng Ch'un and Lai-ting went ahead to announce his coming.

Ying Po-chüeh was engaged in playing backgammon with Li the Third, and when they heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived they barely had time to put the game pieces away. Cheng Ai-yüeh and Cheng Ai-hsiang, wearing sealskin toques over their "bag of silk" chignons in the Hang-chou style, held in place by plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays that enhanced their:

Glossy hair and powdered faces,³⁰
and made up to resemble flower fairies, came out to the door to meet him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing got out of his sedan chair and came into the parlor he directed them to refrain from the customary welcoming flourish of wind and percussion instruments and suspend any drum music. After Li the Third and Huang the Fourth had saluted him, and the madam of the Cheng Family Establishment had come out to welcome him, Cheng Ai-yüeh and her sister kowtowed to him:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.

Two folding chairs were placed at the upper end of the room, upon which Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh took their seats, while Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, and the two Cheng sisters took their places to either side.

Tai-an, who was standing in attendance, asked, "Should we keep the sedan chair here, or send it back home?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the orderlies and the sedan chair should be sent home and instructed Ch'in-t'ung, saying, "When you get home, see if Master Wen has come back, and, if he has, prepare the sorrel horse for him and escort him here."

Ch'in-t'ung nodded in assent, and departed on his errand.

Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "Brother, how come you delayed half a day before getting here?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him all about how Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works had showed up for a visit, and he had felt compelled to detain him for a bite to eat.

Before long, Cheng Ch'un came in with some tea, and Cheng Ai-hsiang served a cup to Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ai-yüeh presented one to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ying Po-chüeh hastily intervened by reaching out his hand for this cup as well, saying, "Oh, I guess I'm mistaken. I thought you intended it for me."

"I should grant precedence to you?" exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. "You haven't earned the right to it."

"Just look at this little whore," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She only has eyes for her patron and gives no heed to her guests."

"It's not your turn to be a guest today," laughed Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but there may be other guests in the offing."

When they had finished their tea, the cups and their raised saucers were taken away.

Before long, the four singing girls who had been engaged to perform scenes from the *Hsi-hsiang chi* came out and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,
and he asked each of them her name.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Huang the Fourth and said, "When they come out to sing for us later on, see that they perform only to the beat of a drum, without any other wind or percussion instruments."

"I understand," replied Huang the Fourth.

Who should appear at this juncture but the madam, who came out and said, "I fear that Your Honor may be cold."

She then told Cheng Ch'un to let down the portiere to keep the heat in. Animal-shaped briquettes were constantly added to the brazier, and the fragrance of orchid and musk pervaded the air.

Just at this juncture, what should they see but several black-clad “ball-clubbers,” who, having heard that His Honor Hsi-men Ch’ing had come into the quarter and was drinking at the Cheng Family Establishment, came to loiter at the door:

Sticking out their heads and craning their necks,

but not daring to proceed inside. One of them, who was acquainted with Tai-an, bowed to him and asked him to help them out. Tai-an quietly came inside and asked if they could come in, but Hsi-men Ch’ing merely responded with a shout, which so disconcerted them that they disappeared in a puff of smoke.

It was not long before the fruits and appetizers suitable to accompany a drinking party were served. Two tables were set out at the upper end of the room, one for Hsi-men Ch’ing alone, and the other to be shared by Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen, with the empty place reserved for Licentiate Wen on the left end. On that side of the room there was a table for Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, while on the right side there was one for the two sisters. Truly:

Platters are piled with exotic viands,

Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.

Cheng Feng and Cheng Ch’un provided musical entertainment on the sidelines.

Just as the wine was being poured and they were about to take their seats, Licentiate Wen appeared, wearing a raised, bridge-shaped scholar’s cap,³¹ a jacket decorated with a motif of green clouds, a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes, and velvet socks. As he entered the door, he merely made a ceremonial bow to the company.

“Venerable sir,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “why have you arrived so late? A place has been saved for you for some time already.”

“Your pupil is at fault,” replied Licentiate Wen. “I did not know that the venerable gentleman had called for me. I happened to have gone to my fellow student’s place for a literary gathering and am consequently a step too late.”

This flustered Huang the Fourth into hastily seeing that he was provided with a cup and chopsticks, and directing him to sit down next to Ying Po-chüeh.

Before long, soup and rice were served, together with steamed open-topped dumplings flavored with hotbed leeks, a soup of eight ingredients, and saucers of ginger and vinegar. The two boy actors entertained them by singing for a while and then retired. Truly:

Wine is poured, gleaming with glaucous foam,³²

Lyrics are sung to the tune “Golden Threads.”³³

Only then did the four singing girls come out and perform the two opening scenes of the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, starting with the aria to the tune “Dabbing the Lips Red” that begins with the words:

*I travel for study through the Central Plain.*³⁴

Who should appear at this point but Tai-an, who came in and reported that Wu Yin-erh from the alley behind theirs had sent Wu Hui and La-mei to deliver a gift of tea. It so happens that Wu Yin-erh’s establishment was located on the alley behind the Cheng Family place, and, when she heard that Hsi-men Ch’ing had come for a drinking party there, she made a point of sending a gift of tea.

Hsi-men Ch’ing called them inside, and when Wu Hui and La-mei had kowtowed to him, they said, “Sister Wu Yin-erh sent us over to deliver a gift of tea to Your Honor.”

When they opened the gift box and poured out the tea, there was a cup of the fragrant beverage, flavored with melon seeds, shredded chestnuts, marinated bamboo shoots, sesame seeds, and attar of roses, for each member of the company.

“What is Wu Yin-erh doing at her place?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“She’s at home today and hasn’t gone out,” replied La-mei.

When they had drunk the tea, and Hsi-men Ch’ing had rewarded the two of them with three mace of silver, he turned to Tai-an and Wu Hui and instructed them, saying, “Go and invite Wu Yin-erh to come join us.”

Cheng Ai-yüeh, who was quick on the uptake, said to Cheng Ch’un, “You go along with them, and make sure, whatever happens, that you persuade Wu Yin-erh to come. If she refuses to do so, tell her that in the future I won’t treat her as a colleague any longer.”

“You make me laugh,” exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. “After all, the two of you are only colleagues in the cunt-peddling trade.”

“My dear sir,” said Licentiate Wen. “How can you be so:

Out of touch with human nature?”³⁵

It has always been true that:

Notes of the same key resonate with each other;

Beings of the same nature seek one another out.³⁶

What is rooted in Heaven inclines to what is above;

What is rooted in Earth inclines toward that below.³⁷

Their feelings for each other as colleagues are governed by the same principle.”

“Beggar Ying,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh, “you, also, are a colleague of Cheng Ch’un and the others, in that, like them, you are here in order to provide entertainment.”

“Silly child!” exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. “I’m an old hand in the procuring trade. Back in the days when I was making out with your mother, you were still in her belly.”

As they were talking and laughing together, the chef came out to preside over the carving of a set of pig’s trotters, which were served together with four bowls of other culinary items, including dock and celery cabbage, minced pork with leeks, soup flavored with tripe and lungs, broth flavored with blood and intestines, and the like.

The singing girls then came out and sang the song suite from the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, starting with the aria to the tune "Powdery Butterflies" that begins with the words:

Five thousand rebellious troops.³⁸

When they were finished, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for the girl surnamed Han who had performed the part of Ts'ui Ying-ying and asked her, "Are you from the Han Family Establishment?"

"Father," responded Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you don't recognize her, but she is a niece of Han Chin-ch'uan, and her given name is Hsiao-ch'ou. This year she is just twelve years old."

"This youngster," opined Hsi-men Ch'ing, "will grow up to be a fine woman. Her demeanor is sprightly, and she sings very well."

He consequently told her to join the company and serve them with wine. Huang the Fourth, for his part, in presiding over the repast:

Catered to his guests with the utmost assiduity.

It was not long before Wu Yin-erh arrived. Her chignon was enclosed in a fret of white crepe, held in place with a pearl headband, ornaments with cloud-shaped kingfisher feather inlays, and an array of little pins all around the edge. From her ears dangled a pair of gold, clove-shaped pendant earrings. On her upper body, she wore a jacket of white satin with purpled edging that opened down the middle; while below, she wore a skirt of sand-green Lu-chou silk, trimmed with purpled gold-spangled edging, and shoes of plain ink-black satin. After coming in the door with an ingratiating smile and kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she proceeded to bow in greeting to Licentiate Wen and each of the other members of the company.

"What a laugh!" exclaimed Ying Po-ch'ueh. "You have only to appear in order to rub me the wrong way. The rest of us are no more than stepchildren I suppose. You recognize only your father with a kowtow, while sparing merely a nod for the rest of us. You denizens of the Verdant Spring Bordello³⁹ treat your customers too rudely. If I presided over a yamen, I would certainly not spare you the squeezing you deserve."

"Beggar Ying," exclaimed Cheng Ai-y'ueh, "you shameless pip-squeak! As I see it, your ball-handling is not that great. All you can do is brag about it."

A place was then arranged for Wu Yin-erh, and she sat down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing's table, while a cup and chopsticks were hastily provided for her.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that she was wearing a white fret over her chignon, he asked, "who are you wearing mourning for?"

"Father, what a question to ask!" replied Wu Yin-erh. "I've been wearing mourning for Mother ever since she died."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that she was wearing mourning for Li P'ing-erh, his heart was filled with delight, and he moved his seat closer to hers so they could converse more readily.

In a little while, soup and rice were served, and Cheng Ai-y'ueh got up from her place to serve the wine.

Wu Yin-erh also stood up, saying, "I haven't yet had a chance to pay my respects to Auntie Cheng," as she went into the madam's room to exchange greetings and then came out again.

"Ai-y'ueh," said the madam, "give Sister Yin-erh a seat. I'm afraid she may be cold. And have the maidservant heat a hand warmer so she can warm up her hands."

Immediately afterwards, a new course of hot dishes was served. Wu Yin-erh, in her place at Hsi-men Ch'ing's side, ate only half of one of the delicacies supplied, and drank two mouthfuls of soup, before putting down her chopsticks and engaging Hsi-men Ch'ing in conversation.

Subsequently, she picked up her wine cup and said, "Father, this wine is cold and needs to be replaced with some warmed wine."

Cheng Ch'un then stepped up and served new wine to Ying Po-ch'ueh and the rest of the company.

After they had drunk one round, Wu Yin-erh asked, "Did you have a sutra reading service on the occasion of the final weekly commemoration of Mother's death?"

"I would like to thank you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "for the offering of tea that you sent on the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of her death."

"That's a fine way to talk," said Wu Yin-erh. "That coarse tea that we sent induced you to send us a gift in return. We are grateful for your return present, the lavishness of which caused my mother no little perturbation. On the occasion of Mother's final weekly commemoration yesterday, I consulted with Cheng Ai-y'ueh and Li Kuei-chieh about sending you another offering of tea, but we didn't know whether you were holding a sutra reading in your home, or not."

"For the final weekly commemoration," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we merely engaged the services of several Buddhist nuns to perform a ritual of penance and did not even invite a single relative to attend, lest we put them to further expense."

As they drank wine and chatted together, Wu Yin-erh went on to ask, "Are the First Lady, and the other ladies in your household, doing all right?"

"They're all fine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Father," continued Wu Yin-erh, "after having lost Mother unexpectedly this way, when you go into her quarters and find yourself all alone, you must long for her in your heart."

"It goes without saying that I long for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day, while I was in my studio, she appeared to me in a dream in broad daylight, which caused me no end of grief."

"When she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive," said Wu Yin-erh, "you could hardly help longing for her."

"The two of you are so wrapped up in your conversation," said Ying Po-ch'ueh, "that you are completely ignoring the rest of us. If you don't order another round of drinks and provide some songs for our entertainment, we might as well get up and go."

This remark threw Li the Third and Huang the Fourth into such consternation that they hurriedly urged the two Cheng sisters to serve a round of wine and prepare their musical instruments. Wu Yin-erh also got up to join them. The three painted faces, sitting in a row to one side of the company, with their feet propped on the brazier, joining their voices together:

Opened their ruby lips,

Exposed their white teeth,

and sang the song suite in the Chung-lü mode the first number of which, to the tune "Powdery Butterflies," begins with the words:

"Three Variations on the Plum Blossom."⁴⁰

Truly:

When words emerge from the mouth of a beauty,

They have a sound that causes rocks to split

and sets the clouds in motion.

When they had finished singing this song suite, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "You are the one who harassed the three girls into singing for us; so you ought to get up and offer them something in return."

"That's no problem," responded Ying Po-chüeh,

"It's not going to kill me.

Let me consider how I might disport myself with them. I could do it lying on my back, standing straight up, or reclining on my side. I could take my pleasure by adopting the position of 'The Golden Cock Standing on a Single Foot.'⁴¹ Then again, I might avail myself of the positions known as 'The Wild Stallion Stamping the Turf,' 'The Feral Fox Pulling Threads,'⁴² 'The Gibbon Offering Fruit,'⁴³ 'The Yellow Dog Spraying Urine,' 'The Immortal Pointing the Way,'⁴⁴ 'The Culprit with His Back to the Post,' or 'Embracing the Wooden Doll at Night.'⁴⁵ Let them choose whatever posture they prefer."

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," said Cheng Ai-hsiang. "You're delirious, you lousy beggar. You're just:

Talking nonsense and uttering rubbish."⁴⁶

Ying Po-chüeh arranged three wine cups on a saucer and said, "My children, down two cups of wine at my behest. If you don't do so, I'll splash it all over you."

"I'm not drinking any wine today," pronounced Cheng Ai-hsiang.

"Only if you genuflect to your Auntie Ai-yüeh," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "and allow me to give you a slap on the face, will I consent to drink any wine."

"Sister Yin-erh," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "what do you say?"

"Master Two," responded Wu Yin-erh, "I'm feeling distressed at heart today. I'll drink half a cup. That's all."

"You beggar," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "if you don't kneel down for me, I won't drink anything at your behest for a hundred years."

"Master Two," intervened Huang the Fourth, "if you refuse to kneel, it will show that you don't know how to take a joke. Just kneel down, and she may dispense with the slap."

"Nothing doing," declared Cheng Ai-yüeh. "Only if he accepts two slaps on the face from me will I consent to drink this cup of wine."

"I call upon the venerable Licentiate Wen to witness," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the extent to which this crazy little whore is prepared to carry things to extremes."

Thereupon, seeing that he was up against it, he actually got down on his knees, so his torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post, while Cheng Ai-yüeh:

Lightly rolled up her variegated sleeves,

Fastidiously exposed her slender fingers,

and took him to task, saying, "You lousy beggar. Will you ever dare to offend your Auntie Ai-yüeh so discourteously again? If not, answer me out loud. If you fail to respond, I will refuse to drink any wine."

Ying Po-chüeh, finding himself:

At a loss for what to do next,

could only respond by promising, "I will never dare to offend my Auntie Ai-yüeh again."

Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded to slap him across the face twice in a row before drinking the cup of wine.

Ying Po-chüeh got back on his feet and said, "What an unkind and unjust little whore you are! You might, at least, have saved a mouthful for me, instead of draining the entire cup yourself."

"If you kneel down again," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "I'll reward you with a cup of wine."

Thereupon, she filled a cup to the brim and laughed as she proceeded to pour it down Ying Po-chüeh's throat.

"You crazy little whore!" Ying Po-chüeh expostulated. "In the course of your mischievous tricks you've splashed the wine all over me. Old foggy that I am, all I've got is this one outfit of formal clothes, and you've managed to soil it the very first day I've worn it. I'll have to ask that man of yours to replace it for me."

After trifling with each other for a while, they returned to their places.

As the day began to grow dark, candles were lit, and the final complement of dishes was served. Meanwhile, a table was set up in the madam's quarters, on which soup and rice, food and wine, were provided for the entertainment of Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung, Hua-t'ung,

and Ying Pao.

Before long, additional saucers of assorted delicacies were served, and Ying Po-chüeh, while urging Licentiate Wen to try them, proceeded to uninterruptedly stuff them into his own mouth and fill his sleeves with them. Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for a dicebox and suggested that Licentiate Wen initiate the game.

"Whoever heard of such a thing," responded Licentiate Wen. "It is you who ought to begin, venerable sir."

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yin-erh commenced playing "Competing for the Red"⁴⁷ with twelve dice, while the four singing girls below took up their instruments and proceeded to play and sing, calling for the participants to drink a cup of wine at appropriate intervals. After one round had been consumed, Wu Yin-erh changed places in order to play "Competing for the Red" with Licentiate Wen and Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ai-hsiang came over to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a cup of wine and play guess-fingers with him. Before long, Cheng Ai-yüeh moved over to play "Competing for the Red" with Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Wu Yin-erh left her place in order to offer wine to Li the Third and Huang the Fourth.

It so happens that Cheng Ai-yüeh then withdrew to her room and came out again after dressing herself anew. She was wearing a jacket of iridescent satin that opened down the middle and had a diapered border, over a gosling-yellow skirt of Hang-chou silk, shot with turquoise and embellished with gold thread, as well as figured ankle leggings, and shoes the points of which were adorned with red phoenixes. Under the lamplight, her sealskin toque served to enhance the quality of her thickly powdered snow-white face, rendering her a fit contender for a beauty contest. Behold:

Her fragrant features and lovely person are
more alluring than ever;
The sparkle of her limpid gaze⁴⁸ sets off the
beauty of her snowy face.
The semicircular curves of her phoenix eyes
conceal her amber pupils;
The seamless protuberance of her ruby lips⁴⁹
is like a painted cherry.
When exposed, the jade shoots of her fingers
are slender and delicate;
When walking, the golden lotuses of her feet
captivate with every step.
She is white jade that exudes its own bouquet,
a flower that can also speak;
Even at a thousand taels for one night
her like cannot be found.⁵⁰

How could Hsi-men Ch'ing have been anything but captivated? After having drunk several cups of wine, he was half intoxicated. Remembering that Li P'ing-erh had admonished him in a dream not to stay out drinking late at night, he got up and headed toward the rear of the establishment to relieve himself. This flustered the madam into calling for a maidservant to light a lantern and lead him back to perform his ablutions. Cheng Ai-yüeh made haste to follow in their wake and, after he had finished relieving himself, took him by the hand and drew him into her room.

This chamber had been prepared in advance, so that:

The moon-shaped window was half open,
Candles in silver sconces burned high,
The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring,
Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk;

while at her bedside:

Clouds of vapor hovered athwart the drapery,⁵¹ and
Haze enveloped the curtains of mermaid silk.

Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his outer garments, leaving only his white satin tunic, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest, and the two of them cuddled up to each other on the bed, thigh over thigh.

To start off with, Cheng Ai-yüeh asked, "Father, why don't you plan not to return home tonight?"

"I'll have to go home," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In the first place, Wu Yin-erh is here, so it could be embarrassing for me to stay. In the second place, I occupy an official position and am subject to an impending merit evaluation, so I fear it might get me in trouble. I had better only come to visit you by daylight."

He then went on to say, "I am profoundly grateful for those butterfat 'abalone shell' sweets that you sent me the other day, though your gift caused me half a day of heartache. Originally, my late Sixth Lady was adept at making them, but since she died, there has not been anyone in my household who knows how to do so."

"They're not hard to make," said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "You've just got to get the knack of it. On that occasion I casually made a few up, not very many of them, and, knowing that you liked them, sent Cheng Ch'un to deliver them to you. The melon seeds that I sent with them were all cracked by my own teeth, one at a time, and the handkerchief that they came in was one that I took the trouble to add the tassels to in my spare time. With regard to the melon seeds, I hear that Beggar Ying helped himself to most of them."

"As for that shameless beggar-in-chief you speak of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I watched him cram the melon seeds into his mouth in two handfuls and gobble most of them up, without leaving many of them for me."

"So it turns out I was only benefiting that lousy beggar," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "as though I meant to show my filial respects to the likes of him."

She then went on to say, "Thank you, Father, for the 'coated plums' you sent me. When my mother saw them, she ate one and found

it very much to her taste. She often suffers from buildups of phlegm that cause her to cough in the evenings and keep the rest of us awake half the night. As a result, her mouth is always dry, but when she lets one of these 'coated plums' dissolve in her mouth, it produces a good deal of saliva. My elder sister and I had only eaten a few of them before the old lady took them away and secreted them in her room, where she helps herself to them early and late, and no one else dares to disturb them."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow I'll send a page boy to deliver another canister of them for you to enjoy."

Cheng Ai-yüeh then went on to inquire, "Father, have you seen anything of Li Kuei-chieh recently?"

"From the time of the funeral until now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I haven't seen anything of her."

"At the time of the fifth weekly commemoration of the Sixth Lady's death," asked Cheng Ai-yüeh, "did she send a gift of tea?"

"Her establishment sent Li Ming to deliver a gift of tea," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I have something to say to you," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but you must keep it to yourself."

"What do you have to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Cheng Ai-yüeh thought to herself for a while and then said, "I'd better not say it. If I do, it will only look as though I'm telling stories about one of my sisters behind her back, which would be embarrassing."

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck, saying as he did so, "You crazy little oily mouth! Whatever you have to say, say it to me. You can rest assured I'll not give you away."

Just as the conversation between the two of them started to warm up, Ying Po-chüeh suddenly strode in and cried out in a loud voice, "A fine couple of people you are; abandoning the rest of us and coming in here to engage in a private conversation."

"Eeyuck!" exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. "What an obnoxious, crazy, shameless beggar you are, to break in on us that way, and give us such a start!"

"You crazy dog!" swore Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get back to the front of the place immediately, where you've left Licentiate Wen and Wu Yin-erh, or they might choose to follow you back here."

But Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to park his posterior on the bed beside them, saying, "Give me your arm, so I can take a bite out of it before I go, and leave the two of you to screw around together."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, he reached into Cheng Ai-yüeh's sleeve and dragged out her snow-white arm, as smooth as goose fat, adorned with a silver bracelet, and the unblemished jade of her ten slender fingers, ensheathed in gold rings.

"My child!" he exclaimed in admiration. "These two hands of yours are made to order for the task of inducing an ejaculation."

"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" protested Cheng Ai-yüeh. "I'd only be wasting my breath on you."

But Ying Po-chüeh took up her arm and took a nip at it before consenting to go, causing the woman to revile him in a loud voice, saying, "You crazy beggar, to barge in here for no good reason only to drive people to distraction."

She then called in the maidservant T'ao-hua and said to her, "You escort him back out, and see that the door to the covered passageway is closed."



Ying Po-chüeh Playfully Nibbles at a Jade-white Forearm

When the door was closed, Cheng Ai-yüeh told Hsi-men Ch'ing the whole story of how Li Kuei-chieh had recently resumed her indulgence in "the play of boys and girls"⁵² with Wang the Third.

"Once again," she reported, "he is frequenting her place day after day, in the company of the touts Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang, the 'cribbers' Stupid Yü and Tiptoe Nieh, and the 'ball-clubbers' Mohammedan Pai and Yokel Sha. He is no longer involved with Ch'i Hsiang-erh but is carrying on with Ch'in Yü-chih. Since he is spending his money at both places, he has run out of funds and has had to pawn his fur coat for thirty taels of silver. He has also turned over a set of his wife's gold bracelets to the Li Family Establishment in lieu of the monthly charge for his liaison with Li Kuei-chieh."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he swore, saying, "That little whore! I told her she ought not to carry on with that youngster, but she disregarded my advice and even resorted to:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
while choosing to deceive me all the while."

"Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you needn't get upset about it. I'll tell you a scheme by which you can arrange for Wang the Third to get a slap in the face, and thereby vent your spleen."

Taking Cheng Ai-yüeh onto his lap, Hsi-men Ch'ing wrapped his white satin sleeve around her powdered neck and kissed her fragrant cheek, while she put the opening of her sleeve over a warmer with a cover of brass wire, in which there were smoldering pellets of aromatic incense, in order to fumigate her person.

"Father," she then went on to say, "you must not let a single person know what I am going to tell you. Even Beggar Ying should be

kept in the dark, lest any inkling of it should leak out.”

“My child,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “tell me what you have to say. I am not such a fool as to let anyone else know about it. Really, what is this scheme of yours?”

Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded to lay it out in detail, saying, “Wang the Third’s mother, Lady Lin, is currently no more than thirty-nine years old and is still a spectacle to behold.

Painting her brows and making up her eyes,
she dolls herself up in such a way as to:

Appear the veritable simulacrum of a vixen.

While her son spends his days in the licensed quarter, she is left to her own devices at home and does not scruple to peddle her wares on the side. Pretending to attend services at a nunnery, she actually drops in on the go-between Auntie Wen, who functions as her procuress. She is reputed to be an old hand at the game of breeze and moonlight. I can assure you, Father, that if you should wish to arrange an assignation with her sometime in the future, it would not be difficult. But there is another fortuitous benefit to this scheme. Wang the Third’s wife is now just eighteen years old and is the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch’en of the Eastern Capital. She is as pretty as a picture, and proficient at backgammon and chess. Since Wang the Third chooses to spend so much of his time out of the house, she might as well be observing her widowhood. As a result, she is:

So angry she scarcely cares whether she is
dead or alive,

and has had to be rescued after trying to hang herself two or three times. Father, such an opportunity is not to be missed. If you succeed in initiating an affair with the mother, there is no reason to fear that the daughter-in-law will not fall into your hands.”

This single conversation had the immediate effect of arousing:

Depraved intentions and excited anticipation,

in the mind of Hsi-men Ch’ing, who embraced the painted face, saying, “My darling, let me ask you, how did you ever come by all this inside information?”

Cheng Ai-yüeh withheld the fact that she often performed in the Wang mansion herself but merely said, “An old client of mine, thus and so, once had a rendezvous with Lady Lin at her place, which was arranged for him by Auntie Wen.”

“Who was that?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing. “No doubt it was Chang the Second, the nephew of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant, who lives on Main Street.”

“Why that fucking Chang Mao-te!” exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. “His cheeks are all covered with pockmarks, and his two eyes are mere slits. He’d only give me the creeps. No one but the likes of Fan Pai-chia-nu, or Hundred Customers Fan, would take him on. His affair with Tung Chin-erh has been ‘a-nail-eighted’⁵³ for some time now.”

“I’m at a loss then,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Just who was it?”

“I might as well tell you,” replied Cheng Ai-yüeh. “It was that southerner who originally deflowered me. He comes here on business twice a year, and, after spending a night or two in the quarter, he customarily ventures outside and indulges himself in the furtive pleasures of:

Snitching cats and filching dogs.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing heard this and realized that everything the painted face proposed resonated with his own feelings, he was more pleased than ever and said, “My child, if you are willing to cater to my tastes, I’ll undertake to pay your mother thirty taels of silver a month for your keep, and you won’t have to take on any other customers. I’ll visit you whenever I have the free time.”

“Father,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh, “if you have taken a liking to me, what difference does the sum of thirty taels or twenty taels make? You can just fork out a few taels to my mother every month or two. Since I am personally disinclined to take on any other customers anyway, I’ll just put myself at your disposal.”

“What a thing to say!” protested Hsi-men Ch’ing. “I’ll be sure to come up with thirty taels of silver.”

When they had finished speaking, the two of them:

Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport.

The comforters on the bed were nearly a foot thick.

“Father,” Cheng Ai-yüeh asked, “are you going to take off your clothes, or not?”

“We might as well indulge ourselves with our clothes on,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “I fear they’re waiting for us to come back, up front.”

He then repositioned a pillow, and the painted face unfastened her lower garments and draped herself face up over its surface. She was wearing under-drawers of red Lu-chou silk and pulled down one of her ankle leggings. Hsi-men Ch’ing hoisted her two tiny golden lotuses onto his shoulders, opened up his blue satin drawers, and fastened the clasp around his organ. Behold:

The flower’s heart is lightly exposed, as

She gently wriggles her willowy waist.⁵⁴

Truly:

The blossom is too tender to be disturbed,

But the spring breeze refuses to spare it.⁵⁵

The flower’s heart does not feel satiated,

Its prodigal feelings are yet unsatisfied.

In a low voice she intimates to her lover,

“The spring night’s pleasure is not over.”⁵⁶

By the time the two of them reached the point at which he was about to ejaculate,⁵⁷ Hsi-men Ch'ing had exerted himself to such an extent that he was:

Panting and puffing,

while the painted face gave voice to lascivious sounds without end.

As her cloudy locks tumbled over the pillow, all she could manage to say was, "My own daddy, slow down a bit."

Sometime later, as the saying goes:

When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense,

and he:

Ejaculated like a geyser.

After:

The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,⁵⁸

they proceeded to readjust their clothing, and, by the light of the lamp:

Straighten themselves up before the mirror.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had washed his hands in the basin in front of the bed, and put all his clothes on, the two of them held hands as they went back to rejoin the rest of the company.

Wu Yin-erh was looking after Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-hsiang was snuggled up to Licentiate Wen as they engaged in:

Casting dice and playing at guess-fingers,⁵⁹

while:

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.

The merrymaking was at its height. When the company saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come back in, they all stood up and offered him a seat.

"Since you have seen fit," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to abandon the rest of us here, all this time, before deigning to rejoin us, you'd better have a pick-me-up to restore your energy after your recent exertions."

"We were just having a chat together," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What other silly business would we have been up to?"

"That's a fine way of putting it!" responded Ying Po-chüeh. "I suppose you would have us believe that the two of you were merely engaged in a private conversation."

Thereupon, Ying Po-chüeh handed him a large goblet filled with warm wine, and the rest of them kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company as he drank it. Meanwhile, the four singing girls picked up their instruments and played and sang for their entertainment.

At this point, Tai-an, who was standing at his side, covered his mouth with his hand and whispered, "Your sedan chair is here."

In response, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a meaningful moue, and Tai-an, accordingly, hastened out to tell the orderlies to light their lanterns and stand by outside.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing indicated that he would not stay any longer, the company all:

Stood up to toast him with drinks in hand,

while he turned to the four singing girls and asked, "Can you sing for me the set of songs that starts off with the words:

On first seeing that bashful beauty?"

"We do know it," responded Han Hsiao-ch'ou.

Thereupon, taking up her *p'i-p'a*, she:

Gently displayed her coquettish voice,

doing her best to show off her talent, as she sang:

On first glimpsing that bashful beauty,

The passions evoked by clouds and rain

brought us together.

I saw that she had a thousand coquettish

and a hundred allurements,⁶⁰

Displaying her seductiveness in a myriad ways;

A veritable handful of warmth and softness.

In corresponding with me, she selected

her words carefully;

In revealing her feelings, she secretly

let her glances flow.

I kept her message in my heart,⁶¹

In my heart;

But did not know when our desires

would be fulfilled.

When the first song in the set was finished, Wu Yin-erh served Hsi-men Ch'ing with wine, Cheng Ai-hsiang served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh served Licentiate Wen. Li Chih and Huang the Fourth were also supplied with wine. Han Hsiao-ch'ou then continued by singing the second song:

I speak to the maidservant, saying,

I wish to build a golden altar, on which to

appoint my commander.

Before the morrow dawns, tell that young

scholar to prepare for,

The clouds and rain on Witch's Mountain.⁶²
This night my double doors have
not even been locked;
In my secluded boudoir, I await
the advent of my lover.
The night is quiet, the watches nearly over,⁶³
The watches nearly over.
This time, that master of seduction will be
hard to resist.

When the song was finished, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for more wine, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came forward to serve him, while Wu Yin-erh served Licentiate Wen, Cheng Ai-yüeh served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ch'un stood by to proffer refreshments. Han Hsiao-ch'ou then continued by singing the third song:

I dream of that tryst at Kao-t'ang,
Upon my assignation with that romantic
and enticing maiden.
She and I grasp each other by
our white hands,⁶⁴
As we enter the silken bed curtains together,⁶⁵
To make a lasting pact between the phoenixes.
The transfusing touch of the magic rhinoceros horn
penetrates her innermost regions.
Beneath the mermaid silk bed curtains⁶⁶ the coverlet
is disturbed by crimson waves.
Her powdered sweat becomes congealed fragrance,⁶⁷
Congealed fragrance.
A mere quarter hour of this evening⁶⁸
is like Heaven on Earth.

When the song was finished, another round of wine was called for. Cheng Ai-yüeh then moved over to wait on Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Wu Yin-erh served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-hsiang served Licentiate Wen, as well as Li the Third and Huang the Fourth. More wine was poured, after which Han Hsiao-ch'ou continued by singing the fourth song:

In the spring warmth under the hibiscus curtains,
My coiffure is in disarray, my hairpins askew,
and my chignon disheveled.
All on his account, my fragrance is alluring,
and my jade is soft.
As we emulate billing swallows and cooing orioles,
Our feelings are ardent, our passions are intense.⁶⁹
My waist has become languorous,
and my eyes are bleary,
But in the depths of our passion
my eyebrows are wanton.
The two of us share an affinity,
An affinity;
Desirous of enjoying a lifetime of love,⁷⁰
in harmony like phoenix mates.

When the song was finished, and they had all enjoyed another round of drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up and ordered Tai-an to take eleven packets of gratuities, of differing quantities, out of his letter case. There were three mace of silver for each of the four singing girls, five mace of silver for the chef, who was called out to receive them, three mace of silver each for Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un, two mace of silver each for the servant and the boy who served the tea, as well as three mace of silver for the maidservant T'ao-hua. All of them kowtowed to him in gratitude.

Huang the Fourth did his best to prevent him from leaving, saying, "Uncle Ying the Second, won't you say a word to dissuade him? It's early yet, and if His Honor will consent to stay a little longer, it will enable me to convey the full extent of my feelings. Why should he insist upon leaving right away? Auntie Ai-yüeh, won't you also endeavor to detain him?"

"I have tried to detain him," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but he simply won't stay."

"You don't know about it," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but there are things I have to do tomorrow."

Then, bowing to Huang the Fourth and Li the Third, he said, "Thank you for all the trouble you have taken on my behalf."

"I fear," responded Huang the Fourth, "that since we have only invited Your Honor to partake of meager fare, and you are unwilling to stay any longer, you will conclude that we have been lacking in respect."

As they spoke, the four singing girls kowtowed together, saying, "When Father gets home, please convey our regards to your First Lady, and the other ladies. When we have some free time, we'll get together with Wu Yin-erh and come to your place to visit the First Lady."

"When you have the time," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "do come and spend the day with us."

By this time, the lanterns had been lit, and, when Hsi-men Ch'ing descended the stairs, he was met by the madam of the Cheng Family Establishment, who bowed to him, saying, "Won't Your Honor consent to stay a while longer? The fact that you are so anxious to leave must show that you do not find our fare to your taste. There is another course remaining that has not yet been served."

"I've eaten my fill," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and would stay a little longer, were it not that I have a lot of business to take care of. I have to get up early tomorrow morning in order to deal with matters pending at the yamen. Since Brother Ying the Second has no such

responsibilities, I'm sure that he can be persuaded to stay a while longer."

Ying Po-chüeh was going to get up and follow him out, but he was forcefully detained by Huang the Fourth, who said, "Master Two, if you insist on leaving, it will certainly spoil the fun."

"That's not the case," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "and there's no need for you to try to retain me. But if you have the prowess to detain the venerable Licentiate Wen, I'll consider you a stout fellow."

Licentiate Wen actually did try to bolt out the gate but was prevented from doing so by Huang the Fourth's page boy, Lai-ting, who held him back by embracing him around the waist.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the main gate, he asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Does Master Wen have a mount here, or not?"

"His donkey is here ready for him," replied Ch'in-t'ung. "Hua-t'ung is looking after it."

"Since you have a mount here, venerable sir," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Licentiate Wen, "you might as well keep Brother Ying the Second company and stay a while longer. I am compelled to leave before you."

Thereupon, they all escorted him outside the gate to see him off.

Cheng Ai-yüeh took Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand and surreptitiously gave it a pinch, while simultaneously turning to face him and saying in a loud voice, "Father, make sure you keep what I told you just now to yourself. As you know:

The dharma must not be divulged to six ears."

"I understand," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

She then turned to Cheng Ch'un and said, "You escort His Honor on his way home, and give our regards to his ladies when you get there."

Wu Yin-erh also chimed in, saying, "Give my regards to the First Lady."

"I really oughtn't to mention it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but these lousy little whores are all attempting to:

Monopolize the trade and compete for business,
in conveying their regards, while I'm left without anyone to convey my regards to."

"You beggar!" retorted Cheng Ai-yüeh. "Get out of the way."

Wu Yin-erh then said goodbye to the group of guests, and the two Cheng sisters, and set out for home, accompanied by Wu Hui, who held a lantern to light her on her way.

"Sister Yin-erh," Cheng Ai-yüeh called after her, "if you run into that wastrel, whatever you do, don't mention this occasion to him."

"I understand," replied Wu Yin-erh.

The remaining company then returned to the scene of their party, where:

Animal-shaped briquettes were replenished, and

New servings of "sunset clouds" were decanted;

as amid:

Song and dance and wind and string instruments,

They enjoyed the pleasure of drinking together.

The party continued until the third watch before breaking up. Huang the Fourth, who hosted this drinking party, paid out ten taels of silver for it, and Hsi-men Ch'ing also contributed three or four taels. But no more of this.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in his sedan chair as the two orderlies, holding lanterns, escorted him out through the gate of the licensed quarter, after which he sent Cheng Ch'un back home.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling sent someone to summon him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early in order to participate in the adjudication of some criminal cases and related matters. The hearings continued until noon, after which he came home and ate his midday meal.

Before this, Brother-in-law Shen had sent his servant Shen Ting with a calling card to recommend a young man named Liu Pao to serve as a cook in the silk goods store, and Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to employ him. He was in his studio, in the process of providing Shen Ting with a reply to take home with him, when he noticed that Tai-an was standing at his side.

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to him and asked, "What time did Master Wen come home last night?"

"I had been asleep in the shop for quite a while," replied Tai-an, "when I heard Hua-t'ung knocking on the gate across the street. It was sometime in the third watch before he got home. When I asked about it this morning, I learned that although Master Wen was not in his cups, Master Ying the Second was so drunk he spit up all over the street. Auntie Ai-yüeh was concerned that it was so late at night and sent Cheng Ch'un to escort him home."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he guffawed with laughter.

He then called Tai-an over to him and said, "Do you know the address of that Auntie Wen who acted as go-between at the time of our son-in-law's marriage some time ago? If you can locate her, I'd like to have a word with her in the house across the street."

"I don't know Auntie Wen's address," replied Tai-an. "I'll go ask your son-in-law about it."

"As soon as you've finished eating," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "go ask about it, and then set out immediately."

Tai-an, accordingly, went back to the rear compound for his noonday meal and then went out to the shop to ask Ch'en Ching-chi about it.

"What are you looking for her for?" asked Ch'en Ching-chi.

"Who knows what he wants with her?" said Tai-an. "Without any warning, he just asked me to go find her."

"After emerging on East Main Street," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "head straight south until you get to the memorial arch on the other side of the T'ung-jen Bridge, at which point you turn east on Wang Family Lane, halfway down which there is an administrative police station, across from a stone bridge. On the other side of the bridge there is a Buddhist nunnery, next to which there is a small alley. If you head west on the small alley, the third house you come to will be a bean curd shop, right next to which, on the upper side, you will see the double leaves of a red outer door with latticework on the top to let in the light. That is her place. If you just call, 'Auntie Wen,' she will come outside in response."

When Tai-an had heard him out, he exclaimed, "Enough already!

When an itinerant tinker follows behind a parade
of incense-burning pilgrims:

The tinkling of his implements seems interminable.

You'll have to go over all that again for me. It's more than I can remember."

Ch'en Ching-chi, accordingly, ran over the directions for him a second time.

"It's not exactly a short jaunt," remarked Tai-an. "I'd better ride a horse."

Thereupon, he led out a large white horse, equipped it with a saddlecloth, fitted on a bit, stood up on the mounting platform, vaulted into the saddle, and gave it a stroke with his riding crop. The horse responded by neighing and prancing as it took off on its way.

Having emerged on East Main Street, Tai-an headed due south to the memorial arch on the other side of the T'ung-jen Bridge and entered Wang Family Lane, halfway down which, sure enough, he found a police station across the street from a dilapidated stone bridge, on the other side of which was a segment of red wall belonging to the Ta-pei An, or Nunnery of Great Compassion. There he found the small alley leading to the west, on the northern, or upper, side of which there was suspended a signboard advertising bean curd. In front of the door of this shop there was an old woman engaged in spreading horse dung out to dry.



Tai-an Surreptitiously Sets Out to Find a Bee Go-between

While still mounted on his horse, Tai-an asked her, "Old mother, is there a go-between named Auntie Wen around here?"

"The house with the latticed outer door right next door is her place," the old woman replied.

Tai-an proceeded in front of it and, sure enough, found the double leaves of a red outer door, just as he had been told.

Hastily leaping off his horse, he knocked on the door with his riding crop and called out, "Is Auntie Wen at home, or not?"

Lo and behold, it was her son, Wen T'ang, who opened the door and inquired, "Where have you come from?"

"I've come with an invitation for your mother from His Honor Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing who resides in front of the district yamen," replied Tai-an. "Ask Auntie Wen to come out immediately."

When Wen T'ang heard that it was someone from the home of the influential official, Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing, he invited him to come inside and take a seat. Tai-an, accordingly, tethered his horse and went into the parlor inside, where he saw that a paper print of the auspicious God of the Marketplace⁷¹ was displayed. In the inner part of the house, a number of persons had just finished holding a conclave and were still engaged in burning incense and settling accounts.

After what seemed like half a day, Wen T'ang came back out and offered him a cup of tea, saying, "My mother is not at home. When she returns, I'll tell her about it, and she can go to your place tomorrow morning."

"Her donkey is still here," objected Tai-an. "How can you pretend that she's not at home?"

So saying, he slipped past his interlocutor and headed toward the back of the house. Who could have known that Auntie Wen and her daughter-in-law were engaged in entertaining a number of devout Taoist women to tea and were unable to avoid being seen by him?

Whereupon, he said, "Is this not Auntie Wen? You told me just now that she was not at home. If I were to go back and tell such a story to my master, how could he avoid being annoyed with me?"

Auntie Wen laughed out loud at this, bowed in greeting to Tai-an, and said, "May I trouble you, Brother, to go home and tell your master that I am engaged in presiding over a tea meeting today. I don't know what His Honor wants to see me about, but I'll pay a visit to his residence tomorrow morning."

"He only told me to come looking for you," said Tai-an. "Who knows what he wants you for? Not knowing that you lived in this out-of-the-way corner, finding you has really put me out."

"For these last few years," said Auntie Wen, "the venerable gentleman has depended on Old Mother Feng and Auntie Hsüeh to buy maidservants, act as go-betweens, and supply artificial flowers for his household. What use has he had for me? But today, all of a sudden, it would seem:

The beans are popping in this cold pot.⁷²

My guess is that since his Sixth Lady has passed away, he must want me to seek another match for him in order to take her place."

"I don't know about that," said Tai-an. "But when you get there and see my master, of course, he'll explain things to you."

"Brother," said Auntie Wen, "just sit down for a bit while I see off the guests at my tea meeting, and then I'll go with you."

"While I wait till you're finished with your tea meeting," said Tai-an, "there's nobody to look after my horse outside. My master is at home, meanwhile, burning with anxiety, like:

A fire within a fire.

He instructed me over and over again to have you come as quickly as possible, so he could have a word with you. Right now he also has another engagement to attend a party with Lo Wan-hsiang,⁷³ the vice prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture."

"All right," said Auntie Wen, "wait until I get you a snack to eat, and I'll go with you."

"Don't bother," said Tai-an.

She then went on to ask, "Has Hsi-men Ta-chieh given birth to a child, or not?"

"Not as far as I can tell," responded Tai-an.

Auntie Wen proceeded to provide Tai-an with a snack while she changed her clothes and then said, "You go ahead on your horse, and I'll follow behind you more slowly on foot."

"Old mother," said Tai-an, "since you've got a donkey at your disposal, why don't you saddle it up for yourself?"

"Where would I get a donkey from?" said Auntie Wen. "That donkey belongs to the bean curd shop next door. I have merely loaned them the use of my courtyard to graze it in, and you have mistaken it for my donkey."

"I remember seeing you riding a donkey here and there in the past," said Tai-an. "What has become of it?"

"It so happens," said Auntie Wen, "that one year, some time ago, one of the maidservants whose sale I had negotiated hanged herself, and the resulting lawsuit forced me to dispose of my old house, not to mention my donkey."

"The loss of your house doesn't amount to much," said Tai-an, "but you ought to have held on to that donkey in order to keep you company early and late. Aside from anything else, I noticed that he always had quite a whip of an organ dangling beneath him."

Auntie Wen laughed out loud at this, saying, "You crazy monkey of a short-life! I thought you were saying something serious, so I made the mistake of bending my ear to listen to you. A fine creature you've turned out to be! In the few years since I saw you last, you've developed quite an:

Oily mouth and a slippery tongue;⁷⁴

and in the future you'll still expect me to find a match for you."

"My horse goes at a good clip," said Tai-an, "and if you walk, who knows how long it will take you to get there, which will only have the effect of irritating Father. You get on the horse, and the two of us can ride tandem."

"You crazy little short-life!" exclaimed Auntie Wen. "I'm not the one you're after. The people on the street are bound to look askance at us when they see what we're doing."

"If not that," said Tai-an, "saddle up the donkey from the bean curd shop and ride it instead. When we get there, I'll see that they're properly compensated."

"That's more like it," said Auntie Wen.

She then told Wen T'ang to prepare the donkey, put on her eye shades, and proceeded to mount it, after which, she set out with Tai-an for Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Truly:

If you want to seek an alluring beauty
from a secluded boudoir,
You must rely entirely upon a red leaf
to be a good go-between.⁷⁵

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Who believes that there is a road leading
to the Peach Blossom Spring?
Yet the peach blossoms, drenched with dew,
smile in the spring breeze.⁷⁶
The Peach Blossom Spring is to be found
among the hills and streams;
Even today, the young fisherman is still

trying to find his way there.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 69

AUNTIE WEN COMMUNICATES HSI-MEN CH'ING'S WISHES TO LADY LIN; WANG TS'AI FALLS FOR A TRICK AND INVITES HIS OWN HUMILIATION

Casually he cooks a fish in the hope of finding
a message on a square of silk;¹
If a road exists to the realm of the immortals,
he is ready to embark upon it.
While sweeping the steps he happens upon a leaf
inscribed with amorous desires;²
In strumming a tune beneath the moon he deploys
the zither of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju.³
Seeking an assignation beneath the mulberry trees,
Ch'iu Hu has lascivious intent;⁴
Though finding the opportunity sitting in his lap,
Liu-hsia Hui is not so inclined.⁵
Having strayed inside the gold lamé bed curtains
in the darkening twilight;
He seems only desirous of pouring the vintage wine
for his solitary amusement.⁶

THE STORY GOES that when Auntie Wen arrived at the Hsi-men residence, P'ing-an told her, "Father is in the house across the street."

Tai-an went inside to announce her arrival and found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in the study with Licentiate Wen. Upon seeing Tai-an, he immediately came out and sat down in a small reception room, while Tai-an told him all about his vicissitudes in locating Auntie Wen.

"I've succeeded in bringing her here," he said, "and she's waiting outside."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, told him to call her inside; and Auntie Wen proceeded to cautiously lift aside the portiere that was hanging over the door to keep in the heat and come into the room, where she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Auntie Wen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's been a long time since I saw you last."

"Well, here I am," responded Auntie Wen.

"Where are you living now, since you moved?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Because I was so unfortunate as to be involved in a lawsuit," said Auntie Wen, "I was forced to get rid of my old house. At present, I have moved to the southern edge of the city and am living on Wang Family Lane."

"You can get up in order to talk to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Auntie Wen, thereupon, got to her feet and stood beside him, while Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants out of their presence. P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung waited for him on the other side of the postern gate, but Tai-an concealed himself outside the portiere so he could eavesdrop on what they had to say.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to ask, "What households of prominent families do you frequent?"

"Well," replied Auntie Wen, "I am on familiar terms with the household of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, who resides on Main Street; the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command; the household of the distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao; that of His Honor Chang the Second; and that of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."

"Are you familiar with the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, or not?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They are old patrons of mine," replied Auntie Wen. "Lady Lin and her daughter-in-law, the wife of Wang the Third, frequently buy costume jewelry from me."

"If you are on familiar terms with them," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is a mission I would like to entrust to you. You mustn't refuse me."

Reaching into his sleeve, he proceeded to pull out a five-tael ingot of silver and hand it to her, saying, thus and so, "See if you can find some way or other of inveigling Lady Lin into visiting your place, so I can have a meeting with her. If you succeed in doing so, I will see that you are further rewarded."

On hearing this, Auntie Wen laughed out loud, saying, "Whoever told you about her? Venerable sir, how did you happen to find out about this?"

"As the saying goes," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

"Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow.

How could I help hearing about it?"

"Well, if you want me to describe this lady," said Auntie Wen, "she was born in the year of the pig, so, this year, she would be thirty-four years old. She is really a first-class lady, is as clever as can be, and could pass for being no more than twenty-nine. Although she does engage in this sort of business, she does so with the greatest discretion. When she goes out, she rides in a large sedan chair, accompanied by attendants who shout to clear the way, and proceeds directly to her destination before coming straight home. Since her son, the venerable Wang the Third, has a position in society to maintain, she would scarcely agree to an assignation at someone else's place. Whoever suggested to you that she might was mistaken. It is only within the:

Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
of her own place that, occasionally, when the venerable Wang the Third is not at home, she may surreptitiously consent to secrete a lover:

Unbeknownst to humans,

Unperceived by ghosts.

But this must be arranged in advance. As for the narrow confines of a place like mine, I would scarcely take the risk of attempting to get her to come there. This silver that you have offered me, I cannot agree to accept. I had better simply tell the lady what you have proposed, and leave it at that."

"If you refuse to accept it, and continue to make excuses," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will be annoyed. If the affair should be successful, I will reward you with some additional pieces of silk fabric for you to wear. If you persist in refusing what I have offered, you will be standing in my way."

"I am scarcely worried about your lack of largess," responded Auntie Wen. "As they say:

When a superior deigns to patronize you,

It spells the advent of your lucky star."⁷

Kowtowing to him, and accepting the proffered silver, she went on to say, "If you wait until I have had a chance to speak to the lady, venerable sir, I will get back in touch with you."

"You must treat this as a serious undertaking," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I will be waiting to hear from you here. When you return, be sure to come to this location. I won't send a page boy to summon you."

"I understand," responded Auntie Wen. "If not tomorrow, then the next day, early or late, as soon as I get the word from her, I'll come back to see you."

As she made her way out, Tai-an said to her, "Auntie Wen, it's up to you, but I would like to have at least a tael of silver for my pains in taking the trouble to find you. You oughtn't to keep everything for yourself."

"You monkey!" exclaimed Auntie Wen.

"If you throw a winnowing sieve over the wall,

Who knows whether it will land right side up
or upside down?"

Thereupon, she proceeded out the gate, mounted the donkey, and went straight off, with her son holding the bridle, while Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to visit for a while longer with Licentiate Wen.

Sometime later, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling showed up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the house in order to offer him some tea and change into more formal attire, after which they set out together for the prefectural office in order to attend a party for Vice Prefect Lo Wan-hsiang. It was not until after the lamps had been lighted that he returned home.

To resume our story, when Auntie Wen arrived home with Hsi-men Ch'ing's five taels of silver in hand:

Her delight knew no bounds.

After the people attending her tea meeting had departed, late in the day, she went over to Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan's mansion, where she greeted Lady Lin with a bow.

"How is it," asked Lady Lin, "that you haven't come by to visit me the last few days?"

Auntie Wen then proceeded to explain to Lady Lin how she had been busy presiding over a conclave and tea meeting at her place in order to plan for a pilgrimage to offer incense at the temple on the summit of Mount T'ai during the twelfth month.

"Why don't you let your son take care of it?" said Lady Lin. "There's no need for you to go."

"I'm not able to go myself," replied Auntie Wen. "I plan to let Wen T'ang take charge of the incense offering pilgrimage."

"When the time comes," said Lady Lin, "I'll donate something toward the traveling expenses."

"Many thanks for your generosity," responded Auntie Wen.

When they had finished this preliminary exchange, Lady Lin urged her to move closer in order to warm herself at the brazier, and a maidservant served them with tea.

While Auntie Wen was drinking her tea, she inquired, "Is the Third Master not at home?"

"He hasn't come home for two nights in a row," said Lady Lin. "He spends his nights in the licensed quarter. He goes there every day with that crowd of sharpers:

Sleeping among the flowers and lolling

beneath the willows,
and leaving his blossoming young wife to vegetate in her room, without paying her the slightest attention. What is one to do? What is one to do?"

"Why is the Third Master's wife not to be seen?" Auntie Wen went on to ask.

"She's still in her room," explained Lady Lin, "and hasn't even come out yet."

When Auntie Wen saw that there was no one else about, she said, "That needn't be a problem, Madame, you can relax about it. I have a scheme by means of which you can be sure of dispersing that crowd of hangers-on, and bringing about a change of heart on the part of the Third Master, so that he will not venture into the licensed quarter again. If madame will permit me to explicate it, I will do so; but, should you object, I will not presume to do so."

"When have I ever refused to go along with anything you have to say?" protested Lady Lin. "If you have anything to suggest, go right ahead and say it. I won't object."

Only then did Auntie Wen go on to say, "His Honor, Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose residence is located in front of the district yamen, currently occupies the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. His household not only engages in money lending to both officials and functionaries, but also operates four or five businesses, including a satin piece goods store, a pharmaceutical shop, a silk goods store, and a knitting and sewing supplies store. In addition, he operates fleets of merchant vessels with armed escorts on the rivers and lakes, trades salt vouchers in Yang-chou, and purveys incense and wax in Tung-p'ing prefecture for use by the imperial household. He has several tens of assistants and managers in his employ. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital is his adoptive father. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien of the Embroidered Uniform Guard is his superior. And Majordomo Chai Ch'ien of the grand preceptor's household is his relative by marriage. The grand coordinator and the regional inspector of Shantung are on familiar terms with him, not to mention the local prefects and district magistrates. The wealth of his household is such that:

The paths run crisscross between the fields;⁸

The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary.

What glitters is gold,

What is white is silver,

What are round are pearls,

What sparkle are jewels.

"In addition to his First Lady, who is the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard, and is his legitimate wife by a second marriage, he has five or six other ladies who preside over quarters of their own and are entitled to wear formal gowns. And, below these, there are several tens of:

Singing boys and dancing girls,⁹

as well as favored maidservants, at his disposal. Truly, for him:

Every day is a Cold Food Festival;

Every night is a Lantern Festival.¹⁰

"At the present time, His Honor is no more than thirty-three or thirty-four years old; truly, a man in the prime of life, who has an imposing physique and is good-looking. He also resorts to aphrodisiacs to nurture his 'turtle'¹¹ and is an old hand at initiating romantic affairs. When it comes to backgammon and elephant chess, there is:

Nothing he has not mastered;

and as for playing at kickball or suchlike sports, there is:

Little he is not proficient at.

With regard to the works of the hundred schools, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, he has but to be exposed to them in order to demonstrate his mastery. Truly, his voice is like:

Tinkling jade or plangent bronze,¹²

and he is as clever as can be.

"Upon hearing that this family of yours has:

Worn the regalia of officials for generations,¹³

and that your:

Financial foundation is anything but shallow,

as well as the fact that the Third Master is enrolled in the Military School, he has expressed a desire to become acquainted with you. The only problem is that, since he has never met you, he is uncertain how to proceed.

"The other day, upon hearing that your birthday is near at hand, and that you are accustomed to accepting worthy gentlemen from anywhere within the four seas, he is single-mindedly desirous of the chance to come and offer you his birthday congratulations. I told him that it would be awkward for him to seek an audience with you precipitously, and that he should wait until I had a chance to approach you on the subject, and obtain your consent. If you should now invite him to come make your acquaintance, not only could you establish a meaningful relationship, but you could also ask his aid in getting rid of this band of rascals that are preying on your son. Such a request would surely do nothing to injure the reputation of your household."

Gentle reader take note: To seek the lower depths, like water, is the nature of women.

On that day, as Lady Lin listened to the encomium on Hsi-men Ch'ing delivered by Auntie Wen, her heart was:

Thrown into a state of confusion,¹⁴ and
Her lustful feelings were aroused.

In the course of considering what to do, she turned to Auntie Wen with a smile and said, "Since he and I:

Are newly acquainted and hardly know each other,
how can we suddenly arrange to meet?"

"That's no problem," responded Auntie Wen. "In speaking to His Honor, I'll just say that you initiated matters by asking me to approach him with a request that he file a complaint on your behalf in the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission against that gang of hangers-on that are inveigling the Third Master into the licensed quarter; and that you also hope that he will favor you with a private visit beforehand. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."

This suggestion produced a feeling of delight in Lady Lin's heart, and she agreed to await his visit on the evening of the day after next. Having obtained the consent of Lady Lin, Auntie Wen went home.

The next day, around dinnertime, Auntie Wen returned to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. That day, after coming home from the yamen, Hsi-men Ch'ing had nothing to do and was sitting in the studio in the house across the street when Tai-an suddenly came in and announced that Auntie Wen had arrived. Upon hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went into the small reception room and told his attendants to let down the blinds. In due course, Auntie Wen came in and kowtowed to him. Tai-an, who understood the situation, tactfully withdrew, so that the two of them could speak freely to each other.

Auntie Wen then explained how she had exercised her powers of persuasion on Lady Lin, telling him, "I gave an extravagant account of your personal character and wealth, your fashionable standing, and your familiarity with the members of the local bureaucracy; how you are:

Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with your wealth;
as well as being:

Romantic and dashing as can be;
with the result that she expressed herself to be:

Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times.¹⁵

She agreed that tomorrow evening, while the Third Master is not there, she will prepare a repast in her home and await your visit, so that, on the pretext of asking you for a favor, the two of you can indulge in a secret rendezvous."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was utterly delighted and ordered Tai-an to reward her with two pieces of silk fabric.

"If Your Honor plans to go tomorrow," said Auntie Wen, "don't go early, but wait until after the lamps are lit and there are fewer people in the streets. Make your way to the rear gate of her residence by way of Dumpling Alley. There is a certain Old Mother Tuan in her employ, who lives right next door to the rear gate of her residence. I'll wait for Your Honor there. Just have your servant tap on the door and I'll come out and conduct you into the inner sanctum, without letting any of the neighbors know about it."

"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Be sure to get there before me tomorrow, and don't budge by so much as an inch. I'll be there right on time."

When they had finished speaking, Auntie Wen respectfully bade him farewell and returned to report to Lady Lin, while Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Li Chiao-erh's quarters to spend the night. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

Hardly able to wait for the day to come, that night Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to conserve his energy. At noontime, he put on a white "loyal and tranquil hat" and joined Ying Po-chüeh in riding on horseback to Hsieh Hsi-ta's place to attend a birthday party in his honor. Two singing girls had been hired for the occasion.

After drinking no more than a few cups of wine, around lamp-lighting time, Hsi-men Ch'ing left the party and mounted his horse, with the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, to accompany him. It was the ninth day of the month, and:

The light of the moon was dusky.

Putting on his eye shades, after traversing Main Street, he made his way along Dumpling Alley, until he arrived at the rear gate of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan's residence. The lamps had already been lighted, and the streets were relatively deserted. When Hsi-men Ch'ing was half a house away from the rear gate, he reined in his horse and told Tai-an to tap on Old Mother Tuan's door.

It so happens that this Old Mother Tuan occupied quarters in the rear of Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence and had been recommended for her position by Auntie Wen. It was her job to look after the rear entrance, early and late, in order to:

Open the gates and close the doors,
and to act as a lookout, enabling anyone bent on an assignation to penetrate the inner sanctum.

When Auntie Wen, who was inside her quarters, heard the tap on the door, she promptly opened it and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived. She waited inside the rear gate until Hsi-men Ch'ing had dismounted and then led him inside, still wearing his eye shades, while telling Ch'in-t'ung to take the horse and wait with it under the eaves of the house on the west side across the street. Tai-an, for his part, concealed himself in Old Mother Tuan's quarters.

Auntie Wen then invited Hsi-men Ch'ing inside, closed the rear gate, and secured it with the crossbar, after which she led him into the interior through an enclosed passageway that skirted a tier of auxiliary rooms, before arriving at the main suite of five compartments in which Lady Lin resided. There was a closed postern gate to one side, on which Auntie Wen lightly tapped with the door knocker. It so happens that this was a prearranged signal, so that, in no time, a maidservant came out to open the double-leaved door, and Auntie Wen led Hsi-men Ch'ing into the rear reception room.

As they lifted aside the portiere over the latticework of the door and went in, Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the interior was:

Ablaze with lamps and candles.

In the place of honor at the head of the room there hung a full-length portrait of the military commissioner of T'ai-yüan and Commandery Prince of Pin-yang, Wang Ching-ch'ung,¹⁶ the founding ancestor of the house of Wang I-hsüan. He was wearing a crimson python robe decorated with roundels of entwined dragons, and a jade-ornamented girdle, and was seated on a folding armchair, covered with a tiger skin, reading a book on military strategy. He resembled Kuan Yü, the God of War, except that his beard was a little shorter, and his spear, sword, and bow and arrows were arrayed by his side. The cinnabar-red plaque over the door was inscribed with three characters meaning Hall of Integrity and Righteousness. The two sidewalls of the room were adorned with works of calligraphy and painting, and:

Zither and books were elegantly displayed.

To the left and right of the portrait there hung a pair of scrolls, on which a couplet was inscribed in gold-flecked characters that were written in the archaic clerkly script of the Han dynasty and read:

The integrity he bequeathed to the family endures
like pine trees and bamboos;
His services to the country are as conspicuous as
the Dipper or a mountain peak.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing was engaged in surveying this scene, he heard the tinkling of a bell on the portiere, and Auntie Wen came in from the interior to serve him with a cup of tea.

"Invite the venerable Lady to come out so that I can pay my respects," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"She will appear by the time Your Honor finishes your tea," said Auntie Wen. "I have just informed the Lady of your arrival."

Who could have anticipated that Lady Lin was surreptitiously engaged in scrutinizing Hsi-men Ch'ing from the other side of the portiere? She saw that:

His physique was awe-inspiring,
His speech out of the ordinary;
He displayed a splendid figure,
Both dignified and outstanding.

On his head, he wore a white satin "loyal and tranquil hat," with sable ear-muffs. On his body, he wore a crane-decorated robe of purple cashmere. On his feet, he wore white-soled black boots. On his upper torso, he wore a riding jacket, emblazoned with a green cut-velvet mandarin square that featured an embroidered lion and was fastened with a row of five gold buttons. Manifestly, he was:

A wealthy but untrustworthy, crafty
and treacherous person;
An abuser of the innocent and good,
addicted to wine and sex.

Upon seeing him, Lady Lin was utterly delighted and quietly called over Auntie Wen to ask her who he was wearing mourning for.

"He is wearing mourning for his Sixth Lady," explained Auntie Wen, "who passed away not long ago in the ninth month. At the very least, he still has at his disposal as many more ladies as the fingers on your hand. You may not be able to tell by looking at him, but he is like:

A fighting quail, just released from his cage:
Ever ready to engage."

When the woman heard this:

Her delight knew no bounds,

and Auntie Wen urged her to go out and meet Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I'd be too embarrassed,"¹⁷ the woman said. "How can I put myself forward like that? Just ask him to come inside."

Auntie Wen, accordingly, went out and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The Lady invites Your Honor to come into her room in order to meet her."

Thereupon, she hastened to lift aside the portiere, and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded into the inner room, where he observed that:

The drapery consisted of hanging red curtains,¹⁸
The floor was completely covered with carpets.
Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,
The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring.
The embroidered bed was enhanced by clouds of vapor
hovering athwart the curtains;
The brocaded screen showed the radiance of the moon
invading the asterism Hsüan-yüan.¹⁹

On the woman's head, she wore a headdress of gold filigree enhanced with emerald leaves. On her body, she wore a wide-sleeved jacket of white satin, over a brocaded, aloeswood-colored, crane-decorated robe of figured satin, and a wide-bordered skirt of palace-style crimson brocade. On her feet, she wore shoes of raven-hued fabric with embroidered patterns, and high white satin heels. Manifestly, she was:

An alluring and lascivious female inhabitant
of ostentatious chambers;
A veritable bodhisattva of coition, dwelling
in her sequestered bower.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Her face is glossy, her locks are thick,
and her brows curvaceous;
When her lotus feet are lightly animated,²⁰
she is remarkable indeed.
When intoxicated, her lusts are aroused
within the bed curtains;
Only then does one come to see just how
extraordinary the lady is.

Upon seeing her, Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance,

saying, "Will Your Ladyship please assume the position of honor so that your pupil may pay his respects to you."

"Your Honor," said Lady Lin, "you can skip the obeisance."

But Hsi-men Ch'ing was unwilling to do so and, bending his body, proceeded to kowtow to her twice. The woman, for her part, responded in kind. When they had finished with these amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat on a chair in the position of honor, while Lady Lin kept him company by sitting at an angle on the edge of the k'ang next to him, and leaning against a comb-back-shaped back rest. Auntie Wen had long since secured the ceremonial gate leading into the front courtyard, so that there was not a single male servant left in the rear compound. The postern gate leading into the Third Master's quarters had also been locked. A young maidservant, named Fu-jung, brought in a serving of tea on a red lacquer tray, and Lady Lin kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company while he drank it, after which the maidservant took the tea cups and their raised saucers away.

Auntie Wen then initiated the conversation, saying, "The Lady has long known that Your Honor holds a judicial appointment in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and has presumed to send me to invite you here in order to ask a favor of you. But she doesn't know whether Your Honor will agree to her request, or not."

"I don't know what it is that her venerable Ladyship would have me do for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I would not deceive you, sir," said Lady Lin, "but the fact is that, although my husband's family has held the hereditary post of Imperial Commissioner for generations, it is some years now since he passed away, and he had not accumulated much in the way of savings. My son is still young, and has been delicately nurtured, but has not yet qualified to succeed to his father's position. Although he is currently enrolled in the Military School, he is still immature and uneducated and is given to entertaining a number of crafty and uncouth²¹ characters who daily entice him into going out whoring and drinking with them, to the complete neglect of his family responsibilities. On several occasions I have been on the verge of reporting them to the authorities, but since I am unaccustomed to venturing outside my private quarters, I am afraid that by:

Exposing my face to the public gaze,²²

I might damage the reputation of my late husband. That is why, today, I have ventured to invite Your Honor to my humble abode in order to confide my innermost thoughts to you, which will serve as an equivalent of my lodging a formal complaint against them. It is my earnest hope that Your Honor will consent to sympathize with my feelings, and find a way of preventing this bunch of characters from continuing to prey on my son, so that he will be able to:

Correct his faults and renew himself,²³

devoting himself to mastering the requirements for public office, so that he can perpetuate the inheritance of his ancestors. If Your Honor is able to do this, you will have given him:

The favor of a new lease on life,²⁴

and I will not only:

Feel profoundly grateful to you,

but will see that you are handsomely rewarded."

"How can your venerable Ladyship bring yourself to utter the word 'reward'?" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The members of your distinguished family have:

Worn the regalia of officials for generations,

serving the court as generals and ministers. Your household is no ordinary one. Since your noble son has twice been enrolled in the Military School, he certainly ought to strive to achieve success, in order to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, rather than succumbing to the wiles of such parasites, and allowing himself to become besotted with women and wine as so many young men do. At Your Ladyship's behest, as soon as your pupil returns to the yamen, he will see to it that this bunch of characters is appropriately disciplined. Your son will not be implicated in any way, but this may serve as a warning to him not to continue walking in the same rut and may, I hope, prevent him from doing so in the future."

When the woman heard this, she hastily got to her feet and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "On a future occasion, I will express my gratitude to Your Honor."

"You and I are like members of the same family," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"How can you say such a thing?"

As the two of them were:

Talking back and forth,
they exchanged meaningful glances with each other. Before long, Auntie Wen set up a table and brought in a serving of wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing intentionally refused, saying, "Your pupil has come for the first time, with a view to making your acquaintance, but has not brought a gift with him. How can he consent to accept your venerable Ladyship's magnanimous hospitality?"

"I did not anticipate that Your Honor would deign to pay me a visit," said Lady Lin, "so I was unable to make the appropriate preparations. The weather is cold, and I have supplied a meager cup of watery wine.

It is no more than a token of my esteem."

The maidservant then proceeded to pour the wine. Truly:

Golden flagons decant the rarest vintage;

Jade goblets overflow with Yang-kao wine.

Lady Lin stood up and proffered him a cup of wine, but Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, also got up from his seat and said, "I ought to first offer Your Ladyship a cup."

Auntie Wen, who was standing to one side, interrupted him, saying, "There is no need for Your Honor to offer Her Ladyship any wine today. The fifteenth day of the eleventh month is the Lady's birthday. Why don't you plan to deliver a present to her on that day, and wish her a happy birthday?"

"Ai-ya," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's a good thing you mentioned it. Today is the ninth, so it is only six days away. I will be sure to ascend her hall and wish her a happy birthday when the time comes."

"How could I be so presumptuous," responded Lady Lin with a smile, "as to put Your Honor's generosity to such a test?"

Before long, in:

Large platters and large bowls,
an assortment of delicacies was put before them in a set of sixteen matched bowls. These dishes, with their:

Enticing flavors and rare ingredients,²⁵
were steaming hot, and cooked to perfection. They included sautéed chicken and fish, fried and roasted goose and duck, fastidiously prepared vegetable dishes, and rare fruits in season. Beside them:

Crimson candles blazed on high,²⁶
at their feet:

Fuel was replenished in golden braziers.

Exchanging cups as they drank,

Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,²⁷

They joked suggestively about clouds and rain,

As the wine enhanced their lustful daring.

They continued drinking until the time when:

The lotus-shaped clepsydra dripped its last, and

The moonbeams in the window reached their height.

They both felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine,²⁸

And their amorous feelings were already stimulated.

Auntie Wen had disappeared, and when they called for more wine, no one responded. Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon seeing that:

There was nobody about,
gradually:

Moved his seat closer to her,

and:

Their conversation became rather risqué.

It was not long before they reached the stage of:

Holding hands and squeezing wrists,²⁹

Rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows.

Initially, when he:

Playfully embraced her powdered neck,
the woman merely:

Smiled but did not choose to respond.³⁰

Eventually, however, the woman:

Gently parted her scarlet lips,

and Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Shot his tongue into her mouth, so that

The sound of their sucking was audible,

And their pleasantries became intimate.

Thereupon, the woman got up and closed the door to the room, after which, she:

Removed her clothes, undid her girdle, and

Slightly parted the brocade bed curtains.

Across the bed there lay:

An embroidered quilt and mandarin duck pillow.³¹

The bedding was fumigated with phoenix incense.

Their jade bodies in intimate contact,

He began to fondle her creamy breasts.

It so happens that, because Hsi-men Ch'ing knew that the woman was fond of the game of breeze and moonlight, before leaving home he had picked up his bag of sexual implements and taken a dose of the Indian monk's medication. The woman discovered, by both visual and tactile means, that his male organ was extremely large, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, also, proceeded to manually stimulate her clitoris.

Devoting themselves to each other's pleasure,

Their lascivious excitement burned like fire.³²

The woman placed an absorbent mermaid silk handkerchief within reach beside the bed, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, underneath the quilt, rendered his chowrie handle rampant. Thereupon:

As he extended his apelike arms,

The butterflies were driven to madness

and the bees to wantonness;

As she raised up her jade legs,

She was scarcely bashful at the clouds

or embarrassed by the rain.

Truly:

Back and forth, they are both practiced hands

at amorous engagement;

What matter if her jade hairpin should happen

to fall by the bedside?³³

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The tunes performed in the nuptial chamber
are low-pitched and secretive;

As incense burns in the duck-shaped censer³⁴
the lucent vapor spirals upward.

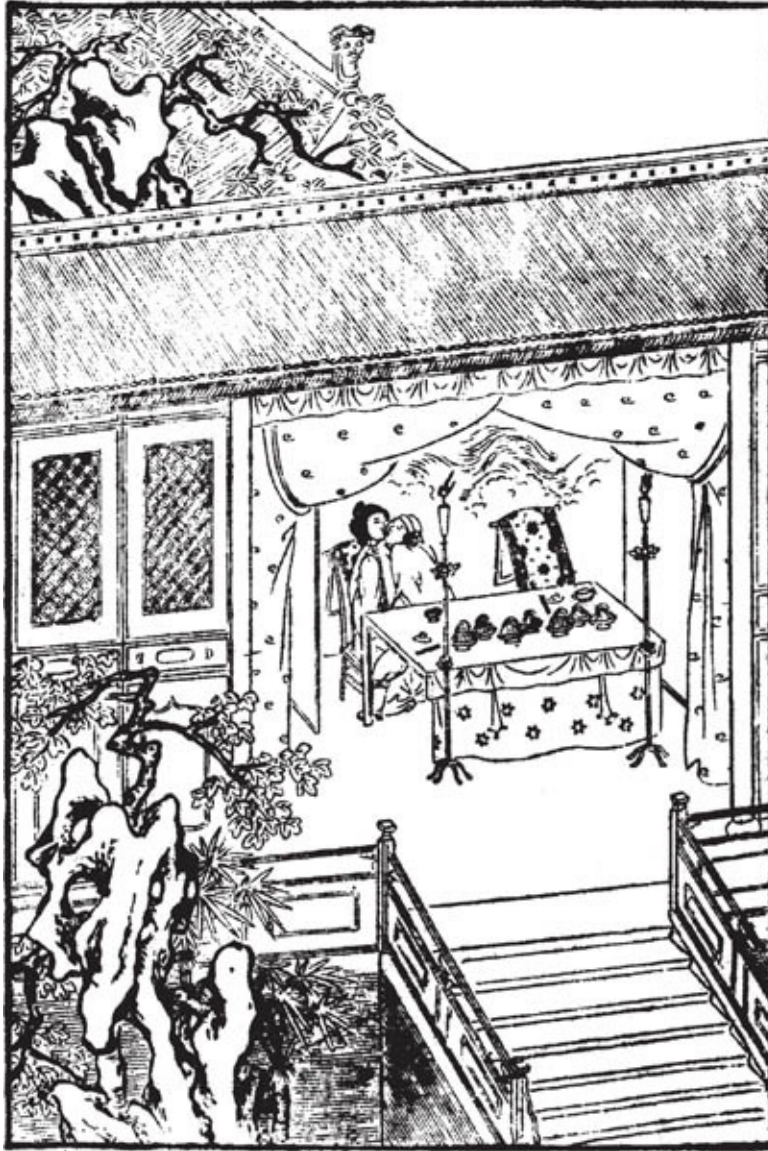
Their dreams are rehearsed amid the pale
liquescence of the moonlit night;

As they toss and turn on the ivory bedstead
the spring colors are marvelous.

Unexpectedly, on this occasion, she has found
herself with a young lothario;

When she is accustomed only to playing games
with the wealthiest merchants.

Overcome with desire, she yearns for union,



In Wang I-hsüan's Mansion He Enjoys a Tryst with Lady Lin

but is so languid and enervated;
 She has to urge her Sung Yü to embark upon
 his own expedition to Kao-t'ang.³⁵
 As he pushes his way through the double gates
 that have never been locked;
 Dew comes to inundate the blossoming branch of
 crimson herbaceous peonies.³⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing, on this occasion, exerted to the full the skills he had acquired during a lifetime as he dallied with the woman, and a watch and a half elapsed before he ejaculated. As for the woman:

Her hair is in disarray, her hairpins askew,
 Her blossoms withered, and her willows tired.
 The oriole's cries and swallow's twittering,
 Still continue to resonate within their ears.

After lying together:

Head to head and thigh over thigh,
 And embracing one another a while,

they got up and put their clothes back on. Upon getting down from the bed, the woman:

Deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick,
opened the door of the room, and:

Gazing at the mirror, made herself up.
After calling for the maidservant to bring in some water so they could wash their hands, they:

Resumed drinking the fragrant wine,
Trading toasts in the fine vintage.

After they had exchanged three cups with each other, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, and the woman was unable to detain him any longer, though she urged him repeatedly to return. Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed in consent and apologized politely for the trouble he had put her to, after which he took his leave and departed, while the woman saw him out as far as the postern gate. Auntie Wen had already opened the rear gate and called Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to bring the horse over for him to mount for the return journey. Out on the street, the night watchman was already:

Shouting the hour and ringing his bell;
The time was late, the night was still.³⁷

Behold:

The atmosphere was pervaded with frost;
The myriad pipes of Heaven were silent.³⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded on his way home. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had disposed of his routine business at the yamen, he retired to the rear chamber and summoned the adjutant and detectives assigned to the area in question and ordered them:

Thus and thus, and
So and so,

saying, "Go and find out who it is that is inveigling the third son of Imperial Commissioner Wang into the licensed quarter, and what establishments he is frequenting. Ascertain their names, and come back to report to me."

He then turned to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling and said, "Master Wang the Third is allowing himself to be led astray. The other day, his mother importuned someone to come and tell me about it. It's not really her son's fault, but he is being led into temptation's way by this bunch of 'bare sticks.' If steps are not taken now to see that they are severely disciplined, in days to come, they are likely to end up leading the heir of this family badly astray."

"What my colleague says is true enough," responded Hsia Yen-ling. "They ought, certainly, to be apprehended."

The adjutant and detectives, upon receiving Hsi-men Ch'ing's instructions, set to work that very day and actually succeeded in ascertaining the names of the persons in question. Having made out a report on the matter, they came to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence that afternoon and presented their findings. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the names in the document were those of Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, Trifler Chang, Tiptoe Nieh, Yokel Sha, Stupid Yü, and Mohammedan Pai; and that the singing girls in question were Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih. Picking up his writing brush, he crossed out the names of Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih, as well as those of Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu.

He then instructed the officers, saying, "You need only take action against Trifler Chang and the rest of those five 'bare sticks.' Arrest them for me, and deliver them to the yamen first thing in the morning."

The functionaries assented and set off on their mission. That evening, having learned that Wang the Third and the others were all drinking and playing kickball at Li Kuei-chieh's place, they concealed themselves behind the rear gate. Late at night, when the party dispersed, they arrested Trifler Chang, Tiptoe Nieh, Stupid Yü, Mohammedan Pai, and Yokel Sha, all five of them. While Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu managed to hide out in one of the back rooms of the establishment, Wang the Third concealed himself under the frame of Li Kuei-chieh's bed and dared not come out. The personnel of the Li Family Establishment were thrown into such consternation that they broke into a sweat. Not knowing who was behind the proceedings, all they could do was to seek information from anyone who could learn the truth of the matter. Wang the Third spent the whole night under the bed, not daring to come out. The madam of the Li Family Establishment feared that the officers involved had been sent all the way from the Eastern Capital to make the arrests. When the fifth watch came around, she persuaded Li Ming to change into different clothes and escort Wang the Third home. The adjutant and detectives involved took Trifler Chang and the rest of them to their orderly room where they hung them up for the night.

Early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen and took his place on the bench together with Hsia Yen-ling. The instruments of punishment were arrayed to either side. When the prisoners were led in, each of them was subjected to a squeezing and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo. They were beaten until:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood spurted out.
The sound of their cries shook the heavens;
Their howls of distress disturbed the earth.

Hsi-men Ch'ing exhorted them, saying, "As for the bunch of you 'bare sticks,' who devote yourselves to inveigling young men into:

Toying with the breeze in the licensed quarter,
Instead of being content to abide by their lots,

you deserve to be punished severely; but, today, I am letting you off lightly with no more than these few strokes of the bamboo. If you should happen to fall into my hands again, however, you can count on being sentenced to public exposure in the cangue outside the

gate of the yamen.”

He then shouted an order that the attendants should drive them out of the courtroom. As they were forced outside, they felt as though:

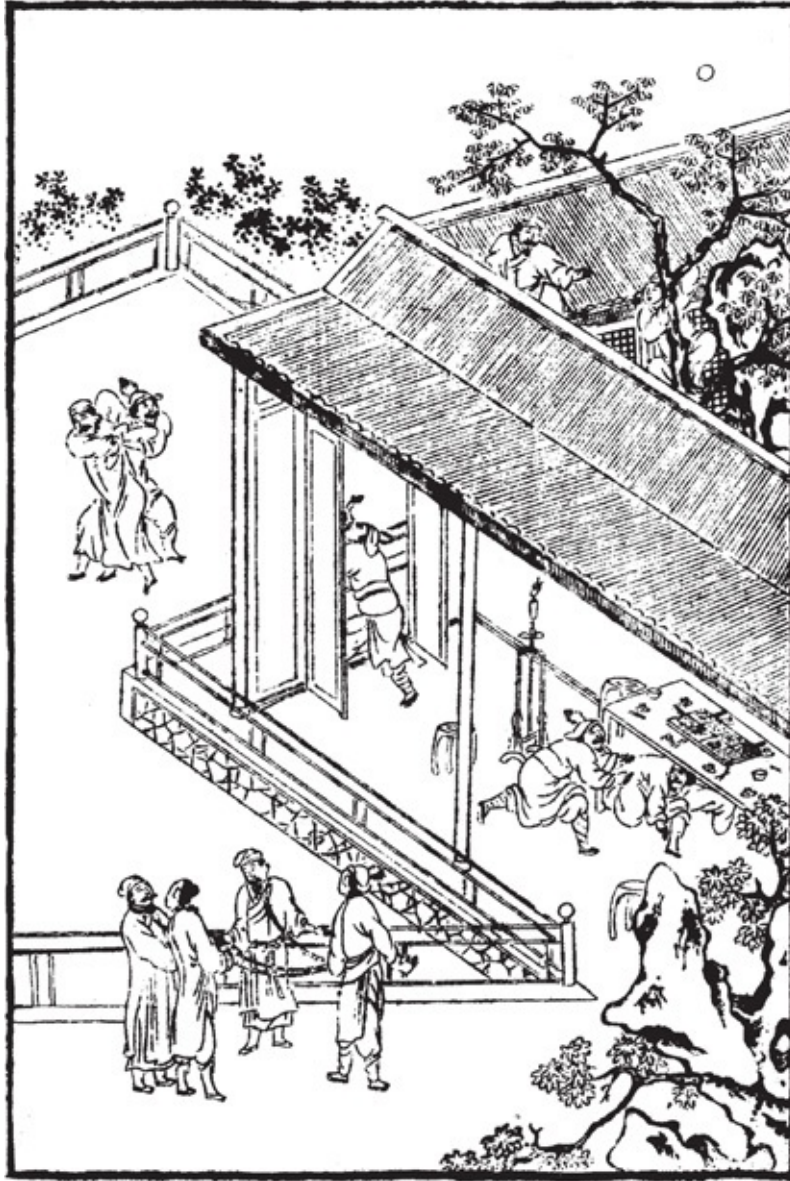
Whether their fates were governed by metal or by water,

There was no place for them to hide.

After having disposed of this case, the two officials retired from the bench and were enjoying a cup of tea in their private quarters, when Hsia Yen-ling said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, “The other day, I received a letter from my relative, Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, saying that the report on the merit evaluation for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard has been submitted, but that the results have not yet been promulgated. Having met with my colleague here today, I propose that we should send a messenger to our colleague Lin Ch'eng-hsün, the judicial commissioner in the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, since that is closer to the capital, to find out if there is any further news on this head.”

“My colleague's proposal is most perspicacious,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

They then summoned one of the couriers on duty, who knelt down before them, and instructed him, saying, “We will provide you with five mace of silver for your traveling expenses. You are to set out immediately, with calling cards from each of the two of us, travel by way of the southern branch of the Yellow River to Huai-ch'ing prefecture, and present them to Battalion Commander Lin Ch'eng-hsün of the Provincial Surveillance Commission there. We want you to find out for us whether the results of the recent merit evaluations for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard have come down from the capital yet. That is to say, whether the formal notification from the Registry Office has been promulgated or not. It is essential that you ascertain the true facts of the matter, and return to report them to us.”



In Verdant Spring Bordello Wang Ts'ai Is Frightened Away

The courier in question took possession of the silver and the calling cards, returned to his office, put on his broad-brimmed hat of Fan-yang felt, accoutered himself for the trip, procured a horse from the stable, and set out on his long journey, while the two officials got up and went home.

To resume our story, when Trifler Chang and the rest of them were expelled from the yamen of the Surveillance Commission and found themselves wandering along the street, they were in a state of trepidation. Completely in the dark as to what had ignited the fuse that resulted in their predicament, they resorted to mutual recriminations.

"No doubt," ventured Trifler Chang, "it must, once again, be something instigated by Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en in the Eastern Capital."

"That's not likely," pronounced Mohammedan Pai. "If that were the case, how would he be willing to:

Let anyone lightly out of his clutches?

As the saying goes:

No one is more perverse than a singing girl;

No one is more dishonest than a silversmith;

No one is more accomplished than a 'cribber.'"

Tiptoe Nieh then chimed in, saying, "None of you seem to get it. I'm the only one who has guessed the truth. This must surely be

the result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's harboring a grudge against Wang the Third for patronizing his mistress, and choosing to vent his spleen at our expense. Truly:

When the dragon battles the tiger,

The one hurt is the innocent fawn."³⁹

"Gentlemen, that may well be the case," opined Trifler Chang, "it is certainly we who are enduring the pain. Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu were just as involved as we were, but it is we alone who are being made to take the blame."

"How can you talk so naively?" said Stupid Yü. "The two of them are friends of his. How could he bring himself to hale them into court to kneel down before him and sentence them to punishment from on high?"

"I wonder why he didn't arrest the women involved?" ventured Trifler Chang.

"The two women are both sweethearts of his," explained Tiptoe Nieh, "and Li Kuei-chieh is his mistress. He could hardly have consented to have her arrested. There's no point in trying to blame anybody. It's just our bad luck to have stumbled into this dragnet. Why do you suppose His Honor Hsia Yen-ling had nothing to say just now? It was only Hsi-men Ch'ing who did the talking. That in itself makes it clear that the fix was in. Right now, we ought to go to Li Kuei-chieh's place and try to get hold of Wang the Third. After all, it's only thanks to him that our buttocks are covered with welts and our thighs beaten to a pulp. If we can get a few taels of silver out of him as compensation, we can avoid being laughed at by our wives."

Thereupon:

Coming this way and going that way,

Rounding bends and turning corners,⁴⁰

they made their way straight to Li Kuei-chieh's establishment in the licensed quarter, where they found that the gate was:

Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that

Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.⁴¹

They shouted out loud for what seemed like half a day before a maidservant finally responded from the other side of the door, asking who was there.

"It's us," said Trifler Chang. "We're looking to have a word with Master Wang the Third."

"He went home in the middle of the night that day," responded the maidservant. "He's not here, and there's no one else at home either, so I don't dare open the gate."

The bunch of them could think of no alternative but to go back to the residence of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, where they barged right into the reception room and sat down. When Wang the Third heard that they had come looking for him, he was so perturbed that he hid out in his own quarters, not daring to emerge.

After what seemed like half a day, he sent his page boy, Yung-ting, out to say to them, "My master is not at home."

They responded by saying, "He's certainly bent on having an easy time of it. If he's not at home, just where has he gone to that he can't be called back from?"

"Let me remind you of the facts of the case," said Stupid Yü. "There's no use pretending that you're:

Still asleep in dreamland.

We've just been beaten in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and then thrown out into the street. Right now, they're demanding that the Third Master make a personal appearance before the bench."

They then pulled up their clothes, exposing their thighs for Yung-ting to see, and told him to go back inside and report on the situation.

"After all," they went on to say, "the fact that we've been subjected to a beating on his account is no trivial matter."

Each and every one of them then proceeded to recline on the benches and give vent to moans and cries of pain.

As a result, Wang the Third became even more fearful of coming out and pleaded with his mother, saying, "Can't you, somehow or other, find a way of rescuing me from this situation?"

"I'm only a woman," responded Lady Lin. "How should I know how to go about persuading anyone to pull strings on your behalf?"

After he had pleaded with her for what seemed like half a day, they learned that the gang out in the reception room were getting restive and were demanding to speak with the venerable lady of the house.

Lady Lin did not go out but spoke to them from the other side of the standing screen, saying, "You will have to be patient. The fact of the matter is that he is out on our country estate and is not at home; but I will send a servant to go and summon him."

"Venerable Lady," said Trifler Chang, "you'd do well to send someone after him as soon as possible. If this boil is not lanced it will ooze pus, and letting it fester is not the thing to do. It is on his account that we have suffered this beating. When His Honor dismissed us just now, he insisted that he be turned over to the court. If he does not appear:

There can be no hope of peace,⁴²
for anyone involved, and matters can only go from bad to worse."

Upon hearing this, Lady Lin lost no time in sending a page boy out to serve them with tea. Wang the Third, for his part, was as scared as the devil and pressed his mother, once again, to find someone to pull strings on his behalf.

Only after he became frantic did Lady Lin say to him, "Auntie Wen just happens to be acquainted with the household of Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing. Years ago, she was the go-between who proposed the betrothal of his daughter, so she is familiar with their household."

"If she is acquainted with the judicial commissioner," said Wang the Third, "send a page boy to invite her here as quickly as

possible.”

“Ever since you criticized her on a former occasion,” said Lady Lin, “she’s been miffed and has stopped coming over here. Under the circumstances, how can we invite her? She’s unlikely to come.”

“My good mother,” said Wang the Third, “things have reached the crisis stage. Invite her here, and I will humble myself so far as to beg her pardon.”

Lady Lin then agreed to send Yung-ting on this errand, saying, “Go out the rear gate as quietly as possible, and invite Auntie Wen to come over here.”

Wang the Third implored her, again and again, saying, “Auntie Wen, if you are acquainted with the judicial commissioner, His Honor Hsi-men Ch’ing, pray use whatever influence you can to rescue me from this predicament.”

Auntie Wen deliberately made a specious show of emphasizing the difficulties involved, saying, “Although it is true that, in the past, it was I who proposed the betrothal of his daughter, it has been some years now since I have had any occasion to cross his threshold. When it comes to such prominent families, with their:

Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
I don’t venture to trouble them.”

Wang the Third hastily knelt down in front of her and said, “Auntie Wen:

You shall have an ample reward;⁴³

I will never dare to forget it.

That bunch of people up front are insisting that I appear in court. How can I afford to do that?”

Auntie Wen kept her eyes fixed on his mother, who eventually said, “You might as well see if you can intervene on his behalf.”

“There’s no point in my going by myself,” said Auntie Wen. “Third Master, you must put on formal attire and let me take you to visit His Honor Hsi-men Ch’ing’s house in person. If you will pay your respects to him and plead with him, while I speak up from the sidelines on your behalf, I guarantee that this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion.”

“Right now,” said Wang the Third, “that bunch of characters up front are pressing their demands most vociferously. If they should happen to catch sight of me, what would I do?”

“As for that problem,” said Auntie Wen:

“What’s the difficulty there?⁴⁴

Let me go out and see what I can do to placate them. If you will provide wine and meat, refreshments and tea, they can be beguiled into partaking of them, while I surreptitiously sneak you out by the rear gate, fulfill our mission, and return, without their having so much as an inkling of what we are about.”

Auntie Wen, thereupon, went out to the front reception room, bowed twice to the assembled group, and said, “The lady of the house has asked me to come out and respectfully explain to you gentlemen that the Third Master has really gone to their country estate and is not at home. She has sent someone to ask him to come back, and he should be here sometime soon if you will only consent to remain sitting here a little while longer. It’s a pity that your implication in this affair has resulted in your suffering such punishment and vituperation; and your feelings are just as understandable as the fact that:

We are all dependent on salt and rice.

When the Third Master returns, he will surely treat you with the consideration you deserve.

No matter how egregiously wrong a verdict may be,

The men deputed to carry it out are not to blame.⁴⁵

After all, the only thing everybody wants is to settle the matter amicably.

Since you are here under official orders,

You have no choice but to do as directed.⁴⁶

Once the Third Master appears, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion.”

At this, the group of them responded as with a single voice, saying, “It is Auntie Wen who truly understands the situation. If you had only come out earlier and spoken to us in such a reasonable way, we would not have become as agitated as all this. Instead, we were told, in the most obdurate terms, that he was not at home, as though they believed that this was merely a pickle that we had gotten ourselves into, when, in fact, it was he who was actually responsible for the fact that we were subjected to a judicial beating. Do you really think that when the authorities demand your appearance, you can merely pretend not to be at home, and continue:

Drinking wine or eating meat,

while getting others to suffer in your stead? Auntie Wen, you are amenable to reason. Since you’ve come out to speak to us, we can suggest a way of coping with the situation. All they need to do is spend some money to purchase a little favorable influence, and the matter can be settled to everyone’s satisfaction. If you had not come out to parley with us, the matter would certainly have had to be adjudicated. A yamen charged with penal investigations is not likely to drop the case for nothing.”

“What you gentlemen say makes sense,” responded Auntie Wen. “If you will remain sitting here a while longer, I’ll speak to the lady, and also have her provide some wine and refreshments for you. You’ve already been here for half a day and must be hungry.”

“It is only our Auntie Wen,” they said with one voice, “who really:

Understands man’s vicissitudes.⁴⁷

The truth of the matter is that ever since we were driven out of the yamen, we haven’t had so much as a taste of yellow soup.”

Auntie Wen then returned to the rear of the compound and saw to the purchase of two mace of silver’s worth of wine, and a mace of

silver's worth of other refreshments, including pork, lamb, and beef, which were duly chopped up to fill several large platters, and taken out to serve to them. Thus she succeeded in inveigling them into turning their attention to feasting upon these:

Unlimited quantities of meat and wine,
in the front reception room.

Meanwhile, Wang the Third put on his scholar's cap and robe, wrote out a message on a calling card, and, with Auntie Wen leading the way, donned his eye-shades, sneaked inconspicuously out the rear gate, and set out to walk to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.

When they arrived at the front gate, P'ing-an, who recognized Auntie Wen, said, "Father has been in the front reception hall, but has just gone inside. What does Auntie Wen wish to speak to him about?"

Auntie Wen handed him Wang the Third's calling card and said, "Brother, may I trouble you to report this gentleman's arrival."

Hastily turning to Wang the Third, she asked him for two mace of silver and handed it to P'ing-an. Only then did he consent to go inside and report the situation to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accordion-bound calling card, he saw that it read, "Your humble pupil Wang Ts'ai:

Presents his compliments with a hundred salutations."⁴⁸

He first called in Auntie Wen to interrogate her about the situation and then opened the latticed door to the great reception hall and sent a page boy to invite Wang the Third to come in. When the attendants in the great reception hall hastily lifted aside the portiere that was hanging over the door to keep in the heat, they revealed that Hsi-men Ch'ing, with a "loyal and tranquil hat" on his head, and dressed in informal garb, was coming out to receive him.

Upon seeing that Wang the Third was formally attired, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a point of saying, "Auntie Wen, why didn't you tell me beforehand? I'm here in my informal clothes."

He then turned to his attendants, saying, "Bring me my formal clothing."

This threw Wang the Third into such consternation that he stepped forward to stop him, exclaiming, "Distinguished elder, make yourself easy. Your humble junior has made bold to come and impose upon you. How could I presume to put you to any inconvenience?"

Upon entering the reception hall, Wang the Third made a point of asking Hsi-men Ch'ing to assume the position of honor so that he could kowtow to him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, saying with a smile, "This is my humble abode, after all."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then seized the initiative by paying the first reverence to his visitor.

"Your humble junior," said Wang the Third, "is guilty of a transgression. I have long been an admirer of yours but have failed to pay you my respects."

"Let us both dispense with further formalities," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Wang the Third, however, persisted in begging Hsi-men Ch'ing to accept his obeisance, saying, "As your humble junior, it is only appropriate that my venerable elder should accept my obeisance in order to atone for my failure to pay you my respects any earlier."

After an exchange of polite demurrals, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally permitted him to kowtow to him twice, after which he was offered a seat and sat down respectfully on the edge of his chair.

After a little while, tea was served, and Wang the Third saw that in Hsi-men Ch'ing's reception hall:

Brocaded standing screens were arrayed;

on the four walls were suspended scrolls depicting landscapes in golds and greens; the chairs were adorned with inlaid patterns and draped with green brocaded silk; while their seats were provided with sable cushions; and beneath them:

The entire floor was covered with rugs.⁴⁹

In the middle of the room there stood a four-cornered brazier of yellow brass, polished:

With a glitter that rivaled the sun's.

Under the plaque over the door was an inscription reading "Bestowed by Imperial Favor" in the distinctive calligraphy of Mi Fu.⁵⁰

Upon surveying these surroundings, Wang the Third appeared somewhat more composed, as he addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Your humble junior has a matter that he is reluctant to trouble Your Eminence with."

So saying, he reached into his sleeve to extract his written statement of the case and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, getting up from his seat in order to do so, and kneeling down in front of him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing reached out a hand to help him up, saying, "My worthy acquaintance, if you have something to say to me, there is no reason not to say it."

Wang the Third then said, "Your humble junior is devoid of talent and is genuinely guilty of an offense. It is my earnest hope that my venerable elder, out of consideration for the position of my late father as a high-ranking military official, will consent to be lenient toward your humble junior's ignorant offense. If you will but allow him to preserve his sense of shame by relieving him of the necessity to appear in court, you will spare your humble junior from imminent death and confer upon him the good fortune of a return to life. He will:

Carry rings and knot grass in order to repay you,⁵¹

And awaits your decision in fear and trepidation."⁵²

When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the document and observed that it contained the names of the five "cribbers," Trifler Chang and the rest, he said, "As for this bunch of 'bare sticks,' I have already dealt with them in the yamen today by punishing them severely and then letting them go. What business do they have trying to put the bite on you?"

"They are demanding that I do thus and so," said Wang the Third. "They claim that my venerable elder, after presiding over their

punishment in the yamen, drove them out with the promise that your humble junior would also be required to appear in court. They have chosen to camp out in my home, where they are swearing oaths and raising a ruckus, and demanding monetary compensation, so that:

Peaceful existence is utterly impossible.⁵³

Having no other recourse, I have come to my venerable elder's home to acknowledge my guilt."

So saying, he also handed over his list of proposed gifts.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw it, he said, "Whoever heard of such a thing?"

He then went on to say, "This bunch of 'bare sticks' are truly detestable. I actually let them off, so what business do they have going anywhere else to make trouble?"

Giving the list of proposed gifts back to Wang the Third, he continued, "My worthy acquaintance, please return home. I won't keep you any longer. Right now, I will dispatch people forthwith to arrest this bunch of 'bare sticks,' and, in days to come, I am prepared to put myself at your disposal."

"How could I presume upon such a thing?" responded Wang the Third. "Since my venerable elder has seen fit not to reject my request, I will be sure to return to your door in the future in order to express my humble thanks."

So saying, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

he started out the door.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off as far as the second gate before saying, "Since I am wearing my informal clothes, it would not be appropriate for me to escort you any further."

Wang the Third continued out through the main gate, put his eye-shades back on, and went his way, accompanied by a page boy, while Auntie Wen requested a further word with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Don't do anything to alarm them," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed her. "I will dispatch people to arrest them right away."

Auntie Wen caught up with Wang the Third, and the two of them made their way surreptitiously back into the house.

Unbeknownst to them, Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly dispatched an adjutant and four orderlies, who marched straight into Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence, where they found the bunch of 'bare sticks' drinking wine and raising a ruckus as before. When these functionaries barged in and:

Without permitting any further explanation,
proceeded to arrest them, and put them in handcuffs, they were so frightened:

Their complexions turned the color of dirt.⁵⁴

"Wang the Third has played a nice trick on us," they objected. "He induced us to stay put in his house, while reversing the angle of the hoe and turning us over like the clods that we are."

The orderlies and the adjutant took them to task, saying, "You characters had better stop talking such nonsense. What good will it do you? Each of you should be preparing to plead for his life in front of His Honor. That would be more like it."

"What you gentlemen suggest is correct," responded Trifler Chang.

Before long, they were all escorted under guard to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, where the orderlies at the gate, and P'ing-an as well, all stuck out their hands and demanded a bribe before they would go inside and announce their arrival. The bunch of them had no recourse but to divest themselves of their jackets, or take the hairnet rings off their heads, to comply with these demands, before they were directed to proceed inside. After what seemed like half a day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out and seated himself in the reception hall as though he were presiding over a court of law, while the adjutant ushered the culprits in and directed them to kneel at the foot of the hall.

Hsi-men Ch'ing upbraided them, saying, "What am I to do with you bunch of 'bare sticks'? I treated you leniently, after all, so what business did you have claiming to speak for my yamen, and going to his home in the attempt to extort money from him? Tell me the truth. Just how much money did you manage to extort? If you don't tell me, I'll order my attendants to put the squeezers on you and give you a real squeezing."

He had no sooner uttered these words than the orderlies in attendance promptly brought out five or six sets of brand new squeezers and stood ready to apply them.

Trifler Chang and the rest of them had no recourse but to kowtow to him in their abased position and plead with him, saying, "Your humble servants did not extort so much as a candareen in the way of compensation from anybody. All we did was to relate the fact that we had been driven out of the yamen, and request the opportunity to explain the situation to him. His household even provided wine and food for our entertainment. We never attempted to extort anything from him."

"You never should have gone to his home in the first place," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You bunch of 'bare sticks' make it your business to take advantage of young men of good family and always have your hands out for whatever you can get out of them. Such conduct is truly reprehensible. As long as you won't confess the truth, I'll have you taken to the yamen and incarcerated there. Tomorrow, I'll subject you to a severe interrogation, obtain your confessions, and sentence you to public exposure in the cangue."

The group of them, as one man, pled for mercy as they wept, saying, "Your Heavenly Honor, save our lives, we pray. Your humble servants will never presume to approach his door again in order to make trouble for him. Not to mention public exposure, to imprison us in these cold winter months is tantamount to a death sentence."

"What am I to do with you 'bare sticks'?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I tell you that if I let you go, I expect you to:

Cleanse your hearts and correct your faults,
devoting yourselves to making an honest living. You must cease:

Colluding with the bordellos in the quarter,
to lead young men astray and cheat them out of their possessions. If you are ever haled before my yamen again, I will have you all beaten to death."

He then shouted, "Get out of here," and the bunch of them, feeling lucky to have escaped with their lives, flew outside as fast as they could go. Truly:

Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having thus disposed of the bunch of them, returned to the rear compound, where Yüeh-niang asked him, "Was this something to do with Wang the Third?"

"It does indeed have to do with the third son of Imperial Commissioner Wang," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the same one who was responsible for that fix that Li Kuei-chieh got herself into some time ago. And today, that lousy little whore has not changed her ways but has taken up with him again. He has been maintaining her as his mistress for a fee of thirty taels of silver a month. No wonder she has been hoodwinking me all this time. But what she did not anticipate was that there was an insider involved who explained the situation to me, so that, yesterday, I dispatched some minions to apprehend this bunch of scamps and bring them before me in the yamen, where I had them put in the squeezers and subjected to a beating. But who could have anticipated that this bunch of scamps would go to his home and kick up a fuss in the hope of shaking him down for a few taels of silver? Fearing that his presence would be demanded in the yamen, and never having appeared in court before, he was thrown into such consternation that he importuned Auntie Wen into coming with a written offer of fifty taels of silver if I would intervene on his behalf. Just now, I had these characters brought back before me here and bombarded them with enough in the way of empty threats to keep them from bothering him anymore.

"His family is unfortunate to have spawned such an unworthy young man. Your ancestors established a firm foundation for the household, serving as imperial commissioners, and you are currently enrolled in the Military School, but you have chosen not to pursue the opportunities for success that are yours for the asking. You deliberately neglect the wife you have at home, though she is as pretty as a sprig of blossoms, the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'ên in the Eastern Capital, paying her no heed, while, day and night, you choose instead to tag along after this bunch of 'bare sticks,' giving yourself over to debauchery in the licensed quarter. He has even gone so far as to pawn his wife's jewelry when in need of spending money. This year, he is no more than twenty years old, still only a youngster, but he will never amount to anything."

Yüeh-niang responded, "Why don't you:

Piddle a bladderful of piss, and
Take a look at your own reflection?

You're like:

A raven scoffing at the blackness of a pig.⁵⁵

Truly:

The lampstand casts no light upon itself.⁵⁶

You may well think you have the capacity to amount to something yourself, but:

You too have drunk water from that well.
There's nothing you won't do.

What's so pure about your own conduct that you should have the right to criticize the conduct of others?"

With these few words she managed to reduce Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence.

Just as their meal was being served to them, the page boy Lai-an came in and reported, "Master Ying the Second is here."

"Ask him to have a seat in the studio," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be right there."

Wang Ching promptly proceeded to open the door to the studio by the front reception hall, and Ying Po-chüeh went inside and sat down on a chair beside the heated k'ang. Sometime later, Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside, exchanged salutations with him, and then sat down on the k'ang so the two of them could have a chat together.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how is it that, the day before yesterday, when we were at Hsieh Hsi-ta's place, you got up to go so early?"

"I had to get an early start the following day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've been busy at the yamen for days on end. Moreover, since I am subject to an impending merit evaluation, I have had to send someone to the Eastern Capital to see if he could pick up any news of the outcome. I am scarcely to be compared with the likes of you who have nothing else to do."

"Brother," continued Ying Po-chüeh, "have you really been tied up at the yamen for days on end?"

"Not a day goes by without something to keep me busy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Wang the Third tells me," went on Ying Po-chüeh, "that you dispatched people from the yamen on the evening of the tenth and arrested Trifler Chang and company, all five of them, at Li Kuei-chieh's place, allowing only Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu to escape. This morning, moreover, you had them brought before you at the yamen and subjected them to a beating before throwing them out. The bunch of them have all subsequently gone to the residence of Imperial Commissioner Wang. Why have you kept me in

the dark and failed to tell me about it?"

"You silly dog!" expostulated Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever told you such a thing? You must have heard incorrectly. It wasn't my yamen, but it may have been the office of Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command."

"The office of the Regional Military Command," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "would hardly concern itself with such trivial matters."

"I fear then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it must have been someone from the district yamen who arrested them."

"That's not the case," said Ying Po-chüeh. "This morning, Li Ming told me that the members of their whole establishment were scared out of their wits, and that Li Kuei-chieh was so frightened that she took to her bed and hasn't gotten up and about for the last two days, simply keeping to her k'ang. They feared that, once again, it was men who had been sent down from the Eastern Capital to make the arrests. Only this morning, upon making inquiries, did they discover that it was the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission that had ordered the arrests."

"I haven't really been to the yamen the last few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and don't know anything about it. I've sworn an oath not to have anything further to do with Li Kuei-chieh, so what do I care if she has chosen to get herself into a predicament that scares her into taking to her bed?"

Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing's face was puffed out as though he were trying to contain a laugh and said, "Brother, what sort of a person are you, that you should even try to pull the wool over my eyes, and keep me in the dark? Since Li Ming told me about things today, I understand what you're up to in letting Pockmarked Chu and Blabbermouth Sun off the hook. After all, a judicial yamen like yours is unlikely to let people escape so easily. This is a case of your contriving things so that:

When the sheep is beaten, the colt and donkey tremble.

You just wanted to put the fear of God into Li Kuei-chieh's outfit so they would be reminded of what you're capable of. If you had dragged everyone involved into the yamen, you would have ruptured your relationships with them and created a lot of bad feelings.

Although you have taken the first step,

You are not obliged to take the second,

and, as a result, right now, when Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu run into you, they are bound to feel somewhat discomfited. This scheme of yours is an instance of:

Conspicuously repairing the cliffside roadways,

While surreptitiously emerging at Ch'en-ts'ang.⁵⁷

I trust you will not take offense, Brother, if I say that this is a brilliant ploy on your part. As the saying goes:

A Perfected Being does not reveal himself as such;

Were he to do so, he would not be a Perfected Being.⁵⁸

If you were openly to play a trick of this kind, you would reveal your true colors and not be the clever character that you are. Brother, you are truly a master strategist and a man of capacious vision."

On hearing these few words, Hsi-men Ch'ing broke out laughing and said, "Since when am I any master strategist?"

"My guess would be," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that there certainly must have been some insider who told you the whole story. If not, how could you ever have ascertained the facts so accurately, or been able to employ such:

Devices beyond the ken of ghosts or spirits?"⁵⁹

"You silly dog!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The best way to avoid being found out,

Is not to do it in the first place."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "at present, you would be well advised not to demand Wang the Third's appearance in court, that's all."

"Who is demanding that he do any such thing?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Originally, when the functionaries presented the bill of particulars about the case, I personally struck out the names of Wang the Third, Pockmarked Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun, as well as those of Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih, ordering them only to arrest that bunch of 'bare sticks.'"

"So why are they still bothering him right now?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"The truth of the matter is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that they expected to be able to extort a few taels of silver out of him. How could they have anticipated that, just now, he would personally come to pay me a visit, kowtow to me, and offer an apology for his misbehavior? I consequently sent people to round up those 'bare sticks' and threatened to sentence them to public exposure in the cangue, whereupon they all pled for mercy and repeatedly promised that they would never dare make demands upon him again. Wang the Third, for his part, addressing me again and again as his venerable elder, presented me with a gift card offering me fifty taels of silver. I refused to accept anything from him, but he promised that he would invite me to his place sometime soon in order to express his gratitude."

"Really, he actually came to your place to apologize for his misbehavior?" asked Ying Po-chüeh in astonishment.

"Surely you don't suggest that I would deceive you," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, who then called for Wang Ching and told him, "Go fetch that calling card from Wang the Third and show it to Master Ying the Second."

Wang Ching went back to the master suite and brought out the calling card, which read, "Your humble pupil Wang Ts'ai:

Presents his compliments with a hundred salutations."

When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, all he could do was to exclaim:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,

“Brother, your schemes are:

Both marvelous and inscrutable.”

“If you run into any of them,” Hsi-men Ch’ing admonished Ying Po-chüeh, “don’t reveal the fact that I had any prior knowledge of the situation.”

“I understand,” said Ying Po-chüeh:

“The secret must not be disclosed.

How could I presume to say anything about it?”

After they had visited together for a while, and consumed a serving of tea, Ying Po-chüeh said, “Brother, I’d better be on my way. If, by any chance, Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu should find their way here, don’t tell them that I’ve been to see you.”

“If they should come here,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I won’t even receive them, but have the servants report that I’m not at home.”

He then called in the people responsible for the front gate and told them, “If either of those persons should show up, simply report that I am not at home.”

From this time on, Hsi-men Ch’ing refused to have anything more to do with Li Kuei-chieh and, when entertaining at home, no longer engaged Li Ming to sing for the company, so his relations with the Li Family Establishment became cool. Truly:

After last night’s rainfall along the

Flower-washing Stream;⁶⁰

The green willows and fragrant verdure⁶¹

remain for whom to see?⁶²

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Who is able to visit the T’ien-t’ai Mountains

in pursuit of immortal maidens?⁶³

The Three Isles of the Blest remain invisible,

hidden amid the waves of the sea.⁶⁴

To vanish inside a nobleman’s gates is to be

as unreachable as the ocean depths;

From this point on, one’s lover might as well

be a stranger along the highway.⁶⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 70

HSI-MEN CH'ING'S SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS PROCURE HIM A PROMOTION; ASSEMBLED OFFICIALS REPORT BEFORE DEFENDER-IN-CHIEF CHU MIEN

Last night, carried by the west wind,
drums and bugles resounded;
At daybreak, in the bitter chill, one
shivers under the cold felt.
Wrapped in impenetrable mist, the ground
appears entirely invisible;
Spreading vastly in all four directions,
all one can see is the sky.
Fancy accommodations, under such desolate
conditions, are not available;
Even the hero Li Kuang was forced to tarry
at the Pa-ling relay station.¹
My patron, a virtual embodiment of Spring,²
dispenses oceanlike favors;
May he set aside some of his residual warmth
to bestow upon this sojourner.

THE STORY GOES that, from this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing broke off relations with Li Kuei-chieh. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when the courier arrived at Judicial Commissioner Lin Ch'eng-hsün's place in Huai-ch'ing prefecture to inquire about the news, the commissioner gave him a sealed copy of the announcement of official promotions in the government gazette and rewarded him with five taels of silver. The courier set out on his return journey that very night and, upon arriving home, turned over the sealed material to the two judicial commissioners.

In the reception hall of the yamen, Hsia Yen-ling opened the envelope and, together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, perused the formal notification of the results of the merit evaluation for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the relevant parts of which read as follows:

Memorial from the Ministry of War

In re: The Strict Merit Evaluation of the Members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, as Ordained by Explicit Imperial Command, in Order to Clarify the Grounds of Motivation and Discipline, and Glorify Your Majesty's Sage Administration

Submitted by Chu Mien, Defender-in-Chief in Charge of all the Officers and Staff of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, and Concurrently Grand Guardian, and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent

With regard to the above-mentioned evaluation of the officers of the Imperial Guard, this senior official will submit a report on his own conduct. As for the remainder, including the two divisions of detectives attached to the Imperial Prison under the jurisdiction of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and the investigators, inspectors, and surveillance commissioners attached thereto, the director of the horse pasturages of the imperial domain and the inner and outer Capital Surveillance Commissions, as well as the battalion and company commanders serving under them, and the judges of the military guards, etc., they have all been classified on the basis of the dossiers that indicate whether their posts are hereditary, due to routine promotion, promotion for merit, privilege, or purchase. On the basis of their seniority and qualifications, they have all been fairly evaluated as to their worthiness, or lack thereof, and the results are hereby reported to Your Majesty with the request that they be sent to the appropriate board for further discussion as to the appropriate promotions, demotions, transfers, or dismissals.

This memorial elicited an imperial rescript that read as follows:

Upon being returned to the Ministry of War, let this memorial be:

Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.

A copy of this edict was duly received by the Office of Scrutiny, and transmitted to the above ministry. Upon its perusal by the Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, in accordance with established precedent, the said official proceeded to do everything in his power to demonstrate his loyalty by conducting an impartial evaluation. It is his responsibility to determine the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the military officials subordinate to him, whether serving in or outside the capital, on the basis of their dossiers and public opinion, while ensuring that the reports he has received on them are both honest and without prejudice. By so doing, the said official exhibits his awareness of his proximity to the imperial presence, on the one hand, and his loyal concern for the welfare of the state, on the other. It goes without saying that differentiating into categories those who deserve encouragement, while distinguishing between the worthy and the unworthy in an orderly manner,³ provides motivation for human ambition and accords with the public's sense of justice. But magnanimity and severity, rewards and punishments, are the prerogative of Your Majesty and, upon receipt of Your mandate, will be meted out in accordance with precedent. It is to be hoped that, if the evaluations are cogent, they will command general assent, and if redundant posts are eliminated, bureaucratic discipline will be enhanced.

The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read:

Let this memorial be respectfully received and the recommendations therein be enacted as proposed.

The relevant parts of the evaluation read as follows:

As for the judicial commissioner of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, and concurrently battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Hsia Yen-ling, his qualifications and reputation are long-standing, and his talent and experience are well established. In the past, when in charge of herds in the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, the area of his jurisdiction was tranquil; and now that he presides over judicial matters in Shantung, his reputation for effective government is outstanding. It is appropriate that his ambitions should be encouraged by promotion to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions.

As for the assistant judicial commissioner, and concurrently battalion vice-commander, Hsi-men Ch'ing, his abilities and initiative have long been acknowledged to be exceptional. Since his family

is affluent, he has not been acquisitive in office. He is diligent and industrious in his support of the national interest, and his censorial work has been meritorious. In facilitating the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys he has scrupulously avoided any peculation. For his administration of the laws he is universally admired by the people of Shantung. It is appropriate that he be promoted to the post of full commissioner in order to preside over the judicial system.

As for the commissioner of the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Lin Ch'eng-hsün, having been an assiduous student in his youth, he has won a place in the military recruitment examinations, entitling him to succeed to a hereditary office. He is a man of no ordinary ambition, who is meticulous in performing his judicial functions. It is appropriate that he be encouraged by selection for a higher position.

As for the assistant judicial commissioner and battalion vice commander Hsieh En, he exhibits the effects of old age and is inconsistent in the way he dispenses lenience and severity. Previously, when he served in the ranks, his performance was respectable enough, but since he has occupied a judicial office, his incapacity for the position has become increasingly evident. It is appropriate that he be cashiered and dismissed from office.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was to be promoted to the post of full judicial commissioner:

His heart was filled with great joy;⁴

but when Hsia Yen-ling saw that he was to be promoted to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions, he had nothing to say for what seemed like half a day, and:

The color drained out of his visage.⁵

They then opened and read the enclosed copy of a memorial from the Ministry of Works, submitted upon the completion of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys, that read as follows:

Memorial from the Ministry of Works

In re: The Arrival in the Capital of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys Is an Occasion for Celestial and Human Celebration. We Urgently Request a Demonstration of Your Majesty's Benevolence in Deigning to Bestow the Appropriate Rewards, in Order to Relieve the Distress of the Masses,⁶ While Broadening the Scope of Your Sage Magnanimity

The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read:

These Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys, which are intended to supply the needs of the Forbidden City, and facilitate the completion of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, have been carried out at Our behest, and enhanced Our gratification. You have exerted your efforts to assist Us in Our pursuit of the ultimate goal of serving the school of the Mysterious Origin.

In the localities through which the Flower and Rock Convoys passed, it is acknowledged that the common people have been made to suffer privation. It is hereby ordered that the offices of the grand coordinators and regional investigating censors should clearly investigate the facts⁷ and remit one-half of the annual land taxes due this year from the affected regions. As for the embankments and dikes that have been destroyed, your ministry must send officials to join with the grand coordinators and censors in having them repaired forthwith. When this work is completed, we will depute the palace attendant Meng Ch'ang-ling⁸ to go to the areas in question and offer a sacrifice on Our behalf.

Ts'ai Ching, Li Pang-yen, Wang Wei,⁹ Cheng Chü-chung,¹⁰ and Kao Ch'iu, who lend their support to Our Person by serving in the Inner Court, have all been distinguished for their meritorious efforts in facilitating this undertaking. Let Ts'ai Ching be granted the title of grand preceptor, Li Pang-yen be granted the titles of pillar of state and grand preceptor of the heir apparent, Wang Wei be granted the title of grand mentor, and Cheng Chü-chung and Kao Ch'iu be granted the title of grand guardian; and let each of them be rewarded with fifty taels of silver and enough fabric to supply both exterior and lining for four sets of clothing. Let Ts'ai Yu also be granted the privilege of having his son, Ts'ai Hsing,¹¹ appointed as director of the Palace Administration.

The preceptor of state, Lin Ling-su,¹² clearly understands what We are hoping to accomplish by protecting the realm, proclaiming the means of transformation, conveying the Divine Shipments from a distance, and launching a northern expedition against the barbarian invaders, all of which things are truly undertaken with divine sanction. Let him be awarded the additional rank of Earl of Loyalty and Filiality, with an annual stipend of a thousand piculs of grain, be presented with a dragon robe featuring a roundel with the motif of a full-face coiled dragon,¹³ be granted the privilege of riding into the palace in a sedan chair, and be rewarded further with the titles the Supreme Patriarch of the Jade Perfected,¹⁴ the Perfect Man of Profound Lucidity, Mysterious Subtlety, and Broad Virtue, the Feathered Sojourner from the Golden Portal,¹⁵ and the Master of Penetrating Perfection, Realized Numinousness, and Mysterious Subtlety.¹⁶

Chu Mien and Huang Ching-ch'en have shown commendable loyalty and diligence in supervising the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys. Let Chu Mien be granted the additional titles of grand mentor and grand mentor of the heir apparent, and Huang Ching-ch'en be granted the title of defender-in-chief of the Palace Command and put in charge of the Supervisorate of Palace Transport. Let each of them also be granted the privilege of having one son appointed battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard.

Let the palace attendants Li Yen, Meng Ch'ang-ling, Chia Hsiang, Ho Hsin, and Lan Ts'ung-hsi¹⁷ be granted the title of the Five Court Attendants of the Yen-fu Palace.¹⁸ Let them each be presented with a python robe and a jade girdle, and be granted the privilege of having one younger brother or nephew appointed to the substantive post of battalion vice commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard.

Let the minister of rites Chang Pang-ch'ang,¹⁹ the left vice minister of rites and academician Ts'ai Yu, the right vice minister of rites Pai Shih-chung,²⁰ the minister of war Yü Shen, and the minister of works Lin Shu²¹ all be granted the title of grand guardian of the heir apparent, and let each of them be further rewarded with forty taels of silver and enough variegated satin to supply both exterior and lining for two sets of clothing.

Let the grand coordinator of Liang-Che, and concurrently assistant censor-in-chief, Chang Ko,²² be promoted to the post of right vice minister of the Ministry of Works. Let the grand coordinator of Shantung, and concurrently censor-in-chief, Hou Meng be promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Let the regional investigating censors of Liang-Che and Shantung, Yin Taliang²³ and Sung Ch'iao-nien, as well as the secretaries of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, An Ch'en and Wu Hsün, each be promoted one class in rank, and be rewarded with twenty taels of silver.

Let the battalion commanders who facilitated the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys Wei Ch'eng-hsün, Hsü Hsiang, Yang T'ing-p'ei, Ssu Feng-i, Chao Yu-lan, Fu T'ien-tse, Hsi-men Ch'ing, T'ien Chiu-kao, etc., each be promoted one class in rank.

Let the palace attendants Sung T'ui, etc., and the commanders of training divisions Wang Yu, etc., be rewarded with ten taels of silver; the battalion officers Hsüeh Hsien-chung, etc., be rewarded with five taels of silver; and the commandants Ch'ang Yü, etc., be rewarded with two lengths of silk.

Let these orders be directed to the attention of the appropriate offices.

When Hsia Yen-ling and Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading these documents, they left the yamen and returned home.

That afternoon, Wang the Third sent Yung-ting and Auntie Wen to deliver a letter box containing a gold-flecked accordion-bound invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing, inviting him to a dinner party in his mansion on the eleventh day of the month as a meager expression of gratitude for the favor he had shown him. Upon receiving this missive, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Unable to contain his delight,

and assumed that it would not be long before Wang the Third's wife fell into his hands.

Who could have anticipated, however, that on the evening of the tenth a formal notification arrived from the Registry Office of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital, that read:

For the information of the judicial officers of all the provinces.

You must proceed to the capital as quickly as possible in order to arrive in time to present your memorials of gratitude to the throne at an audience on the Winter Solstice.

This order is not to be disobeyed, or

You will suffer for your culpability.²⁴

After having read this, the next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen and, together with Hsia Yen-ling, wrote acknowledgments in accordion-bound albums and sent them off with the courier. But no more of this.

Each of them then returned to their homes, got together their luggage, prepared the customary presentation gifts, and arranged with each other to set out without delay.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to summon Auntie Wen and told her to inform Wang the Third that he would be unable to make it to the dinner party to which he had been invited on the eleventh, because, thus and so, he had to go to the capital to attend an audience and express his gratitude to the throne.

Upon hearing this, Wang the Third said, "If my venerable elder has business to attend to, I will be happy to wait until his return before extending another invitation with the utmost sincerity."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then summoned Pen the Fourth, told him that he wanted him to accompany him on the trip, and gave him five taels of silver to cover his household expenses while he was away. He left Ch'un-hung behind to look after the household but took Tai-an and Wang Ching with him to attend to his needs on the road. He also borrowed four police officers and four ponies from Commandant Chou Hsiu, saw that the luggage was properly packed up, and arranged for a closed sedan chair, a horse, and orderlies to carry the sedan chair. Hsia Yen-ling, for his part, was accompanied by his servant Hsia Shou. The two officials, between them, had an entourage of more than twenty persons.

They set out from Ch'ing-ho district on the twelfth day of the month.

It was winter when the days are short, and

They traveled both by day and by night.

When they reached Huai-ch'ing prefecture in Huai-hsi and called upon Battalion Commander Lin Ch'eng-hsün, they found that he had already departed for the Eastern Capital. Along the way:

When cold, they sat in their sedan chairs;

When warm, they made their way on horseback.

Each morning they tramped the purple road and red dust;²⁵

Every evening they stayed in relay stations or in inns.

Truly:

When thoughts are pressing one wants to wave
the blue-felt banner;

When the mind is eager one beats to tatters
the purple-cord whip.

To make a long story short, when they arrived in the Eastern Capital and entered by way of the Myriad Years Gate, Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to separate, intending to go stay at the Hsiang-kuo Temple, or Temple of the Protector of the State,²⁶ but Hsia Yen-ling would not agree, insisting that he come and stay with his relative, Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü. Hsi-men Ch'ing thus felt constrained to prepare a calling card and send it ahead for presentation to his prospective host.

When they arrived, Privy Councilor Ts'ui was at home and came out to greet them. After they had entered the reception hall and exchanged the customary amenities of introduction, commented on the weather, and expressed:

The sentiments they had felt while apart,
they dusted themselves off and sat down for a serving of tea, whereupon their host saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with clasped hands and asked him for his distinguished courtesy name.

"My courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then went on to inquire, "May I ask your distinguished courtesy name, venerable sir?"

Privy Councilor Ts'ui replied, "Your pupil is unsophisticated by nature and lives in idle seclusion. My humble name is Shou-yü, and my courtesy name is Hsün-chai, or Unassuming Studio."

He then went on to say, "My relative, Hsia Yen-ling, has long sung the praises of your surpassing virtue and acknowledged his dependence on your support. Your single-minded cooperation could not have been more generous."

"I am hardly deserving of such praise," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I have constantly benefitted from his instruction. And now that he has been elevated to a senior position in the capital, his opportunities for further advancement can only be enhanced. He is to be congratulated! He is to be congratulated!"

"How can you say such a thing?" exclaimed Hsia Yen-ling.

"Though one may possess the tools for the task,

It is better to wait for the times to be right."²⁷

"What Ssu-ch'üan says is quite right," opined Privy Councilor Ts'ui. "Your status being what it is, it cannot be otherwise."

At the conclusion of this conversational exchange they all laughed. It was not long before their luggage was stored away, and as evening fell, Privy Councilor Ts'ui ordered his servants to set up a table and provide them with something to eat. Needless to say, the fare consisted of fruits, wine, seasonal delicacies, and the like, but there is no need to describe this in detail. That night, the two of them slept in Privy Councilor Ts'ui's home. But no more of this.

Early the next morning, they each got ready their gifts and calling cards and set off, accompanied by their attendants, to pay their respects at the mansion of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. That day the grand preceptor had not yet returned from the Secretariat. The officials and functionaries who had assembled in front of the mansion were like:

Swarming bees and gathering ants,²⁸

Jammed together into an indivisible mass.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling persuaded the functionaries in charge of the gate to take their calling cards inside by presenting them with two packets of silver.

When Majordomo Chai Ch'ien saw their cards, he came out to greet them and invited them into his private residence at the front of the mansion. Hsia Yen-ling began by introducing himself, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chai Ch'ien exchanged the customary amenities and alluded to the correspondence between them that had occurred since their last meeting. Only then did they sit down in the positions appropriate for host and guests.

Hsia Yen-ling was the first to present his list of gifts, which consisted of two bolts of cloud-crane brocade and two bolts of variegated satin for the grand preceptor, along with ten taels of silver for Chai Ch'ien. Hsi-men Ch'ing's list of presents for the grand preceptor consisted of a crimson variegated python robe, a jet, figured, round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured a *tou-niu*²⁹ design, and two bolts of capital brocade. His personal gifts to Chai Ch'ien consisted of a bolt of black velvet decorated with a cloud pattern in green thread, and thirty taels of silver. Chai Ch'ien ordered his attendants to take the gifts for the grand preceptor into the mansion and see that they were properly registered. The only item that he agreed to accept for himself was the bolt of cloud-patterned velvet presented by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He refused to accept the thirty taels of silver from Hsi-men Ch'ing and the ten taels of silver from Hsia Yen-ling, saying, "Whoever heard of such a thing? Were I to do so, it would violate the feeling of intimacy between us."

He then ordered his attendants to set up a table and serve them a meal, saying, "Today His Majesty is dedicating the plaques to be installed in the newly completed Mount Ken Imperial Park, and His Honor has gone out to the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity³⁰ in order to preside over the sacrifices. The ceremony will not be over until this afternoon, and, when he gets home, he plans to go with His Honor Li Pang-yen to attend a party at the home of the distaff relative of the imperial family, Cheng Chü-chung. I fear that if my kinsman and Judicial Commissioner Hsia wait for him, it will only interfere with your other activities. Whenever His Honor happens to be free, I will undertake to inform him of your presence. It's all the same, one way or the other."

"We are grateful for my kinsman's efforts on our behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you do that, it will be fine by us."

Chai Ch'ien went on to ask, "Where is my kinsman staying?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained that they were staying in the home of Hsia Yen-ling's relative, Ts'ui Shou-yü.

It was not long before a table was formally set up, and soup, rice, and assorted delicacies were simultaneously served up in:

Large platters and large bowls.

These were all delicious fried and roasted specialties prepared by the Court of Imperial Entertainments:

Than which there were no finer.

After they had each consumed three cups of wine, served in golden goblets, they were prepared to say their farewells and get up to go, but Chai Ch'ien endeavored to retain them a little longer and ordered his attendants to pour another serving of wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then inquired, "Kinsman, when are we scheduled to appear at the imperial audience?"

"Kinsman," replied Chai Ch'ien, "your case differs from that of His Honor Hsia. His Honor is now a senior official serving in the capital, and his case falls into a different category. You will appear at the audience together with the newly appointed assistant battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the nephew of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, Ho Yung-shou. He will take your place as assistant judicial commissioner, since you are now the chief commissioner, so the two of you will be colleagues. He has already presented his memorial of gratitude, so, as soon as you have appeared at an audience and presented your memorial, the two of you can go together to receive your orders of appointment. You might as well arrange to do everything in concert with him."

When Hsia Yen-ling heard this, he did not have a single word to say.

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Kinsman, let me ask you, since you are knowledgeable about such things, how would it be if I were to wait until after the Emperor has returned from performing the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice to attend an audience?"

"Kinsman," responded Chai Ch'ien, "you ought not to wait that long. On the day of the winter solstice, when His Majesty has returned from performing the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, and the officials from the entire empire have offered their congratulatory memorials, a banquet will be held to celebrate the completion of the ceremony. Are you willing to wait until after that? The best thing for you to do is to go and report your name to the Court of State Ceremonial today, and then submit your individual memorial of gratitude to the throne at the early audience tomorrow morning. Then, on the day of the winter solstice, after Chu Mien, the senior official of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, has led the officials under his jurisdiction in submitting a joint memorial of gratitude to the throne, you can collect your orders of appointment and set out for home."

Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed his gratitude, saying, "I thank my kinsman for his advice.

What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"

When they were on the verge of departure, Chai Ch'ien took Hsi-men Ch'ing aside to have a word with him in private and reproached him severely, saying, "In the letter that I sent you a while ago, I insisted that the matter of your impending promotion should be kept strictly confidential and not be divulged to any of your colleagues. How is it then that my kinsman spoke of it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, with the result that he solicited a note from Perfect Man Lin Ling-su, bringing pressure to bear on Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien? The defender-in-chief then took the matter up with His Honor the grand preceptor, telling him that Hsia Yen-ling did not wish to be transferred to the capital as commander of the escort for imperial processions and preferred to remain in his current post as judicial commissioner for another three years. Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, who also serves in the Inner Court, in his turn, sought the aid of Consort An, née Liu,³¹ the favorite of the Emperor, in seeing that an order was issued appointing his nephew, Ho Yung-shou, to replace you as assistant judicial commissioner in Shantung, and personally spoke to the grand preceptor and Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien about it. Thus, the favors sought on the two sides were in direct conflict with each other, and His Honor was put in an extremely difficult position. If I had not been able to insistently maintain your interest before His Honor, so that he ended by turning down Perfect Man Lin Ling-su's request, my kinsman might well have been pushed aside."

This speech had the effect of throwing Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hastily performed an obeisance to Chai Ch'ien, saying, "I am profoundly indebted to my kinsman for his magnanimity. But I didn't speak to anyone about this matter. As for the gentleman in question, how could he ever have learned of it?"

Chai Ch'ien responded, "It has always been true that:

If critical matters are not kept secret
harm will result.³²

In the future, I trust that my kinsman will be more discreet about things. That's all."

At this point, Hsi-men Ch'ing, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

rejoined Hsia Yen-ling, and, after saying farewell, they made their departure. Upon arriving back at the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Pen the Fourth to report his name to the Court of State Ceremonial.

The next day, he and Hsia Yen-ling both went into the palace to attend the audience, dressed in their black gowns and official caps and girdles. Who could have anticipated that as they were coming out through the main gate to the palace after submitting their memorials of gratitude to the throne and were walking past the gate tower on the west, what should they see but a black-clad lictor who came forward and asked, "Which of you is His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, the judicial commissioner of Shantung?"

Pen the Fourth asked him, "Who have you come from?"

"I come from Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury," he replied, "who would like to have a word with His Honor."

Before he had even finished speaking, what should they see but a eunuch director, dressed in a crimson python robe, with a "three mountain hat"³³ on his head, and white-soled black boots on his feet, who approached them from the imperial roadway, and called out in an assertive voice, saying, "I would like to issue an invitation to His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing."

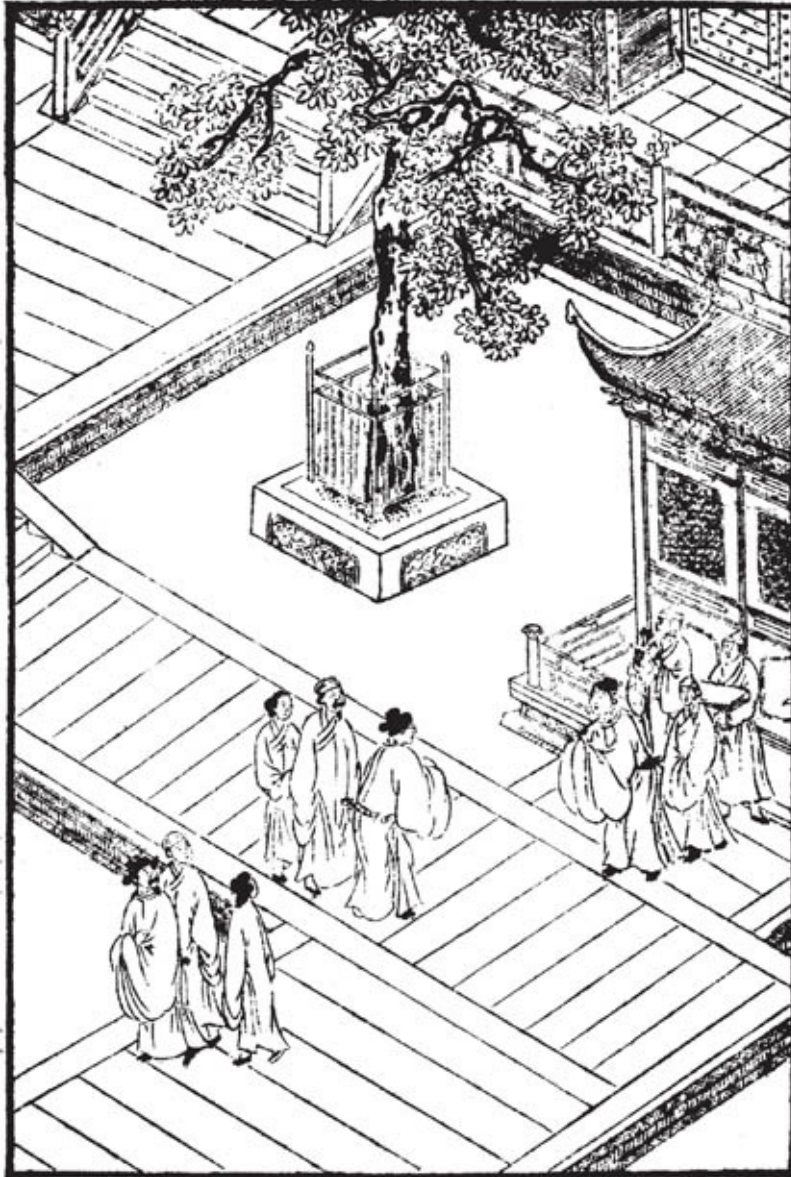
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, parted company with Hsia Yen-ling and allowed himself to be conducted into an orderly room for the use of officers on duty that was located nearby. It was fitted with clear windows and translucent latticework, the fire in the brazier inside made it comfortably warm, and the table was laden with partitioned boxes for the serving of assorted delicacies. When they confronted each other inside, the eunuch saluted him with a bow, and Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to bend his back and return the compliment.

The eunuch then said, "Your Honor doesn't know me, but I am Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury and serve as an attendant in the fourth building of the Yen-ning Palace, the residence of Consort Tuan, née Feng.³⁴ The other day, when the palace construction was completed, the Lord of Ten Thousand Years rewarded me by appointing my nephew, Ho Yung-shou, to the position of battalion vice-commander in the Left Guard of the Embroidered Uniform Guard unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, so he will serve as assistant judicial commissioner in your jurisdiction and will be a colleague of yours."

"So you are the venerable Eunuch Director Ho Hsin," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I did not recognize you. Forgive me. Forgive me."

He then bowed to him again and said, "In these precincts of the Forbidden City I cannot presume to make a proper obeisance to you. Permit me to call upon you in your private residence someday soon and pay my respects."

Thereupon, the customary amenities having been performed, his host offered him a seat, and a servant presented them with tea, served with raised saucers on a platter of cinnabar-red lacquer decorated with gold tracery. When they had finished their tea, the lids were removed from the partitioned boxes on the table, exposing a rich supply of soup and rice and other delicacies, and they were provided with cups and chopsticks.



The Eunuch Ho Hsin Treats a Guest in a Palace Building

"There is no need for small cups," said Eunuch Director Ho Hsin. "I am aware that Your Honor has just come from an audience, and the weather is cold. Were I to entertain you with small cups, while offering you no more than this meager fare, it would be an affront to Your Honor. What you need is a pick-me-up."³⁵

"I ought not to impose upon you to such an extent," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Eunuch Director Ho thereupon filled a large cup to the brim and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I am much obliged to you, venerable sir," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and your pupil will be happy to accept what you proffer. The only thing is that, upon leaving your presence, I must meet with other officials and pay my respects at the ministry. If my face is flushed from drinking:

It would hardly be appropriate."³⁶

"Drink two cups to ward off the cold," said Eunuch Director Ho. "What harm can it do?"

He then went on to say, "My nephew is young, and unfamiliar with judicial matters. I hope that, for my sake, Your Honor will agree to afford him guidance in all things when he takes his place among your colleagues."

"How could I be so presumptuous?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There is no need for such modesty on your part, venerable sir. My new colleague, your distinguished nephew, may be young, but:

Status affects character as nurture affects health."³⁷

It is only natural that:

Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence.”³⁸

“That’s a fine way to talk!” said Eunuch Director Ho. “As the sayings go:

Even if one studies for a lifetime, areas
of ignorance will remain.”³⁹

The affairs of this world are as profuse
as the hairs of an ox;

Even Confucius himself could not master
more than a leg’s worth.

I fear there are things he didn’t know.

At all events, Your Honor must try to explain matters to him.”

“Your pupil will endeavor to obey your instructions,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

He then went on to ask, “Venerable sir, where is your private residence located? Your pupil would like to come there to pay his respects.”

Eunuch Director Ho replied, “My humble abode is located in the Wen-hua fang, or Cultural Florescence precinct, to the east of the Heavenly River Bridge. It can be identified by the two stone lions that serve as a mounting platform outside the gate.”

He then went on to ask, “Where is Your Honor staying? I would like to send the new official in my household over to pay you his respects.”

“Your pupil,” Hsi-men Ch’ing replied, “is lodging temporarily in the home of Privy Councilor Ts’ui Shou-yü.”

After they had exchanged addresses, Hsi-men Ch’ing consumed a large cup of the proffered pick-me-up and then got up to go.

Eunuch Director Ho Hsin saw him to the door and saluted him with clasped hands, saying, “With regard to what I spoke of to you just now, I hope that Your Honor will consent to look out for my nephew in all things. He is waiting to accompany you when you submit your memorial of gratitude and go to proffer the customary gifts to Chu Mien, the senior official of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, after which you can go together to collect your orders of appointment.”

“Venerable sir,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “there is no need for you to instruct me any further. Your pupil understands the situation.”

Thereupon, he exited the gate of the Forbidden City and went to report to the Ministry of War, where he ran into Hsia Yen-ling and joined him in going to pay his respects to the appropriate officials. By the time he had gone to formally present himself to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, handed in his curriculum vitae, applied for his order of appointment, and reported to the Registry Office and the other appropriate officials, it was already late in the afternoon. Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, for his part, had changed into the uniform of his new position as commander of the escort for imperial processions, prepared his own curriculum vitae, formally presented himself to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, where he was excused from having to kowtow, and selected a date for his assumption of office in the Southern Yamen, the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard.

When Hsia Yen-ling came out the door of the ministry, he found that Hsi-men Ch’ing was there waiting for him, though he hesitated to ride alongside him, and suggested that he be the first to mount. Hsia Yen-ling protested at this and insisted that they ride side by side.

Hsi-men Ch’ing addressed him as his superior in rank, but Hsia Yen-ling objected, saying, “Ssu-ch’üan, the two of us are former colleagues, after all. How can you start addressing me that way?”

“Our differences in status have been determined,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“It is only natural.

There is no need for such modesty on your part.”

He then went on to ask, “Since Your Honor has been raised to such an exalted position and will not be returning to Shantung, when are you going to send for your esteemed dependents?”

“I would like to move them here as soon as possible,” said Hsia Yen-ling, “but were I to do so, there would be no one to look after my property there. Right now, I plan to stay temporarily at my relative’s place until after the New Year’s celebrations, and send someone to fetch the members of my household then. Meanwhile, I hope that my colleague will consent to look after them, early and late. If anyone is interested in purchasing my property, I hope that my colleague will take care of it on my behalf. I should be very grateful were you to do so.”

“Your pupil will endeavor to obey your instructions,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “May I ask what your property is worth?”

“That house of mine,” replied Hsia Yen-ling, “was originally purchased from Eunuch Director Hsü for 1,200 taels. I subsequently had an extra story built in the rear, and the cost of the improvements came to 200 taels. Right now, I would be willing to let it go for the original purchase price.”

“Since my distinguished colleague has confided in me,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “if anyone should ask me about it, I will be able to answer without letting you down.”

“The only thing is, I fear I am putting my colleague to a lot of trouble,” responded Hsia Yen-ling.

When the two of them arrived back at the home of Ts’ui Shou-yü, Wang Ching approached them and reported, “His Honor, the newly appointed official Ho Yung-shou, came to pay you a visit. When he had dismounted and come into the reception hall, I told him that you had not yet returned from the Ministry of War. His Honor Ho said to give you his best regards. He also left calling cards for

His Honor Hsia, and His Honor Ts'ui, and, at noon, he sent someone to deliver two pieces of satin brocade together with a calling card of safflower red paper."

He then showed these to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who saw that the card read, "The enclosed two satin kerchiefs are deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your humble colleague and student, Ho Yung-shou."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read this message, he promptly told Wang Ching to wrap up and seal two round-collared robes made in Nanking, featuring mandarin squares with variegated embroidered lions. After writing out a gift card, and having something to eat, he set off immediately for Eunuch Director Ho's home in order to pay a return visit.

Upon Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival at the reception hall, Ho Yung-shou hurriedly straightened his clothing and came out to welcome him. He was wearing a variegated, figured, round-collared robe of jet cloud-patterned velvet, featuring a mandarin square with an embroidered lion; black shoes with black silk uppers; and a girdle with a decorative plaque of gilded tortoiseshell around his waist. He was not more than nineteen years old.

His face looked as though it were powdered;

He was bright-eyed and clean-cut; and

His lips looked as though they were rouged.⁴⁰

Hastening down the steps to greet his visitor, he proceeded to bow and scrape in the most deferential manner, exhibiting the utmost in the way of modesty and respect. As Hsi-men Ch'ing ascended the steps, the household servants hurried to lift aside the portiere, giving a welcoming shout as they waited upon him, fore and aft.

When the two of them had entered the reception hall and exchanged formal greetings, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to open the box containing the robes he had prepared; proceeded to proffer:

The customary presentation gifts;

and kowtowed, saying, "When you deigned to pay me a visit a while ago and bestowed such lavish gifts upon me, I fear I was not there to welcome you. And, this morning, the venerable gentleman, your uncle, treated me to a repast in his orderly room, for which consideration I could not be more grateful."

Ho Yung-shou hastened to kowtow in return, saying, "Having received this trifling appointment, which entitles me to become a colleague of yours, I look forward to being the beneficiary of your instruction.

Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.

I went to pay you my respects a while ago but failed to see you, and now you have deigned to demonstrate your good will by:

Shedding glory on my humble abode."

He then ordered his attendants to put away the gifts. In the meantime, he pulled up some formal seats, upholstered in deerskin, and the two of them sat down in the positions of host and guest. His attendants served them with tea, and Ho Yung-shou bowed deeply as he presented a cup to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who got up from his seat and returned his salutation. As they were drinking their tea, they asked after each other's courtesy names.

"Your pupil's courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

To which Ho Yung-shou responded, "Your pupil's courtesy name is T'iench'üan, or Heavenly Spring."

He then went on to ask, "Has my colleague already paid his respects to the officials at the Ministry of War today?"

"Upon coming out of the Forbidden City after being entertained by your venerable uncle," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I reported to the Ministry of War, paid my formal respects to the commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, applied for my order of appointment, and reported to the other appropriate officials. When I returned, I saw your calling card and learned that you had condescended to pay me a visit. The fact that I was not there to welcome you has left me feeling:

Scarcely able to conquer my fear and trepidation."⁴¹

"Not knowing that my colleague had arrived," said Ho Yung-shou, "your pupil was tardy in paying his respects."

He then went on to ask, "Did my colleague and His Honor Hsia Yen-ling attend the audience this morning?"

"Hsia Yen-ling has now been promoted to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He and I attended the audience together this morning and expressed our gratitude for our new appointments. But when we reported to the Ministry of War to pay our respects to our superiors, he handed in his own documents and was interviewed separately."

When he had finished questioning him, Ho Yung-shou went on to say, "Since we have had a chance to consult together today, when do you think we should go to present our customary gifts to His Honor the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, preparatory to receiving our orders of appointment?"

"According to my kinsman Chai Ch'ien," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we should go first to the home of the defender-in-chief to present our gifts, before presenting our memorials of gratitude at the great audience. After that, we should proceed to report to the office of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, where we will receive our orders of appointment together with the rest."

"Since that is what my colleague suggests," said Ho Yung-shou, "let us prepare our gifts and go to present them early tomorrow morning."

Thereupon, the two of them went over their respective gifts together. Ho Yung-shou's consisted of two python robes and a jade girdle. Hsi-men Ch'ing's consisted of a length of scarlet satin brocade, emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin*,⁴² a python robe of blue silk, as well as a chatelaine of gold-embossed jade. Each of them also agreed to present four jugs of Chin-hua wine, and they arranged to go together to assemble in front of Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien's residence the following morning. Once these arrangements had been agreed upon, and they had consumed two servings of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing took his leave and returned to Ts'ui Shou-yü's dwelling. He did not confide anything about these plans to Hsia Yen-ling. Of the events of

that evening there is no more to tell.

Early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to Ho Yung-shou's place, where he found that his host had already prepared a small repast, along with a pick-me-up, which was duly served in:

Large platters and large bowls,
as neatly as could be. Even their servants were enabled to eat their fill. After finishing their meal, they went together to assemble before the front gate of Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien's residence, where they found that Pen the Fourth and a servant from the Ho household, who had gone ahead with the gifts, had already been waiting for them for some time.

At this time, Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien had recently been promoted to the rank of grand guardian, and Emperor Hui-tsung had deputed him to go to the Southern Altar, the site of the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, in order to preside over the inspection of the sacrificial animals, preparatory to the ceremony on the day of the winter solstice. He had not yet returned from this mission, and the area outside the gate of his residence was rendered black by the number of officials and functionaries who were gathered there in order to present him with congratulatory gifts, who were so closely packed together that it felt as though they were:

Locked tight in an iron bucket.

Ho Yung-shou, together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, dismounted and sat down to wait in the home of an acquaintance of his that was located nearby, while sending a servant to listen for the sound of the criers that would precede the entourage of the defender-in-chief, so that he could come back and report on his impending arrival.

Their wait extended until the early afternoon, at which time they suddenly saw a man flying along on horseback, who announced, "His Honor is on his way back from inspecting the sacrificial animals. He has already entered the city through the Southern Breeze Gate⁴³ and has ordered that casual onlookers should be cleared out of the way."

Not long afterwards, another mounted courier appeared and reported, "His Honor has already crossed the Heavenly River Bridge."

At this juncture, the first contingent of chefs, together with their tea boxes and partitioned food boxes, passed by. It was only after what seemed like another half day had elapsed that a squad of cavalry, with their identifying insignia, appeared in the distance.

These officers all wore iron helmets on their heads,
Decorated with chain patterns and emblazoned with
the character for courage;

Their torsos were clad in hauberks of nankeen,
stiffened with carved lacquer;

Over which they wore jackets of blue satin with
narrow sleeves and flowered roundels,

Held in place with red chiffon cummerbunds,
On top of battle skirts of green deerskin adorned
with drawnwork aquatic creatures;

While their feet were shod with four-seamed
tight-fitting black boots.

Their bows were adorned with painted magpies;

Their arrows were fitted with eagle feathers;⁴⁴

And in brocade bags across their shoulders they bore
blue command standards in gilt lettering.

Truly:

The men look like fierce tigers;

The horses rival flying dragons.⁴⁵

Before long, a squad of soldiers bearing blue flags passed by, enclosing between them a squad of adjutants, dressed in black. Each and every one of them was:

Lanky and large-sized,

Ruthless and menacing.

On their heads they sported jet-black caps,

On their bodies they wore long black gowns,

Their feet were clad in dark brown

leather-soled boots,

At their waists there were hanging

tiger-head tallies.⁴⁶

Mounted on their horses, truly:

Their air was awe-inspiring,⁴⁷

Their appearance was imposing.

Before long, when these three squads of cavalry, with their identifying insignia, had passed by, what should they hear but the approaching sound of shouting to clear the way. The outriders who were creating this din were all:

Officers of the Imperial Insignia Guard,
Orderlies on assignment for the occasion,
More than six feet in stature, and
Broad-shouldered as they come.
Each of them wore a tall black cylindrical hat,
All were toggled out in puttees and black boots.
In their left hands they wielded rattan canes,
While their right hands hiked up their clothes.

As these outriders advanced, continuously shouting to clear the way, the people in the roadway ahead of them were:

Truly frightened out of their wits;
Suddenly the streets were deserted.

After the squad of outriders had passed, they were followed by two additional contingents of guardsmen, who were succeeded in turn by a squad of twenty detectives in black livery, spread out on either side of the street like the wings of a formation of wild geese, all of whom were tall and sturdy in stature. They were uniformly:

Stout-waisted thick-stomached types;
Golden-eyed brown-bearded specimens.
Each of them was as rapacious and cruel as a tiger;
None of them was capable of showing the least pity.

In the wake of these ten pairs of black-liveried guardsmen appeared an open sedan chair, carried by eight bearers, accompanied by eight outriders, in which Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien was seated.

Wearing on his head the black silk hat of an official,
His body was clad in a robe of crimson velvet
with a *tou-niu* mandarin square;
His waist was enclosed in a four-finger-wide girdle
with an openwork plaque of white jade
from the Ch'u Mountains,⁴⁸

His feet were shod in black boots;
At his midriff there hung the ivory insignia
of a grand guardian and a fish-shaped
key of yellow gold,

Affixed to his hat were a dangling sable tail
and a golden cicada,⁴⁹

His feet were firmly planted on a footrest
draped in tiger skin.

The bearers bore his sedan chair so high that
it was three feet off the ground.

It was preceded by two household servants, one on
either side, clad in blue satin, and
girdles with rhinoceros horn plaques,

And was followed by yet another squad of cavalry,
carrying six identifying insignia,
and six more blue command standards,

Who kept close at hand in order to receive orders.

Behind these there came several tens of others,
riding fine steeds with jeweled saddles,
jade bridles, and golden stirrups,

All of whom were majordomos, factotums, file clerks,
clerical subofficials, or scribes;

One and all of whom were gilded and pampered youths
from influential households,

Who were motivated only by lust and avarice,

Utterly indifferent to regulations and laws.

In rapid succession, one squad after another arrived in front of the defender-in-chief's residence, where they arrayed themselves in a straight line. The onlookers fell silent and stayed out of the way, not one of them daring to cough. The assembled officials and functionaries who had come to offer their gifts rendered the area black as they knelt down by the side of the road.

After some time, when the sedan chair of the defender-in-chief arrived before them, his attendants shouted, "Stand up, and remain at attention!" To which the assembled crowd assented with a single shout. Truly:

The sound shook the cloudy empyrean.

To the east, all that could be heard was a steady beat as:

Drums and music began to sound.

It so happens that the six senior officers in his yamen, on learning that the defender-in-chief had been elevated to the rank of grand master of the imperial household, and grand guardian, and been granted the privilege of having a son appointed battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, had all prepared lavish gifts, including wine and ingredients for a feast, and assembled in order to proffer their congratulations. For this reason, there were quite a few officials from the Music Office in attendance, who had begun to strike up their music. No sooner did the defender-in-chief descend from his sedan chair than the music came to a halt, and the various officials and functionaries made ready to present themselves.

All of a sudden, shouting to clear the way was heard, and a servitor in black livery, holding two red calling cards in his hand, came flying up on horseback and handed them to the guards at the gate, saying, "The minister of rites Chang Pang-ch'ang, and His Honor the academician Ts'ai Yu, are coming to pay their respects."

This information was promptly conveyed inside. Before long, their sedan chairs showed up at the gate, and the minister Chang Pang-ch'ang and vice minister Ts'ai Yu, wearing scarlet ceremonial robes with mandarin squares featuring embroidered peacocks, one of them sporting a girdle with a plaque of rhinoceros horn, and the other a girdle with a plaque of gold, went inside to pay their respects.

After they had been entertained with tea and seen on their way, the minister of personnel Wang Tsu-tao,⁵⁰ the left vice minister Han Lü, and the right vice minister Yin Ching⁵¹ also came to pay their respects to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien.

After they had been entertained with tea and seen on their way, the imperial relative and Duke of Chia, Chao I, the military affairs commissioner Cheng Chü-chung, and the commandant-escort and director of the Court of the Imperial Clan, Wang Shen, clad in nankeen robes with jade girdles, also came to pay their respects. Of the three, Cheng Chü-chung alone rode in a sedan chair, the other two being mounted on horseback.

After they had been seen off, the six senior officers in the defender-in-chief's yamen arrived, surrounded by criers proclaiming the protocol, and drawn up in appropriate order. The first of these was the superintendent of justice for the two townships of the Eastern Capital, Sun Jung;⁵² the second was the chief inspector, Liang Ying-lung; the third was the director of the Office of Herds in the Inner and Outer Demesnes of the Court of the Imperial Stud, the nephew of Defender-in-Chief T'ung Kuan, T'ung T'ien-yin; the fourth was the surveillance commissioner of the thirteen gates of the capital city, Huang Ching-ch'en; the fifth was the commander of the Capital Training Divisions and capital security commissioner, Tou Chien;⁵³ and the sixth was the ward-inspecting commandant of the inner and outer precincts of the Eastern Capital, Ch'en Tsung-shan. All of them were garbed in crimson robes and wore hats adorned with dangling sable tails and golden cicadas. Only Sun Jung, who held the rank of grand guardian of the heir apparent, wore a jade girdle, while the rest of them wore girdles of gold. When they dismounted and went inside, each of them took with him gifts of gold currency and bolts of fabric.

After a little while, the sound of music was heard, as the group of senior officers, wearing floral ornaments of gold, and jade girdles, exchanged toasts with Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien. Beneath the steps:

Strains of classic melodies saturate the ears;

Tones of woodwinds and strings are harmonious.

Truly:

The tables, ten-foot square, are laden with food;

Served amid clustering flowers upon brocade mats.

What did this conspicuous display of the defender-in-chief's wealth and distinction look like? Behold:

He holds a position of the first rank;⁵⁴

His office is one of the three highest.⁵⁵

In his majestic reception hall,

The days are long and the bell-cords are silent;

In the vast minister's mansion,⁵⁶

The clepsydras are mute and the halberds arrayed.

The forest flowers of colored paper

rival those of spring;

The pearls hanging from the drapery

light the evening hours.⁵⁷

Fragrant and aromatic,

Otter's marrow has been newly compounded

with "hundred-blend" incense;⁵⁸

In serried profusion,

Tripods with dragon motifs and seal script

are worth thousands in gold.

The bedclothes are half embroidered
with kingfisher feathers;
The pillows are emblazoned with the
“eight treasures” in coral.
From time to time, one hears the tinkling
of jade girdle pendants;
One’s vision is focused on the glittering
of the moving lanterns.
With their tiger-head tallies and jade insignia,
The armored ranks in the forecourt are formidable;
With their ivory clappers and silver psalteries,⁵⁹
The production of the puppet show is entertaining.⁶⁰
All day long, those who come to pay their regards,
Consist only of noble scions or royal princelings;
Year after year, those who cultivate his company,
Are noblemen or relatives of the imperial family.
When singing girls perform their songs,⁶¹
One is amazed at the repertory of three thousand pieces;
When the mica screens are pulled aside,⁶²
There suddenly appear twelve girls with gold hairpins.⁶³
Where the lotus blossoms are in bloom,
The frolicking fish in the pond do not
startle the beholder;
Where birdcages are suspended on high,
The coquettish fowl beneath the eaves
engage in conversation.
What do such persons know of the arts of
compromise or reconciliation?
All they are familiar with are the ways
of toadying and sycophancy.

Truly:

In humorous conversation they initiate hostilities;
With idle boasts they disturb the national safety.
When they issue spurious decrees,
The eight chief officials in the realm
bow in acquiescence;
When they employ clever arguments,
The Emperor in his nine-gated palace⁶⁴
nods his head in consent.
By initiating the Flower and Rock Convoys,
He has inflicted calamity upon the Chiang-nan
and the Huai-pei regions;
By seizing boxwood to offer to the throne,
He has exhausted both the national treasury
and the people’s resources.
Among those who serve at court there are none
whose hearts have not been chilled;
Among the ranks of men of integrity there are
none who are not holding their breath.

Truly:

In the capital precincts he ranks first among
the wielders of power;
Among the wealthy and prominent of this world⁶⁵
he is without an equal.⁶⁶

In a little while, when the toasting was over, they all sat down in their places, and a troupe of five actors came forward. To the accompaniment of psaltery, mandola, *p'i-p'a*, metallophone, harp, and clappers inlaid with red ivory, they proceeded to perform the song suite in the Cheng-kung mode that begins with the tune “Decorous and Pretty.” Truly:

The enduring tones linger around the rafters;

To a surge of pure melody and lovely harmony.

Enjoying wealth and distinction,
The recipient of imperial favor;⁶⁷
Having risen from bleak poverty,
You occupy an exalted position.
Wielding the scales of power, your authority
dominates the capital;
Relying on imperial favor, you endeavor to
deceive our sovereign,
In total disregard of benevolence or righteousness.

TO THE TUNE “PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL”

You employ corvée labor to construct ponds,
You buy landed estates for your descendants.
In your every endeavor, you explore only the
means of insuring your own benefit;
In your treacherous greed, what do you care
if Yüeh suffers while Ch'in prospers?⁶⁸
Those who curry favor with you reach instant distinction;
Those who offend you find that their lives are endangered.
Envious of the worthy and talented,
You prefer the intimacy of the petty minded.
Motivated only by personal grudges, you show total
disregard for the public interest.
You keep the Emperor in his nine-gated palace
entirely in the dark,
While allowing the people within the four seas
to descend into chaos.
But, as the saying goes, Heaven's net
only seems to be loose.⁶⁹

TO THE TUNE “THE LUCKY GRADUATE”

With your clever words, you seek to elicit the
transient amusement of the ruler;
But do not exert loyal effort toward achieving
harmony among the myriad states.
You only try to subvert the work of real heroes
in order to deceive the world.
Vainly scratching an itch through the hide of your boot;⁷⁰
Exhibiting the same symptoms that you pretend to cure;⁷¹
You show no concern whatever for Heavenly principle.

TO THE TUNE “PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL”

You have the intent of Chao Kao of the Ch'in
dynasty in pointing to a deer;⁷²
And the design of T'u-an Ku in loosing his dog.⁷³
You would emulate Wang Mang of the Han dynasty
in your disloyal objectives;⁷⁴
And deserve the same fate as the traitor Tung Cho
whose navel was set on fire.⁷⁵
Wherever you move, you are accompanied by pipes and strings;
When you go out the gate, you are protected by armed guards.
When you enter the court, the hundred officials
are rigid with apprehension;
Relying on the ruler, you usurp the tiger's might
in flaunting your authority.⁷⁶
There are no few clients who abase themselves to
cater to your perfidious cabal;
But who is there willing to wield his sword to
execute the toadying villains,
Rather than letting them do as they please?

CODA

Your designation as a minister is not found
beneath the golden goblet;⁷⁷
But in the works of historians your faults
will be duly enumerated.
What do you know of reconciling yin and yang?⁷⁸
or nurturing the vital energy?
All you can do is betray the country and make
pacts with foreign barbarians.
You have no right to the jade girdle and gold fish⁷⁹

suspended from your python robe;
Accepting emolument without achievement, you should
be ashamed to sleep and to eat.
As long as power remains in your hands,
people will be afraid of you;
But when catastrophe descends upon you,
it will be too late to repent.⁸⁰
All the bamboo on the southern hills would not suffice
on which to enumerate your crimes;
When the waves on the eastern ocean are completely dry
your stench of infamy will remain.⁸¹
It will be perpetuated for a myriad years,⁸²
Forevermore inducing people to revile you.⁸³

On this occasion, after:

Three rounds of wine had been offered, and

One suite of songs had been performed,

the six senior officers got up to go, and Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien escorted them on their way out.

When he returned to the reception hall, the sound of music was temporarily suspended, and the majordomo prepared to announce the names of the officials from their various jurisdictions as they came in to pay their respects to him. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien ordered his attendants to bring in his desk and then took his seat on a folding chair upholstered in tiger skin.

He first ordered that the contingent of meritorious imperial relatives, prominent eunuchs, and high officials, together with their servitors and clerks, who had come to present their gifts, should be admitted.

It was not long before they were sent on their way and were succeeded by the contingent of secretaries attached to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the officers from the Southern and Northern Yemens of that organization, the two detective bureaus with their five offices and seven departments, the investigators, inspectors, surveillance commissioners, and supervisors, the director of the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, the commander of the escort for imperial processions, the prison warden, the battalion and company commanders, and so forth. The leaders at the head of each of these categories were supplied with accordion-bound albums containing the credentials of their subordinates, which they duly handed up before being dismissed.

Only then were the judicial commissioners of the Two-Huai regions, the Two-Che regions, Shantung, Shansi, Kuan-tung, Kuan-hsi, Ho-tung, Hopei, Fukien, Kuang-nan, Szechwan, all thirteen provinces, ordered to present themselves in turn.⁸⁴ Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou were in the fifth group, and when their presents were carried in, the majordomo saw to it that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin's calling card was placed conspicuously on the defender-in-chief's desk.

As the two of them stood beneath the steps, waiting for their names to be called, Hsi-men Ch'ing lifted up his head to look around and saw that in front of him was a spacious thirty-foot-wide structure, with a double-eaved, sloping, gable and hip roof, and exposed supporting beams beneath the corners.⁸⁵ Its beaded blinds were rolled high,⁸⁶ and it was surrounded on all sides by a green balustrade.⁸⁷ A vermilion plaque was suspended over the lintel that had been presented by Emperor Hui-tung himself and was inscribed in the imperial hand with four gold characters as large as dippers, which read "Hall of the Commander of the Imperial Insignia Guard." This was the home of the Emperor's eyes and ears, teeth and claws; the headquarters of his secret police. Any commoner who found himself there could expect to be executed. Six anterooms were arrayed on either side of the interior.

The steps were wide and spacious, and

The courtyard was secluded and imposing.

Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, attired in his crimson robe, was seated at the head of the steps, and, before long, he summoned them before him. The two of them obediently ascended the steps until they stood under the eaves, where they bent their bodies to pay their respects, kneeling down and kowtowing four times, as they awaited their instructions.

Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien remarked, "As for you two battalion commanders, what need was there for you to have your kinsman Eunuch Director Ho Hsin present me with these gifts?"

After ordering his attendants to put them away, he went on to say, "As long as you conscientiously carry out your official duties in the area of your jurisdiction, I, for my part, will see that you are treated fairly. After you have attended the great audience and submitted your memorials of gratitude, you can come back to the office to receive your orders of appointment, and proceed to your posts."

The two of them assented with one voice, after which the attendants called out, "You are dismissed," and they made their way out through the postern gate on the left.

As they exited the main gate and waited for Pen the Fourth and the others to come out with the empty gift boxes so they could be on their way, they suddenly noticed a messenger, who flew up on horseback, carrying a calling card of safflower red paper, and reported, "His Honor Wang and His Honor Kao are about to arrive."

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou then ducked inside someone's gateway so they could observe what took place. It was not long before the soldiers preceding them shouted to clear the way, and the two dignitaries appeared:

Accompanied by a contingent of mounted horsemen,

Overflowing the streets and blocking the alleys.

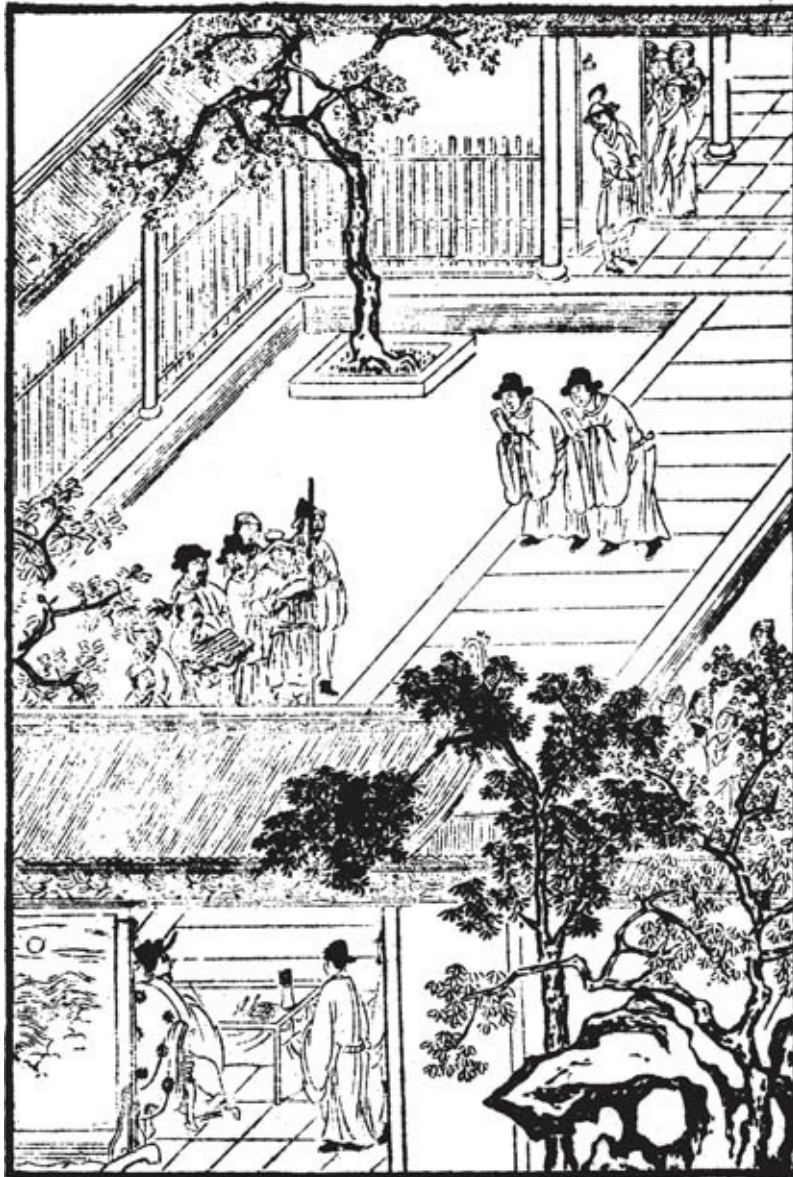
Whom should they see, garbed in crimson robes with jade girdles, and riding in sedan chairs, but Wang Wei, the supreme commander of the 800,000 imperial guards in the Capital Training Divisions and Duke of Lung-hsi, and Kao Ch'iu, the defender-in-chief of the Inspired Strategy Corps of the Imperial Bodyguard. Upon their arrival, the officials from the various provinces who had come to pay

their respects all surged outside, and the newcomers were lost to sight.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou waited for some time until Pen the Fourth came out with the empty gift boxes. Only then did the two of them withdraw to a secluded spot, order their attendants to bring up their horses, mount their steeds, and go back to their lodgings.

Truly:

Solely because the wicked and sycophantic
occupied positions of power,
It was only appropriate that the Central Plain
should become soaked in blood.⁸⁸



The Two Judicial Commissioners Report before Chu Mien

Gentle reader take note:

Just as womenfolk may ruin a household,
Petty men may reduce the realm to chaos;
It is only natural.

The perspicacious already foresaw that this bunch of traitors were bound to overturn the empire, and, sure enough, at the expiration of

the Hsüan-ho reign period, Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung were taken north in captivity, Emperor Kao-tsung fled south, and the empire fell into the hands of the barbarians. Surely, this outcome is to be profoundly lamented. The reflections that arise in the mind of the historian cannot be exhausted. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Calamitous are the deeds of those who abuse their
power and betray the national interest;⁸⁹
When founding a dynasty or inheriting a household,
one must strive to keep petty men at bay.
Though the "six traitors" may all have been executed,
that is hardly worthy of consideration;⁹⁰
It did not mitigate the plight of the two emperors
as they suffered exile and confinement.⁹¹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 71

LI P'ING-ERH APPEARS IN A DREAM IN BATTALION COMMANDER HO'S HOUSE; THE JUDICIAL COMMISSIONERS PRESENT THEIR MEMORIALS AT THE AUDIENCE

Let me temporarily cease strumming the zither
that rests upon my knee;
In order to idly rehearse the past events that
are recorded in history.
One cannot but admire the worthy rulers who are
both diligent and thrifty;
While deeply sorrowing at the mediocre monarchs
who indulge in debauchery.
Those who maintain peace and stability seek out
men of worth and wisdom;
While those who only engender chaos fraternize
with sycophantic ministers.
If one exposes the many factors that result in
either success or failure;
As with "lofty mountains and flowing waters,"¹
the attuned will understand.²

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou arrived back on the main thoroughfare, Ho Yung-shou first sent someone to report to Eunuch Director Ho Hsin and then invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to come back to their home for a meal. Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, but Ho Yung-shou had one of his attendants take hold of his horse's bit with his hand, while he said to him, "Your pupil has another matter which he needs to discuss with you."

Thereupon, they proceeded to ride side by side until they dismounted in front of Ho Hsin's house, while Pen the Fourth and the carriers of the empty gift boxes went straight back to the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü.

It so happens that Ho Yung-shou had made prior arrangements for a lavish feast that was awaiting them at his home. When they entered the reception hall, behold:

Screens display their peacock's tails,
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.
Animal-shaped briquettes are smoldering,
Amid the fragrance from a golden brazier.

In the middle of the hall, at the upper end of the room, there was a single table setting, with another one facing it below, and yet another set up on the eastern side.

Platters are piled with exotic fruits,
Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.
The tables and chairs are spic-and-span,³
The standing screens are neatly arrayed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired, "Who is my colleague entertaining today?"

"My uncle, the eunuch director, has taken the day off," Ho Yung-shou replied, "and would like to entertain my colleague with a meal."

"For you to put yourself to such trouble on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is scarcely fitting among colleagues."

Ho Yung-shou laughed, saying, "It was my uncle's idea to prepare this meager repast, in the hope that you would condescend to offer me the benefit of your instruction."

After they had consumed a serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked when he could pay his respects to the old gentleman.

"My uncle will be here any minute now," replied Ho Yung-shou.

It was not long before Eunuch Director Ho Hsin came out from the rear of the residence. He was wearing a python robe of green velvet, an official hat, black boots, and a jeweled chatelaine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing prostrated himself preparatory to kowtowing four times as a sign of respect, saying as he did so, "Pray accept my obeisance," but Eunuch Director Ho Hsin demurred, saying, "That will never do."

"Your pupil and your nephew Ho Yung-shou are colleagues of a younger generation," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whereas you,

venerable sir:

Are exalted in both age and virtue,
and serve as a prominent eunuch. It is only appropriate that you should accept my obeisance.”

They dickered politely for a while before Ho Hsin agreed to accept a half kowtow from him, after which, he ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing to the seat of honor, while he prepared to take the position of host, and indicated to Ho Yung-shou that he should occupy the place on the side.

“Venerable sir,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “that will never do. Since your nephew and I are colleagues, how can he be relegated to the side? If it were just a case of you and your nephew, it might be all right, but for your pupil to occupy such a preferential position would never do.”

Ho Hsin was greatly pleased by this and said, “Your Honor is well-versed in etiquette. In that case, I'll presume to take the grand secretary's position adjacent to the throne and allow my nephew, the new official, to play the role of host vis-à-vis Your Honor.”

“Such an arrangement,” responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, “would be more comfortable for your pupil.”

Thereupon, they all exchanged the customary amenities and sat down.

Ho Hsin ordered, “Attendants, add some new charcoal to the brazier. The weather's rather cold today.”

Before long, the servants brought in a package of finely polished charcoal for interior heating purposes and dumped it into the four-cornered brazier of yellow brass that stood in the center of the room. They also let down the translucent, oilpaper, heat-holding drapes at the door of the room, which let in the flickering sunlight so that everything was brightly illuminated.

“Your Honor,” said Ho Hsin, “pray divest yourself of your formal outer garments.”

“Your pupil doesn't have anything appropriate on underneath,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “I'll send a servant to fetch something from my lodgings.”

“There's no need for you to send for anything,” said Ho Hsin.

Then, turning to his attendants, he told them to take Hsi-men Ch'ing's outer garments and said, “Fetch that green velvet flying fish python robe⁴ that I've been wearing for His Honor to put on.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, “That is part of your official regalia, venerable sir. How could your pupil presume to wear it?”

“Go ahead and put it on, Your Honor,” said Ho Hsin. “What is there to be afraid of? The other day the Lord of Ten Thousand Years bestowed a regular python robe on me, so I will no longer be wearing it. In fact, I will donate it to Your Honor to wear over your other clothes.”

It was not long before the attendants came out with it. Hsi-men Ch'ing unfastened his girdle and took off his round-collared gown, handing it over to Tai-an. He then put on the flying fish python robe and bowed to Ho Hsin in order to express his thanks. He went on to ask Ho Yung-shou to take off his outer clothing in order to keep him company. At this point, another serving of tea was brought out, and they drank it together.

Ho Hsin then said, “Have the household musicians come out.”

It so happens that he maintained a troupe of twelve household musicians who had been taught to perform on musical instruments. Led by their two instructors, they duly came out and kowtowed to the company. Ho Hsin ordered that the bronze gong and bronze drum be brought out and set up at the lower end of the hall, and the musical performance began. Truly:

The sound shakes the cloudy empyrean;

The tones startle both fish and birds.

After this prelude, the attendants served the feast and they were invited to take their places.

Eunuch Director Ho Hsin prepared to offer a drink to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he hastily protested, saying, “Venerable sir, please make yourself easy. My colleague can do the honors on your behalf. It will suffice merely to provide the goblet and chopsticks at my place.”

“I insist on offering Your Honor a drink,” said Ho Hsin. “This newly appointed official from my household:

Upon first entering the bulrushes,

Has no way of gauging their depth.⁵

It is my fervent hope that, in all things, Your Honor will do what you can to uphold his interests. That would be most gratifying.”

“Venerable sir,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “how can you talk that way? As the saying goes:

The fellow feeling between colleagues endures

for three generations.

Your pupil is also much indebted to your diffracted radiance. How could we not:

Do our best to help each other out?”⁶

“Well said! Well said!” responded Ho Hsin. “It is, indeed, our duty to:

Cooperate in the ruler's service,

By coming to each other's support.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing did not wait for Ho Hsin to hand him the cup but went forward to accept it and put it down at his place. He then responded by offering two cups in return, which he put down at the places of Ho Yung-shou and Ho Hsin. After they had all bowed to each other, they sat down.

When the musical prelude was completed, three of the household musicians, together with their two instructors, came forward with their:

Silver psaltery, ivory clappers,
Three-string guitar, and *p'i-p'a*,
and performed the song suite in the Cheng-kung mode that begins with the tune “Decorous and Pretty.”⁷

The Crystal Palace,
Mermaid silk drapes;
Moonlight illumines the Crystal Palace,
Cold penetrates the mermaid silk drapes.
It is late at night, and We are unable to sleep
upon Our dragon couch.
Leaving the palace gate, We venture out onto the
streets of the capital,
Upon which windblown snow is falling.

TO THE TUNE “PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL”

It is like the flitter of fluttering butterfly wings;
It resembles the tumbling of carefree willow catkins.
Frozen flakes dance, as the swirling wind
blows them about;
Treading fragments of alabaster, Our steps
are impulsive.
Snow covers the sleeves of Our white scholar’s gown;
The wind rumples Our commoner’s black silk skullcap.
Suddenly looking back, We gaze fixedly on the phoenix
towers of the palace;
Utterly unable to discern the mandarin ducks of azure
vitreous tile on the eaves.
In no time at all, the nine-gated palace halls appear
to be paved with silver;
In half an instant, the infinite expanse of the world⁸
seems mantled in jade;
It looks just as though the entire realm is completely
enveloped in powder.

TO THE TUNE “THE LUCKY GRADUATE”

We see that the double doors of the minister’s mansion
are locked tight as an iron bucket.
And proceed to give a resounding blow to the rings of
the two animal-head-shaped knockers.
The person knocking at your gate is Chao the Elder, who
resides in front of the Myriad Years Mount.⁹
Is your master entertaining anyone in his chamber?
So, he’s reading works of literature by lamplight.
We have come expressly to hear him explicate them.

TO THE TUNE “LAZYBONES”

Braving the cold wind and enduring the frozen snow,
We have come to pay him a visit.
There are some confidential matters that We urgently
feel the need to discuss with him.
What are you so flustered about, being as you are
a sophisticated public servant?
You can skip the obeisance, Our grand councilor, who
has attracted so many worthies.
This is the residence of one of the Three Dukes, who
presides over the vessels of state;
Not the abode of one who has taken the tonsure, such
as Tripitaka¹⁰ of the T’ang dynasty.
We will take this proffered seat in order to listen
to your expounding of the classics.
But, as for your servant, We don’t wish to have him
about our ears offering more tea.

TO THE TUNE “THE LUCKY GRADUATE”

We will not emulate Emperor Kao-tsu of the Han dynasty
who resided in the Wei-yang Palace;¹¹
Nor the T’ang dynasty Son of Heaven who spent the night
sleeping in the Chin-yang Palace,¹²
Merely anxious to share the gilded phoenix pillow, when
the kingfisher-hued quilt felt chilly.¹³
We are only interested in learning about Fu Yüeh;¹⁴
Rather than dreaming of the meeting at Kao-t’ang.
This is the proper business of anyone who aspires to
the position of a ruler.

TO THE TUNE “PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL”

Since We occupy the unique position of the ruler
over all within the Four Seas,
We must devote Ourselves to upholding the Three Bonds
and observing the Five Constants.¹⁵
In the years of Our youth, We dedicated Ourselves to
mastering the spear and quarterstaff;

But Our only regret is that We failed to penetrate
the gates of the school of Confucius.
How many chapters are there in the *Book of Documents*?
How many poems in all are there in the *Book of Songs*?
Through the explication of the *Book of Rites*, one
can learn modesty and accommodation;
By discussion of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one
can discern the lessons of the past.
We would learn from the examples of the rulers Yü, T'ang,
Wen, and Wu;¹⁶ in emulating Yao and Shun;¹⁷
You live up to Fang Hsüan-ling, Tu Ju-hui, Hsiao Ho, and
Ts'ao Shen,¹⁸ who helped found the Han and T'ang.
We depend upon you to undertake responsibility for the
ministerial task of reconciling yin and yang.

TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"

You maintain that by relying on *The Analects of Confucius*
one may establish one's authority at court;
And that even half of that text may suffice to gain control
over the mountains and rivers of the realm.¹⁹
The way of the Sage is comparable to that of Heaven itself,
in that it is immeasurable in extent.
To listen to your explication of the classics
in front of the crimson curtain,²⁰
Is certainly superior to a banquet at which the
host provides singing girls in red.²¹
By the time your discourse is over, Our spirit is
purified and Our energy enhanced.²²

TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"

On silver candlesticks the painted candles are bright;
From golden censers waft calligraphic fumes of incense.
We ought not to put Our elder brother to the trouble
of pouring the vintage wine himself;
And it is hardly necessary for Our sister-in-law to
offer Us a goblet of "sunset clouds."
You say that "A wife who has shared one's poverty-
stricken fare must never be abandoned";
We too remember that "The friends one makes while
poor and mean must never be forgotten."²³
As the sayings go, "Outer strength is no match for
inner strength";²⁴
"If a wife is worthy, her husband will be able to
avoid calamity."²⁵
Our relationship with you resembles that between
T'ai-chia and I Yin;²⁶
Your union with your wife is like that of Liang
Hung and Meng Kuang.²⁷
We only hope that your good fortune and longevity
will be prolonged.²⁸

TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"

Whenever We try to sleep, We cannot avoid thinking of
early rulers and later rulers;
No sooner do Our eyes close than we are obsessed with
why states rise and states fall.
For this reason, by day and by night We cannot sleep,²⁹
pondering a myriad courses of action.
It is not a case of "When happy one dislikes
the shortness of the night";
Nor an instance of "When lonely one hates it
that the watches are so long."³⁰
There are so many things to feel worried about.

TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"

We worry about soldiers at their posts who
lack adequate clothing;
We worry about families that lack sufficient
grain for the next day.³¹
We worry about the poor who sleep by day in
their secluded alleys;
We worry about the students who doze at night
before unheated windows;
We worry about resentful wives and husbands
complaining of the cold;
We worry about the carters forced to drive
a myriad li in search of trade;
We worry about the boatmen on the rivers,
threatened by wind and waves;
We worry about the starving children who

cry out for their mothers;
We worry about the worthy commoners who
lack a means of livelihood;
We worry about those who hasten to the
battle in their coats of mail.
The mention of these things cannot but
cause Us to sigh with sorrow.

TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"?

Worry about the hardships of the people disrupts
Our rest and racks Our brains;³²
Concern for the size of the empire occupies Our
thoughts in sleep and in dreams.
At present, T'ai-yüan prefecture to the north is
still ruled by the House of Liu.³³
We intend to temporarily abandon the vermilion
phoenix gates of Our palace;
Personally take Our place within the blue-green
oiled curtains of Our carriage;
And initiate Our campaign by taking the city of
Shang-tang in Ho-tung province.

TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"

You speak of the rulers Ch'ien Ch'u of Wu-Yüeh³⁴
and Li Yü of the Southern T'ang;³⁵
As well as Liu Ch'ang of the Southern Han³⁶
and Meng Ch'ang of the Later Shu.³⁷
None of them exercises benevolent rule, causing
their citizenry to lose hope;³⁸
When they practice tyranny, they bring calamity
down upon their populations.
Whom should We depute to pacify Szechwan
in the West;
Whom should we direct to restore order to
the Two-Kuang?
The conquest of the kingdom of Wu-yüeh will
require a general of renown;
The subjugation of Chiang-nan will call for
someone who is loyal and true.
Extending the borders of the realm will require someone
like a pillar of white jade holding up the sky;³⁹
Setting the universe to rights will demand an individual
like a bridge of yellow gold spanning the sea.⁴⁰
Pray give it your most careful consideration.

TO THE TUNE "TAKING OFF THE COTTON GOWN"⁴¹

In order to take Chin-ling you must speedily
cross the Yangtze River.⁴²
When you get to Ch'ien-t'ang you must pacify
that area of the country.⁴³
In Szechwan to the west you must not be daunted by
the state of the cliffside roadways.⁴⁴
In the territories of the southern barbarians you
must confront the poisonous miasmas.⁴⁵

TO THE TUNE "EXHILARATED BY PEACE"

In battle you must disperse the tiger-and-wolf-like foe;
Personally experiencing the hardships of wind and frost.
You must use *The Six Tactics* and *The Three Strategies*⁴⁶
in order to stabilize the frontiers,
While holding the seals of supreme military commanders.
We hope that when you don your coats of mail, thus
enhancing your prowess;
Your horses, flaunting their jade bridles, will be
impossible to obstruct;
And the drumbeat of whips on your golden stirrups⁴⁷
will proclaim victory,
As you lead your armies in triumph back to Pien-liang.

PARACODA⁴⁸

Anyone who complies with Heaven's will; understands
Heaven's principles; and is prepared to
forsake evil and return to the true,⁴⁹
should be spared.
Anyone who imposes a tyrannical regime; opposes the
imperial forces; and tries to show off
his prowess and demonstrate his might,⁵⁰
must be destroyed.
Do not rob the people of their wealth;⁵¹

Do not exterminate the people's lives;⁵²
Do not debauch the people's womenfolk;
Do not set fire to the people's homes.
Treat your men and horses with consideration,
combining mercy and justice;
See that they are properly paid and fed, with
clear rewards and punishments.
Protect the city walls and moats, pursue the
rebels, and grant them amnesty.
Along the highways, put up posters in order
to help pacify the populace;
Initiate welfare programs where needed, and
open up the public granaries.

CODA

We await the day when, in formal attire and with respectful
mien, We may proceed to the Ling-yen Pavilion⁵³
and have the portraits of you meritorious
officials publicly displayed.
You must not fail to be worthy of having your names engraved
on metal and stone, and inscribed on bells and
tripods, so that the fragrance of your fame
may be perpetuated in history.
Your use of your forces displays good generalship;
You possess strategic ability and possess courage.
By gazing upward to contemplate astronomical phenomena⁵⁴
you may predict events from the stars;
By gazing downward to examine the mountains and rivers
you may evaluate the lay of the land.
In proceeding to battle you must first ascertain
which of the nine terrains is relevant;⁵⁵
In determining the outcome of a conflict you must
rely on the five types of secret agents.⁵⁶
In daylight battles you must employ
flags and pennants;
In nighttime battles you must deploy
fires and drums.⁵⁷
In infantry battles you must use smoke screens
to disguise your deployments;
In naval conflicts you must adjust to the wind
in using your sails and oars.
When irregular and regular tactics abet each other,⁵⁸
your military strength is enhanced;
When benevolence and wisdom are practiced together,
no amount of valor can resist them.
We delegate Our authority to you generals, so that
you may pacify the four quarters;
To second-guess our supreme commanders while seated
on the throne would invite chaos.
We hope you will send urgent memorials announcing
your achievements on the frontier;
So we may all rejoice at the attainment of peace
as you head back for the capital.
Before We begin to allot land and bestow fiefdoms⁵⁹
in granting you titles of nobility,
We will first see to it that the troops under your
various commands are amply rewarded.⁶⁰

When the household musicians had finished performing the song suite, they withdrew. After:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and

Two main courses had been served,

it gradually grew toward evening, and the lamps were lighted.

Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned Tai-an and instructed him to offer gratuities to the chef and the various musicians who had performed for them and then got up to go, saying, "Your pupil has imposed upon your hospitality all day long. It is time for me to take my leave."

But the venerable eunuch was unwilling to let him go, saying, "The reason I took the day off, today, was that I wanted to benefit from Your Honor's instruction. I haven't provided anything special in the way of entertainment, but only an opportunity for us to talk together. I fear Your Honor may still be hungry."

"Having just enjoyed the luxurious repast that you provided, venerable sir," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how can you possibly suggest that I should still be hungry? Your pupil merely needs to return to his lodgings to get some rest. Tomorrow morning, I must join your nephew in reporting to the Ministry of War in order to receive our orders of appointment and register our names."

"In that case," responded Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, "there is no need for Your Honor to return to your lodgings. You can spend the night here at my place, which will make it more convenient for you and the newly appointed official from my household to go take care of your business in the morning. May I venture to ask, where are you staying at present?"

"Your pupil," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is lodging for the time being in the home of my colleague Hsia Yen-ling's relative Privy

Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, and all of my luggage is there."

"That's no problem," said Ho Hsin. "You Honor might just as well send someone to go fetch your luggage and bring it here, where I can put you up for a few days. How would that be? In my back garden there are several small rooms that are pleasantly secluded. If you agree to this proposal, it will make it more convenient for you and my nephew to conduct your business. That would be a better arrangement than if you stay somewhere else, since you'll both be in the same place."

"To stay here would be fine by me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "My only fear is that Hsia Yen-ling might take it amiss and think that your pupil is slighting him."

"In this day and age," responded Ho Hsin, "as the saying goes:

If one's colleague forfeits his office in the morning,

One is no longer obliged to bow to him in the evening.⁶¹

The yamen is just like a puppet theater. Though you were initially a colleague of his, now that the previous official has left, his replacement is ready to:

Assume his position and carry out his duties.⁶²

He no longer has anything to do with it. If he were to interpret it that way, it would only show how little he understands the way of the world. Today, I am determined to spend the evening with Your Honor and simply won't let you go."

He then called for his attendants and ordered them, "Have some tables set up forthwith in the room below, and see to it that the servants of His Honor Hsi-men are provided with food and wine. Afterwards, send some people from our household to accompany them in going to bring his luggage back here. Also, issue instructions to have the chamber in the west courtyard in the back garden swept clean and provided with bedding. And light some charcoal under the k'ang."

From in the hall a single call;

Below the steps a hundred yeps.

The attendants assented obsequiously and set out about their tasks.

"That is extremely kind of you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but your pupil is still concerned lest he offend Hsia Yen-ling."

"Don't talk such rot!" said Ho Hsin. "He no longer serves in your yamen.

He who occupies no post in an office,

Has no right to discuss its policies.⁶³

He is now responsible for the depot in which the imperial equipage is stored and no longer has any say with regard to the provincial judicial commissions. He is in no position to feel offended by you."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he ordered that, after Tai-an and the grooms tending the horses had been provided with food and wine, several soldiers should also be dispatched, equipped with ropes and carrying poles, to proceed to the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü and bring back Hsi-men Ch'ing's luggage.

Ho Hsin then went on to say, "There is another favor I would like to ask of Your Honor. When my nephew, the newly appointed official, arrives at his place of office, I hope that Your Honor will consent to help him find a house to live in, so that it will be convenient for him to send for his dependents later on. I'll have him accompany Your Honor on your way back, and then, after he has found a home, I'll arrange to send his dependents off to join him. There are not a lot of them, but, including several families of servants, there will be twenty or thirty persons, in all."

"When your nephew is gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will there be to look after this house of yours, venerable sir?"

"There are two adopted nephews in my household," said Ho Hsin. "The second one, whose name is Ho Yung-fu, is currently residing on my country estate. I'll ask him to come and reside here."

"Venerable sir," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how much silver are you willing to spend on a place for your nephew?"

"It will probably require a place costing more than a thousand taels of silver to accommodate them all," responded Ho Hsin.

"My colleague Hsia Yen-ling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "now that he has a capital appointment, will not be going back to Ch'ing-ho and will have to dispose of the house he owns there. Venerable sir, why don't you purchase that place of his in order to provide a house for your nephew? That would be a good move, since it would:

Accomplish two objectives with a single act.

His house has a fifty-four-foot-wide frontage and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. Inside the ceremonial gate there is a large reception hall with vaulted stag's head roofs over the galleries connecting it to the anterooms on either side of the courtyard. In the rear there are located residential quarters, ornamental pavilions, and a host of other rooms on all sides, with passageways leading between them. It is more than spacious enough to accommodate your nephew."

"What price does he expect to get for it?" asked Ho Hsin.

"He has told me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that he originally paid twelve hundred taels for it, and that he has since added two flat-roofed rooms to the rear, and erected an ornamental pavilion. However, if you would like to acquire it, venerable sir, he would probably let you have it for whatever you are prepared to offer."

"I'm putting the matter in Your Honor's hands," said Ho Hsin. "Whatever Your Honor proposes will be all right with me. Since I am at home today, why don't you send someone to speak to him and ask for the loan of the original deed of sale, so that I can take a look at it? It would be a rare stroke of luck to succeed in locating a house so that my nephew will have a place to stay when he assumes his

new office.”

Before long, whom should they see but Tai-an and the other servants who came back to report that they had fetched the luggage.

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, “Did Pen the Fourth and Wang Ching come back with you or not?”

“Wang Ching is already here, having overseen the transport of the trunks of clothing and other luggage,” reported Tai-an. “The sedan chair is still there, and Pen the Fourth remained to look after it.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon:

Whispered into his ear in a low voice,

Thus and thus, and

So and so,

saying, “Take my calling card and request that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling loan me the original deed of sale for that place of his, so that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin can examine it; and bring Pen the Fourth back with you.”

Tai-an assented and set off on this errand.

It was not long before Pen the Fourth, wearing black livery and a commoner's informal skullcap, came back with Tai-an, who handed the deed of sale to Hsi-men Ch'ing and reported, “His Honor Hsia Yen-ling responded to your request by saying, ‘Since it is the venerable eunuch Ho Hsin who is interested in my place, how can I put a price on it?’ This is the original deed of sale that I have brought back with me. He also said that he had spent a good deal of money on making improvements to the property, but that he would go along with whatever Your Honor proposes.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing handed the original deed of sale to Ho Hsin, who read it over and saw that the purchase price was stated to be twelve hundred taels.

“I imagine he must have resided in this house for some years by now,” he said, “so the interior can hardly help showing some signs of wear and tear, which would offset whatever he may have spent on improvements. Out of respect for Your Honor, however, I am willing to invest in the property on my nephew's behalf and am prepared to pay the original purchase price.”

On hearing this, Pen the Fourth hastily knelt down in front of him and said, “What Your Honor proposes is appropriate. It has always been true that:

You must be ready to spend lavishly,

In order to acquire a good property.

In a thousand years a dwelling may have

a hundred owners,⁶⁴

But each time it is refurbished it will

be as good as new.”⁶⁵

When Eunuch Director Ho Hsin heard these words, he was utterly captivated and exclaimed, “Where do you come from? This character certainly has a way with words. As the saying goes:

Those who would accomplish great things,

do not balk at petty outlays.⁶⁶

What he says is right enough. What is his name?”

“He is one of my managers,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “and he is called Pen the Fourth.”

“Well then,” Ho Hsin said to him, “since we don't yet have an intermediary, you can serve as our middleman, and go request a deed of sale on my behalf. Since today is a propitious day for such a transaction, I might as well proceed to weigh out the silver for him forthwith.”

“It's already late right now,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “You might as well wait until tomorrow.”

“At the fifth watch I have to report for early duty in the palace,” explained Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, “and tomorrow is the day of the great audience. I might as well wrap the matter up by turning the silver over to him today and thereby conclude the matter.”

“At what time will the imperial equipage leave the palace tomorrow?” asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

“The imperial equipage will leave the palace in order to proceed to the Altar of Heaven at 11:00 tonight,” said Ho Hsin. “The Suburban Sacrifice should be over by 1:00 AM at the end of the third watch. By 4:30 AM the imperial equipage will have returned to the palace for the serving of a morning meal, after which the Emperor will emerge to preside over the audience in the main hall of the palace, and receive the congratulations of the assembled officials. The various bureaucratic offices of the entire empire will all submit memorials in celebration of the winter solstice. On the following day, a banquet will be held for the principal civil and military officials of the capital to celebrate the completion of the ceremony. Since the two of you are outer officials, serving in the provinces, once you have submitted your memorials at the great audience, there will be nothing more for you to do.”

When he had finished speaking, Ho Hsin instructed his nephew Ho Yung-shou, the newly appointed battalion commander, to go back to the interior of the residence and bring out twenty-four large silver ingots weighing fifty taels apiece, and put them in food boxes for carrying. He then deputed two household servants to accompany Pen the Fourth and Tai-an in escorting them to Privy Councillor Ts'ui Shou-yü's house and delivering them to Hsia Yen-ling.

When Hsia Yen-ling saw that they had brought the silver for him, he was utterly delighted and immediately wrote out a deed of sale in his own hand and turned it over to Pen the Fourth and his companions. When they took this back and delivered it to Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, he was:

Unable to contain his delight,

and rewarded Pen the Fourth with ten taels of silver, and Tai-an and Wang Ching with three taels each.

"They're only youngsters," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You ought not to reward them so lavishly."

"I'm just offhandedly giving them enough with which to buy something to eat," responded Ho Hsin.

The three recipients kowtowed to him in gratitude, and Ho Hsin ordered that they also be provided with food and wine.

He then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and bowed twice, saying, "This outcome is entirely due to Your Honor's diffracted radiance."

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It is really owing to your golden reputation."

Ho Hsin went on to say, "I hope that Your Honor will speak to Hsia Yen-ling and urge him to vacate that place of his as soon as convenient, so that my nephew's dependents can prepare for their departure."

"Your pupil will certainly speak to him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and urge him to vacate the premises as soon as possible. My new colleague, your nephew, when he first arrives, can stay temporarily in the residential quarters of the yamen for a few days, until Hsia Yen-ling's dependents have moved to the capital, and the place has been put in order. It will not be too late if my colleague's dependents delay their departure until then."

"It should be possible to carry out whatever renovations are necessary by the end of the New Year's celebrations," said Ho Hsin. "It would be best for my nephew's dependents to make their move at that time. It will not be convenient if they have to stay in the yamen for too long."

As their conversation continued, it was already the second watch of the night, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Venerable sir, let us say good night. Your pupil:

Cannot handle the effects of the drink."

Only then did Eunuch Director Ho Hsin consent to call it a night and retreat to his heated chamber in the rear of the house.

Meanwhile, Ho Yung-shou called for the household musicians to perform for them again and proceeded to play a game of pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Only after they had continued drinking for a while longer did they get up and go back to the rear garden.

The accommodation provided for Hsi-men Ch'ing consisted of a three-room studio ranged along the northern end of the garden, which was surrounded on all four sides by a whitewashed wall, and enhanced with terraces and kiosks, ornamental rock formations, potted miniature plants, flowers and trees. Inside the studio:

Crimson candles blazed on high;

Drapes enclosed layered quilts.

Brocaded curtains set off Japanese screens

decorated with gold tracery;

Zithers, books, tables, and mats enhanced

the air of elegant seclusion.

The kingfisher blinds hung low;

The furnishings were faultless.

On the stove, tea was steeping in a precious pot;

Within the censer, cakes of musk were smoldering.

Ho Yung-shou continued to make small talk with Hsi-men Ch'ing, and, sometime later, a servant lad served them with tea. Only then did Ho Yung-shou say good night and go back to his own quarters in the rear of the house. Hsi-men Ch'ing warmed himself at the stove for a while before he finally disposed of his headgear:

Took off his clothes and went to bed.⁶⁷

Wang Ching and Tai-an helped him off with his boots and stockings, put out the lamps and candles, and prepared to sleep after laying out their bedding on a heated k'ang at the lower end of the room.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was somewhat inebriated. As he lay on the pillow, he observed that his quilts and mattresses were of satin and brocade, his bed curtains were of embroidered sable, and the bed itself was like a heated alcove decorated with gold tracery. As he lay under his quilt, he saw that:

The window was illuminated by moonlight,

and:

He tossed first this way and then that,

unable to get to sleep. After a while, as he listened to the steady dripping of the clepsydra and watched the quiet movements of the flower shadows, he became aware that the cold wind was rattling the papered window panes. His feeling of loneliness was exacerbated by the fact that he had been away from home for some time, and he was on the verge of inviting Wang Ching to come sleep with him.

All of a sudden, he heard the faint sound of a woman's voice outside the window and, hastily donning a robe and getting out of bed, slipped on his shoes and stockings and cautiously opened the door to see who it was. Lo and behold, it was Li P'ing-erh:

With misty locks and cloudy tresses,

Faintly made up, lovely and elegant.

A well-worn plain white gown veiled

her snow-white body;

Soft light-yellow stockings set off

her upturned shoe-tips.⁶⁸

Lightly moving her lotus feet,
 She appeared beneath the moon.
 As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her, he:
 Took her into the room,⁶⁹
 Embraced her, and wept,⁷⁰
 saying, "Darling, what are you doing here?"
 "I've come looking for you," said Li P'ing-erh, "in order to tell you that I've found a new home. I especially wanted to see you tonight because I'll be moving in before long."
 "Where is this home of yours located?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired anxiously.
 "It's not far away at all," replied Li P'ing-erh. "If you go out from here, it's located on Potter's Alley, off the east side of the main thoroughfare."
 When they had finished speaking, she and Hsi-men Ch'ing:
 Enfolded each other in a mutual embrace,⁷¹
 Got into bed to play at clouds and rain,⁷²
 and experienced scarcely endurable transports of delight. Once it was over, she:
 Adjusted her attire, redid her chignon, but
 Hesitated reluctantly to part from him.⁷³
 Li P'ing-erh repeatedly enjoined Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My Brother, be sure you remember to abstain from late night drinking parties, and return home as early as possible. That wretch of mine is forever on the lookout for a means of bringing you to grief. Whatever you do, don't forget these words of mine. You must keep them constantly in mind."
 When she had finished speaking, she took Hsi-men Ch'ing by the hand and urged him to see her on her way home. When they arrived out on the main thoroughfare, he saw that:
 The moonlight was as bright as day.⁷⁴
 Sure enough, when they headed east past the memorial arch, they arrived at a small alley and, almost immediately thereafter, came to a double-leaved gate of white planks.
 Li P'ing-erh pointed it out, saying, "This is my home."
 No sooner had she finished speaking, than she:
 Shook herself loose and went inside.
 Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily stepped forward to stop her but suddenly awoke with a start to find that it was but:
 A dream of the Southern Branch.
 All he could see was:
 The moonbeams slanting across the window, and
 The rising shadows of the flowering branches.
 Feeling the bedding beneath him, Hsi-men Ching found that:
 His flow of semen covered the mat,
 Her fragrance saturated the quilt,
 The taste of her saliva was sweet.
 Grieving over her was of no avail,
 His anguish could not be overcome.⁷⁵
 Truly:
 The good things of this world are
 none too enduring;
 Colored clouds are prone to scatter
 and glass is brittle.
 There is a poem that testifies to this:
 The jade firmament is somewhat nebulous,
 pervaded as it is by frost;



Li P'ing-erh Appears in a Dream in Ho Yung-shou's House

Faint moonlight penetrates the casement,
as his dreaming soul awakes.
In desolation, he tries to go to sleep
until he can try no longer;
How he hates it that the torpid rooster
refuses to announce the dawn. ⁷⁶

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Tossed first this way and then that,
waiting for the rooster to crow, and longing for the break of day. But, when the day finally broke, he had dozed off.

Early in the morning, the page boys in Ho Yung-shou's house got up and waited on Hsi-men Ch'ing with hot water and towels so he could wash his face. After Wang Ching and Tai-an had helped Hsi-men Ch'ing to comb his hair and perform his ablutions, Ho Yung-shou came out to keep him company. When they had drunk a serving of ginger-flavored tea, he had a table set up and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to have some congee.

"Why has the old gentleman not appeared?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"My venerable uncle had to report for duty in the palace at the fifth watch," Ho Yung-shou replied.

In no time at all, the congee was served as they sat around the brazier, accompanied by four saucers of tastefully presented appetizers, and four large bowls of stewed meats. When they had finished eating the congee, a wine-laced pick-me-up containing pork meatballs, eggs, and wonton was served, with gold spoons and carved lacquer cups encased with silver. As they ate, they ordered their

servants to go outside and prepare their horses.

Ho Yung-shou and Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded, dressed in formal attire and attended by their servitors, to go into the Forbidden City and report to the Ministry of War. When they came out, they separated, as Ho Yung-shou headed for home, while Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the Hsiang-kuo Temple to pay a call on Abbot Chih-yün. The abbot retained him for a vegetarian repast, but Hsi-men Ch'ing ate only a single delicacy himself, conferring the remainder on his attendants.

When they left the temple, Tai-an was carrying some satins and brocades in a felt bag as they went along East Street, intending to go to Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü's residence in order to pay a congratulatory visit to Hsia Yen-ling. On their way there, halfway through Potter's Alley, Hsi-men Ch'ing actually saw a double-leaved gate of white planks, exactly like the one he had seen in his dream.

Hsi-men Ch'ing unobtrusively sent Tai-an to ask the old woman who sold bean curd next-door who the house belonged to, and the old woman replied, "It is the home of Commander Yüan."

On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Could not suppress a sigh of astonishment.

When they arrived at the residence of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, Hsia Yen-ling was in the process of leading out his horse in order to go pay a social call. When he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he told his attendants to take the horse aside and invited him into the reception hall, where they bowed to each other and exchanged the customary amenities. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Tai-an to bring out his congratulatory gifts, consisting of a length of brocaded damask on a blue ground and a length of variegated satin.

"Your pupil has not yet had the chance to congratulate his colleague," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but has allowed you to anticipate me. And yesterday, you also went to a good deal of trouble on my behalf with regard to the disposition of my humble abode.

My gratitude knows no bounds."

"Eunuch Director Ho Hsin asked your pupil to assist him in finding a house for his nephew," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and since Your Honor had asked me to help with the disposition of your property, I mentioned it's availability to him. Ho Hsin having expressed an interest in purchasing it, your pupil could scarcely have refrained from helping to complete the transaction, and when I sent for the original deed of sale, and he had perused it, he readily consented to pay the original purchase price. It is the nature of eunuchs to be impulsive, expecting:

Bridges to be built while they wait on horseback,
that accounts for this successful conclusion. It is a stroke of good luck for Your Honor."

When he had finished speaking, they had a laugh together.

"I haven't yet had a chance to repay Ho Yung-shou's visit," said Hsia Yen-ling.

He then went on to ask, "Is he going to accompany my colleague on his return trip?"

"He has already agreed to travel with your pupil," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He will send for his dependents later. Last night the venerable eunuch made a point of asking me to urge Your Honor to vacate the premises as soon as possible, so that his nephew can arrange for his dependents to join him. At present, he is planning to stay temporarily in the yamen for a few days."

"Your pupil will not procrastinate about it," Hsia Yen-ling assured him. "As soon as I succeed in finding a place here, I will send someone to fetch my dependents. I should be able to manage it by early next month."

When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go and left a calling card for Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü.

"I would like to retain my colleague for a longer visit," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but we are both only sojourners here. You know how it is."

He then escorted Hsi-men Ch'ing outside, where he mounted his horse and returned to the home of Ho Yung-shou.

Ho Yung-shou had already seen to the preparation of a noon repast and was waiting for him there.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him everything that Hsia Yen-ling had said, explaining that he would undertake to have his property in Ch'ing-ho vacated by early next month, so that Ho Yung-shou could arrange to have his dependents move in at that time.

Ho Yung-shou was delighted to hear this and thanked him, saying, "This is but a further demonstration of my colleague's concern for my welfare."

After their meal, the two of them were in the reception hall playing a board game together, when an attendant suddenly came in and announced, "His Honor Chai Ch'ien from the grand preceptor's mansion has sent people to deliver a gift for the road to you. They went looking for you at the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, but he sent them on here to find you."

Thereupon, he handed over a calling card of safflower red paper, with a list of presents that read, "The enclosed one length of satin brocade, one length of cloud-patterned linen, one freshly slaughtered pig, one northern sheep, two jars of wine from the imperial palace, and two boxes of sweetmeats are deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your kinsman Chai Ch'ien."

Upon speaking to the messenger, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I am once again the recipient of His Honor Chai Ch'ien's generosity."

He then accepted the presents, wrote a card in reply, rewarded the messenger with two taels of silver, and the bearers of the gift boxes with five mace of silver each; saying to the messenger as he did so, "I am inconvenienced by being away from home and fear that this paltry compensation may be regarded as a slight."

The messenger promptly took the gratuity, though protesting the while, "Your servant dares not presume to accept it."

"Inadequate as it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it should suffice to buy you a cup of wine."

Only then did the messenger kowtow in gratitude and formally accept it.

At this point, Wang Ching, who was standing beside Hsi-men Ch'ing, interjected in a low voice, "My elder sister enjoined me to go to the grand preceptor's residence in order to visit Ai-chieh and entrusted me with some things for her."

"What things are those?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They are two pairs of shoes and foot bindings made for her by my sister at home," replied Wang Ching.

"If that's all, it will hardly be adequate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "In my leather trunk, there are some rose hip-flavored pastries that I brought with me. Take two containers of them and put them into a small gift box decorated with gold tracery."

He then wrote out a card to go with them and handed it to Wang Ching, who had put on his black livery, telling him to go back to Chai Ch'ien's residence with the messenger and pay a visit to Ai-chieh. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to write out a card and sent the sheep and one of the jars of wine to Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü to thank him for his hospitality, while arranging to have the pig, the other jar of wine, and the two boxes of sweetmeats taken back to the rear of the residence for the delectation of the venerable Eunuch Director Ho Hsin; saying as he did so, "I have put you here to quite a lot of trouble."

This threw Ho Yung-shou into such consternation that he hastily bowed in thanks, saying, "My colleague, you and I are like members of the same family. What need is there for you to do all this?"

To resume our story, when Wang Ching arrived at the grand preceptor's mansion, he invited Han Ai-chieh to come out and paid his respects to her in the outer reception hall. She was adorned as resplendently as:

A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster,⁷⁷

quite unlike the appearance she had presented in her old home, and had also increased considerably in stature. She arranged for him to be entertained with food and wine and, having noticed that he seemed to be rather thinly clad, presented him with a sable cloak lined with ultramarine satin, and five taels of silver. When he returned to report on his trip, he showed these gifts to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who expressed his gratification.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou continued playing their board game, they suddenly heard the sound of outriders clearing the road, and a gatekeeper came in to report that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling had come to pay his respects and presented two calling cards from him. The two of them hastily adjusted their attire and welcomed him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities, and Ho Yung-shou thanked him for his agreement to sell his property the day before. Hsia Yen-ling had brought with him a pair of satin kerchiefs to present to the two of them as congratulatory gifts, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou thanked him repeatedly and turned them over to their servants to put away. He also presented Pen the Fourth, Tai-an, and Wang Ching with a gratuity of ten taels of silver. As they sat down in the positions appropriate for guests and host, and tea was served, they chatted about the weather.

Hsia Yen-ling then asked, "Might I invite the venerable eunuch to come out so that I can pay him my respects?"

"My uncle is on duty in the palace at present," responded Ho Yung-shou.

Hsia Yen-ling left behind a red accordion-bound calling card, saying, "Please convey my regards to the venerable eunuch. I have been tardy in paying my respects. Pray forgive me."

When he had finished speaking, he said goodbye, got up, and departed.

Ho Yung-shou, for his part, promptly prepared a bolt of satin brocade as a congratulatory gift for Hsia Yen-ling and dispatched someone to deliver it. But no more of this.

That evening, Ho Yung-shou also entertained Hsi-men Ch'ing to a late-night drinking party in his heated chamber in the rear garden. The household musicians sang for them until the second watch before they went to bed.

Concerned about the wet dream he had had the night before, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Wang Ching to bring his bedding inside that evening and sleep on the floor of the studio. When the night was half over, he called him onto his own bed and proceeded to embrace his naked body under the bedclothes:

Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue, and
Mingled his sweet spittle with his.

Truly:

Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying;
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.⁷⁸

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next morning, he arose at the fifth watch and set out with Ho Yung-shou, accompanied by their servants, to attend the audience in the palace. They first proceeded to the Tai-lou Yüan, or Clepsydra Waiting-Hall, where they waited until the Tung-hua Men, or Eastern Floriate Gate, of the Forbidden City opened, when they proceeded to enter the imperial precincts. Behold:

The stars are still visible in the sky, as

the palace clepsydra runs out;⁷⁹

The jade girdle ornaments of the courtiers
sound a tinkling *shan-shan*.

Blossoms brush against swords and halberds
as the stars begin to sink;

Pennants sweep away the willows, on which

the dew is not yet dry.⁸⁰

Amid the glow of an auspicious nimbus, they
gaze upon the Emperor;

An exhalation of propitious vapor envelops
the thousand officials.
If you wish to foresee the sentiments of the
Son of Heaven this day;
Gaze afar at the purple vapor emanating from
the Isles of the Blest.

In a little while, behold:

The portals of the Forbidden City are opened,
To the harmonious clanging of phoenix
girdle pendants;
The doors of the celestial palace are parted,
Making visible the majestic regalia of
the dragon robe.
On this day of prolonged prosperity
and extended peace,⁸¹
We celebrate the dawning of an era
of auspicious joy.⁸²

At that time, the Son of Heaven had already returned from presiding over the Southern Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, and the civil and military officials had all assembled at court to await his appearance at the great audience.⁸³ Before long, after the tolling of a bell, the equipage of the Son of Heaven emerged from the palace, and he ascended to the Great Hall for Veneration of Governance to accept the congratulations of the hundred officials. Shortly thereafter:

The incense burners commenced their revolution;
The drapes were raised and the flabella parted.⁸⁴

What did the imposing ceremonial of the imperial audience that day look like? Behold:

The imperial aura is clear and peaceful,
Genial and agreeable, like an
enveloping mist;
The resplendent sun dominates the void,
Voluminous and rising, clouds
of vapor linger.
Nebulous and indistinct,
The dragon towers and phoenix pavilions,⁸⁵
Are enveloped with a fragrant haze;
Pervading and spreading,⁸⁶
The pearly palaces and jeweled halls,⁸⁷
Reflect the glow of morning clouds.
The Ta-ch'ing Hall,
The Ch'ung-ch'ing Hall,
The Wen-te Hall, and
The Chi-hsien Hall,
Sparkle and glisten;⁸⁸
Their golds and greens blending their hues.
The Ch'ien-ming Palace,
The K'un-ning Palace,
The Chao-yang Palace,
The Ho-pi Palace, and
The Ch'ing-ning Palace,
Shimmer and shine;
Their reds and greens glowing brilliantly.
Bleakly and coldly,⁸⁹
The sun illumines the jade flagstones
and carved balustrades;⁹⁰
Drifting and floating,
The mist enshrouds the gilded rafters
and the painted beams.
Within purple portals and yellow chambers,

In precious tripods, billowing and streaming,
Aloeswood incense smolders;
Along crimson steps and maroon stairways,
On jade terraces, brightly and resplendently,⁹¹
Painted candles burn high.
Lung-lung tung-tung,
The Heaven-shaking drums beat out
a triple paradiddle;
K'eng-k'eng hung-hung,
The Ch'ang-lo Palace bell tolls
a hundred eight times.
Entangled and confused,⁹²
Sword-bearing guardsmen bump
into each other;
Thronging and swarming,
Dragon and tiger flags swirl
about in disorder.
Soldiers with brocade robes and floriate caps,⁹³
Bearing round baldachins and square baldachins,
Array themselves both in front and behind;
Officers with jade tallies and dragon banners,
Driving in gilded carriages and jade carriages,
Deploy themselves both to left and to right.

Also to be seen are:

Vertically held maces, and
Horizontally held maces,
By threes and by twos;⁹⁴
Paired dragon flabella, and
Single dragon flabella,
Doubled and redoubled.⁹⁵
Squad by squad and troop by troop,⁹⁶
Horses with gold saddles, and
Horses with jade bridles,
Display their discipline;
Brace by brace and pair by pair,⁹⁷
Cabin-bearing elephants, and
Cart-pulling elephants,
Show their prodigiousness.
The elite guardsmen protecting the hall,⁹⁸
Each and every one of them lanky and large-sized,
comparable to celestial deities,
Are clothed in plates of gilded armor;
The palace wardens securing the audience,
Every single one of them rigorously disciplined,
resembling terrestrial spirits,
Are armed with florally incised swords.
Rigid and ordered,⁹⁹
Within the gate of the hall are arrayed
the ceremonial supervisors,
Each of them wearing a high judicial cap,
Holding his tablet in front of his chest,¹⁰⁰
Straight and proper,
Beside the inclined stairway are standing
the assembled officials,

Each of them in a brightly brocaded robe,
 Ready to receive announcements and edicts.
 Within the golden hall, in plenteous profusion,¹⁰¹
 Ornamented flabella open simultaneously;
 Before the decorated rafters, deftly and gently,¹⁰²
 The beaded blinds have been rolled high.¹⁰³
 Atop the bell tower, chiao-chiao yüeh-yüeh,
 Herald's proclaim the dawn three times;
 In front of the jade stairs, la-la kua-kua,
 Silence-commanding whips crack thrice.
 Rigorously disciplined,
 Beside the sculpted dragons,
 Arrayed in official regalia,
 There stand holders of the five noble ranks;
 Majestic and inspiring,¹⁰⁴
 Seated on his dragon throne,
 Resting on a brocade cushion,
 They look upon the Lord of a Myriad Chariots.¹⁰⁵
 Gazing at him from a distance:¹⁰⁶
 On his head he wears the flat-topped crown
 with twelve tassels,¹⁰⁷
 His body is clad in a yellow ocher imperial
 dragon robe,
 His waist is bound by a girdle adorned with
 Indigo Field jade,¹⁰⁸
 On his feet he wears thick-soled, polished,
 black leather boots,
 In his hands he grasps a tablet of white jade
 inlaid with gold,
 At his back stands a nine thunder cloud, dragon
 and phoenix screen.

Truly:

On a clear day the green latticed doors
 of the palace open wide;
 A celestial breeze broadcasts the aroma
 of the imperial incense.¹⁰⁹
 A thousand strands of auspicious vapor¹¹⁰
 float by the golden gates;
 While a solitary crimson-colored cloud¹¹¹
 envelops the Jade Emperor.¹¹²

This emperor was born with:

The eyebrows of Yao and the eyes of Shun,
 The back of Yü and the shoulders of T'ang.¹¹³
 If one were to describe this emperor:
 His talents were superior to those of other men,
 He was skilled at extemporaneous poetic rhyming,
 He was able to tally herds of sheep at a glance.¹¹⁴
 He was as good as Wen T'ung at painting
 inkwash bamboos,¹¹⁵
 And as skillful as Hsüeh Chi at dashing
 off calligraphy.¹¹⁶
 He was versed in the books of the three religions,
 And acquainted with the texts of the Nine Schools.
 Indulgent in pleasure, by day and by night,
 He was just like the ruler of Chien-ko, Meng Ch'ang of

the Later Shu dynasty;¹¹⁷
In love of beauty and addiction to the cup,
He was much like the ruler of Chin-ling, Ch'en Shu-pao
of the Ch'en dynasty.¹¹⁸

During the twenty-six years after he ascended the throne at the age of seventeen, he changed the titles of his reign periods six times, starting with Chien-chung ching-kuo, and continuing with Ch'ung-ning, Ta-kuan, Cheng-ho, Ch'ung-ho, and Hsüan-ho.¹¹⁹

That day, when the Emperor had ascended the throne, and the silence-commanding whips had cracked, the civil and military officials in the wake of the nine ministers and four directors,¹²⁰ holding their tablets in front of their chests, mounted the red steps leading up to the dais, performed the ceremony of five obeisances and three kowtows,¹²¹ and presented their memorials.

When they had finished doing so, the eunuch who held the post of palace foreman, with his body clad in a close-fitting purple gown, and his waist encircled with a gold-embossed girdle, strode out to the head of the golden stairs and orally proclaimed an imperial edict,¹²² saying, "It is now twenty years since We acceded to the throne.¹²³ The Mount Ken Imperial Park has been completed, and Heaven has vouchsafed propitious omens. This day inaugurates the dawn of an auspicious era, the benefits of which We intend to share with all of you gentlemen."

Before he had even finished speaking, a great minister at the head of the gathered ranks stepped forward:

His court boots resound upon the ground,
The sleeves of his robe stir the breeze.
If you do not know his official rank,
His jade girdle proclaims his status.

When the assembled officials looked at him, it turned out to be the left grand councilor, grand academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, minister of personnel, grand preceptor, and Duke of Lu, Ts'ai Ching.

Wearing his official headgear and holding his ivory tablet,¹²⁴ he prostrated himself upon the golden stairs¹²⁵ and kowtowed, saying, "May Your Majesty live ten thousand years, ten thousand years, ten thousand times ten thousand years!¹²⁶ Your minister and his cohorts, in sincere fear and trepidation, kowtow and render their obeisance.¹²⁷ We respectfully observe that during the twenty years since Your Majesty acceded to the throne:

The sea-girt realm has been at peace,¹²⁸
The whole empire has been prosperous.
Exalted Heaven, having observed this,¹²⁹
Has produced untold auspicious omens:
The sun has radiated double coronas,
The stars have shone notably bright,
The seas have expanded their extent.
Your Sage Majesty holds the celestial mandate,
Ensuring You of a reign of ten thousand years.
Heaven will be stable,
Earth will be pacific,
People will be serene.
The size of the realm and solidity of the dynasty,
Only enhance the probability of a perpetual reign.
The Three Border Regions have benefited
from a cessation of warfare;
The myriad states have come to pay court¹³⁰
before the celestial portals.
Mount Ken towers athwart the empyrean,¹³¹
The Jade Capital flaunts its elegance.
The Precious Registers conferring the mandate are
exhibited before the palace gates;
The Scarlet Empyrean Tower soars loftily into the
sky above the celestial structures.¹³²
How fortunate Your minister and his cohorts are,
To have the joy of living in this exalted reign,
And associating with such brilliant compatriots.
May Your Majesty profit eternally from the three
wishes of the border guard at Hua;¹³³
And reap the constant benefits of the light shed

upon You by the sun and the moon.
Unable to overcome our extreme trepidation
on gazing upward at the celestial
and sage presence of Your Majesty,¹³⁴
We humbly submit this eulogy for Your attention.”

After some time, an imperial rescript was proclaimed, saying, “The eulogy submitted by Our worthy minister only accentuates his loyalty and sincerity, while serving to enhance Our gratification. We hereby decree that the coming year will be the first year of the Ch’ung-ho reign period. On the first day of the first month, We shall formally accept the newly created seal of state known as the Mandate Determining Seal,¹³⁵ declare a general amnesty, and issue rewards to Our ministers in accordance with their ranks.”

When Grand Preceptor Ts’ai Ching had descended the steps after receiving the rescript in response to his eulogy, the eunuch who held the post of palace foreman proclaimed the Emperor’s command, saying:

“If you have a report to make, proceed forthwith;
If not, roll up the blinds and depart the court.”¹³⁶

Before he had finished speaking, what should they see but a man who:

Stepped forward out of the ranks,
His tablet lowered and body bent,¹³⁷
Garbed in red, with an ivory tablet,
Wearing a jade girdle and gold fish,

and proceeded to prostrate himself on the golden stairs, stating, “Your minister, Grand Master of the Imperial Household, Defender-in-Chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Grand Guardian, and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent, Chu Mien, hereby presents before Your Majesty the twenty-six judicial commissioners kneeling behind me, Chang Lung and company, from the thirteen provinces of the empire, the Two-Huai regions, the Two-Che regions, Shantung, Shansi, Honan, Hopei, Kuan-tung, Kuan-hsi, Fukien, Kuang-nan, and Szechwan. They have been evaluated according to precedent, and recommended for either promotion or reassignment, and are here waiting to receive their credentials. Since it is mandated that these recommendations be presented before Your Majesty, and I lack the presumption to act on my own,¹³⁸ I request the issuance of a rescript to decide the matter.”¹³⁹

In response to this request, an imperial rescript approving the recommendations according to precedent was duly proclaimed. After Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien had descended the steps upon receiving the rescript, the Son of Heaven, with one flip of his sleeves, dismissed the assembled ministers, got into his carriage, and returned to the palace, while the officials, divided into their civil and military ranks, exited the Forbidden City through the Tuan-li Gate, or Gate of Correct Protocol. The twelve trained elephants from the imperial entourage preceded them without the help of their attendants, and the elite guardsmen followed in their wake as they went their separate ways.

All that can be heard is the clinking of armor,
As the sword-bearing guardsmen,
And the red-clad palace guards,
Emerge simultaneously.
All that can be seen is the glint of poleaxes,
Where outside of the palace gate,
Carriages and horses are arrayed,
And guardsmen lined up.
The shouting of men resembles,
The turmoil of oceans and crashing of breakers;
The neighing of horses is like,
The collapse of mountains and cracking of earth.¹⁴⁰

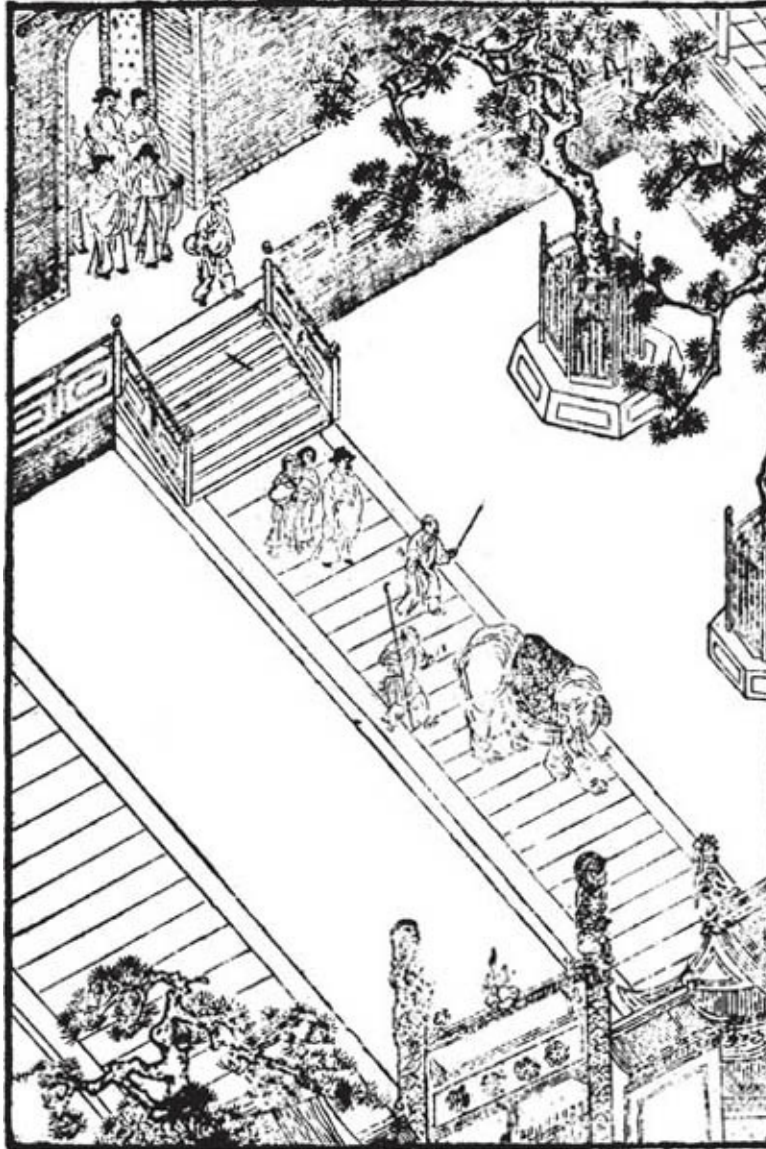
The crowd of judicial commissioners all emerged from the palace grounds, mounted their horses, and proceeded to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, where they congregated as closely as though they were:

Locked tight in an iron bucket.

Before long, whom should they see but a seal-keeper, who came out with his badge of office in hand and announced, “His Honor the defender-in-chief will not return to the yamen today. His sedan chair is already waiting for him just inside the Hsi-hua Men, or Western Floriate Gate, and he is about to set out for the mansions of His Honor Ts’ai Ching and His Honor Li Pang-yen in order to join them in celebrating the winter solstice.”

As a result, the assembled officials all scattered, and Hsi-men Ch’ing and Ho Yung-shou returned to the residence of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, where they spent the night.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch’ing reported back to the Ministry of War to receive his orders of appointment and register his name with the appropriate offices, along with the other expectant officials, after which, he collected what was left of his belongings, packed his luggage, and prepared to set out together with Ho Yung-shou.



Defender-in-Chief Chu Presents a Memorial to the Throne

That evening, Eunuch Director Ho Hsin put on a farewell party for them, during which he said to Ho Yung-shou, "See that you seek the advice of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing in everything, lest, by acting on your own, you should fail in your social obligations."

On the twenty-first day of the eleventh month, they started off from the Eastern Capital, with some twenty attendants between them in their entourage, and set out on the high road to Shantung.

They had already embarked upon:

The ninety coldest days of the winter season,
A time when drops of water turn into icicles.

Along the way, they encountered nothing but:

Empty suburbs and deserted roads,
Desiccated trees and cold ravens.¹⁴¹

In the sparse woods the pale sun
sheds a slanting glow;

The evening snow and cold clouds
obscure the dusky ford.

Before one mountain is surmounted
another comes in view;¹⁴²

By the time one village is passed
another comes in sight.

When they had crossed the Yellow River and reached the customs station at Pa-chiao Chen, all of a sudden, they were confronted with a violent windstorm. Behold:

It is not the roaring of tigers,
Nor is it the droning of dragons.
With a sudden rush, a frigid blast
strikes the face;

With a violent sough, a cold wind
beleaguers them.

Still too weak to strip the willows
or bring blossoms out;

Concealed within it are water sprites
and mountain goblins.¹⁴³

At the outset, it is utterly devoid of
either trace or shadow;¹⁴⁴

But afterwards, it rolls away the mists
and effaces the clouds.

It is so alarming that:

Along willow-lined embankments, the seagulls
fly away in pairs;

On banks of red smartweed, the mandarin ducks
take off together.

Just see the way it:

Penetrates gauze windows,
Extinguishes silver lamps,
Permeates painted bowers,
Pervades silken garments.

In its frenzied dancing, it blows down the
blossoms and bends the willows;

In its somber ferocity, it sets stones in
motion and raises clouds of sand.¹⁴⁵

In its boundless obscurity,

It blows the great trees into sounding
with repeated blasts;

In its whistling cacophony,

It startles a solitary wild goose into
sheltering in a ditch.

In no time at all:

The sand and the rocks strike the ground,
And clouds of dirt obscure the heavens;¹⁴⁶
When the sand and rocks strike the ground,
It is just like the unexpected arrival of
a skyful of opportune rain;

When clouds of dirt obscure the heavens,
It is like the dust raised by the approach
of a million fierce troops.¹⁴⁷

It has the effect of:

Driving the old village fisherman into
ceasing his angling,

Packing up his gear, and racing toward home;
And causing the mountain woodcutter to
lose his composure,

Put away his tools, and head for his cottage.

It is so frightening that:

The tigers and leopards in the hills,
 Pull in their heads,
 Conceal their tracks,
 And hide themselves in the ravines.
 It blows so hard that:
 The horned dragons deep in the oceans,
 Clench their claws,
 Curl up their tails,
 And fail to flaunt their ferocity.
 After blowing for some time,
 One notices that the rooftop tiles
 fly off like sparrows;
 After blustering for a while,
 It appears that the hillside stones
 have taken to flight.
 The rooftop tiles fly off like sparrows,
 Assaulting the traveling merchants into missing
 the track and losing their way;¹⁴⁸
 The hillside stones have taken to flight,
 Scaring the merchant ships into securing their
 hawsers and trimming their sails.
 Tall trees are blown down and uprooted;¹⁴⁹
 Short trees are divested of branch tips.

Just how strong is this wind? Truly:

It overturns the trees that protect
 the gates of Hell;
 It raises the dust on the summit of
 Feng-tu Mountain.¹⁵⁰
 Ch'ang-o hastily shuts the gates of
 the moon palace;
 Airborne Lieh-tzu, high in the void,
 appeals for help.
 It imperils the Jade Emperor's residence
 on the peak of Mount K'un-lun;
 It blows both the world and the universe¹⁵¹
 into violent motion up and down.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou, riding in two closed sedan chairs with felt curtains, were so buffeted by the wind that they found it:

Difficult to proceed a step further.¹⁵²

They also observed that in the waning light they were in danger of being assaulted by criminal elements hiding in the woods. Ho Yung-shou, therefore, suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that they head for the next village to seek lodging for the night and proceed the next day when the wind had abated. After searching for what seemed like half a day, they saw in the distance an old monastery by the side of the road, located in a grove of bare willow trees, behind what remained of a crumbling wall. Behold:

By the stone steps the steles have toppled
 over and are covered by creepers;
 The zigzag galleries and the ancient halls
 have half fallen into decrepitude.
 Late at night the sojourners are devoid of
 either lamplight or braziers;
 As the moon sets they can only sigh at the
 monks engaged in meditation.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou went into the monastery to seek lodging for the night, they noticed a placard indicating that it was named the Yellow Dragon Monastery. On looking into the abbot's quarters, they saw that several monks were sitting there, engaged in meditation. There were no lamps or braziers to be seen, and the living quarters were in a state of dilapidation, some of the gaps in which were patched with woven bamboo. The abbot came out and greeted them with a Buddhist salutation, after which, he lighted a fire to heat some tea and cut some stalks of hay with which to feed their horses. In his luggage, Hsi-men Ching had brought some dried chicken, cured pork, biscuits, hardtack, and the like, which he and Ho Yung-shou managed to make a meal out of that night, while the abbot supplemented it by cooking up a potful of lentil-flavored congee for them, after eating which, they went to bed.

for the night.

The next day, when the wind had stopped and the weather had cleared, they rewarded the old monk with a tael of silver for his hospitality, took their leave, and continued on their journey to Shantung. Truly:

Galloping abroad upon the ruler's business,

they are undeterred by the effort;¹⁵³

Mountains and passes prolong the distance,¹⁵⁴

as they travel toward the capital.

Spending the night in an ancient monastery,

they lack fire for heat or meals;

It is quite enough to cause the wayfarers

to be acutely perturbed at heart.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 72

WANG THE THIRD KOWTOWS TO HSI-MEN CH'ING AS HIS ADOPTED FATHER; YING PO-CHÜEH INTERCEDES TO ALLEVIATE THE GRIEVANCE OF LI MING

The cold and the heat impel each other forward¹
as spring gives place to autumn;
Both for those abroad, and those remaining home,²
their feelings remain persistent.
In the cold season, the traveler is plagued by
the hardships of wind and frost;
Beset by obstacles, the ruler's loyal servant³
allows his teardrops to overflow.
Endangered by the wind and the waves, he knows
not whether he will float or sink;
But meeting with a beauty or enjoying a drink⁴
may serve to alleviate his sorrow.
A snail's-horn of fame, a fly's-head of profit,⁵
have never ceased to be alluring;
How often have they led the black-haired youth
to scoff at the white-haired elder.⁶

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou continued on their journey. But no more of this.

We return instead to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang back at home. It happened that during Hsi-men Ch'ing's former trip to the Eastern Capital, Ch'en Ching-chi was spotted by the wet nurse Ju-i having a drink with P'an Chin-lien in her room, and when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, Yüeh-niang had borne the brunt of his anger, and they had had a falling out about it.⁷ For that reason, on this occasion when Hsi-men Ch'ing was away from home, Yüeh-niang refrained from doing any entertaining. Even when her brother and sister-in-law came to visit, she would not allow them to stay but sent them abruptly on their way. She instructed P'ing-an to keep the main gate closed unless there were some reason to open it, and she had the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard locked up every night. The members of her sorority of wives and concubines did not venture outside but remained in their quarters doing needlework. If Ch'en Ching-chi needed to fetch pawned garments from the storage loft in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang saw to it that either Ch'un-hung or Lai-an accompanied him both on his way in and on his way out. She constantly checked to see if the doors were properly secured and in everything presided over the household more strictly than had been her wont. For this reason, P'an Chin-lien was unable to carry on with Ch'en Ching-chi, and, because it had been the wet nurse Ju-i who had reported her former indiscretion to Yüeh-niang, she was constantly on bad terms with her.

One day, Yüeh-niang got out a considerable number of Hsi-men Ch'ing's undershirts and underpants and handed them over to Ju-i, suggesting that she get Auntie Han to help her in seeing that they were properly washed and starched, and then hung outside to dry in Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Who could have anticipated that in Chin-lien's quarters next door Ch'un-mei was also engaged in laundering her mistress's clothing and was about to begin the process of beating her skirts in order to get them clean, so she sent Ch'iu-chü over to ask if she could borrow a laundry bat for the purpose.

Since Ju-i, along with Ying-ch'un, was engaged in beating Hsi-men Ch'ing's underwear at the time, she refused to give it to her, saying, "You borrowed a laundry bat for your own use just the other day, and here you are asking for it again. Auntie Han, here, is using it right now to beat Father's underpants and undershirts."

Ch'iu-chü, in a fit of temper, angrily marched next door and said to Ch'un-mei, "You insisted on sending me over to borrow it for no good reason, and now they won't let me have it. Ying-ch'un actually said, 'Take it then,' but Ju-i stopped her and refused to let me have it."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" Ch'un-mei exclaimed. "How can she be so uncooperative? It seems as though:

Even in broad daylight, one can't borrow
an empty oil lamp from her.

Who knows but what Mother may also expect me to launder her foot bindings after I get through starching this yellow damask skirt of hers. If I ask that woman to lend us a laundry bat but she refuses to let me have it, when I've done washing Mother's things, what am I going to beat them with?"

She then said to Ch'iu-chü, "You'd better go back to the rear compound and see if they have a laundry bat we could use."

When P'an Chin-lien, who was sitting on the k'ang in her room, engaged in putting on her foot bindings, happened to overhear this,

she asked, "What's going on?"

Ch'un-mei then told her the whole story of how she had tried to borrow a laundry bat, but Ju-i had refused to give it to her.

Because Chin-lien harbored a long-standing grudge against her, this was just the pretext she had been looking for, and she reviled her, saying, "That lousy whore! How could she refuse to give it to you? You'd better go yourself to demand it of her. And if she refuses, it will be all right to give that whore a piece of your mind."

Ch'un-mei, who was in the prime of youth and needed no urging, set off in a fit of rage for Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she arrived like a gust of wind, saying, "Just who do you take to be an outsider in this household, anyway, that you should refuse to let her have a laundry bat when she asks for it? It would seem that yet another mistress has emerged out of nowhere in these quarters."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ju-i. "The laundry bat is right here. Go ahead and take it if you need to. Who do you think is monopolizing it here, anyway, that you should feel justified in getting so angry about it? The First Lady has instructed me that when Auntie Han, here, has finished starching these undershirts and cotton briefs of Father's they should be taken out and beaten with the laundry bat. When Ch'iu-chü came and asked for it, I said to her, 'Wait until I've finished giving these clothes of Father's a couple of strokes with the bat, after which you can take it for your own use.' She has grossly misrepresented the case in claiming that I refused to give it to her. Fortunately, Sister Ying-ch'un is here and can be my witness."

Who could have anticipated that Chin-lien had followed right behind Ch'un-mei and started to curse Ju-i, saying, "That's enough of your lip, woman! Since your mistress died, you act as though you have taken over her place in these quarters, and that Father won't be satisfied to have anyone but you take care of his intimate clothing for him. The rest of us wives might just as well be dead, since only you are fit to launder and starch his clothes for him. You think that by adopting this strategy you can lord it over the rest of us, do you? Well, I'm:

Quite inured to such alarms."

"Fifth Lady, how can you say such a thing?" protested Ju-i. "If the First Lady had not instructed us to do so, do you really think we would have had the nerve to insist on being the only ones to take care of Father's things for him?"

"Why you lousy splay-legged, man-hunting whore!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You still insist on defending yourself, do you? Who is it that served Father with tea and adjusted his bedding for him in the middle of the night? And who talked him into having a jacket made for her? You think the things you're up to behind our backs are unknown to me, do you? Even if your furtive shenanigans should result in a pregnancy, I won't be intimidated by you."

"His legitimate consort and her son both came to grief," said Ju-i.

"Where can I hope to get to?"

If Chin-lien had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:

A fire blazed up in her heart, and

Her powdered face became suffused with red.

Striding forward, she grabbed hold of the woman's hair with one hand and proceeded to thump her in the belly with the other until Auntie Han intervened and succeeded in separating them.

"You shameless whore! You man-baiting whore!" Chin-lien cursed. "Here we all are, bored enough to scream as it is, and you come along trying to seduce our husband. What role do you think you play in these quarters anyway? You're simply a reincarnation of Lai-wang's wife; but I'm not afraid of you."

Ju-i, weeping on the one hand, and trying to straighten her hair on the other, responded by saying, "I'm a latecomer here and know nothing of any Lai-wang's wife. All I know is that I serve as a wet nurse in Father's household."

"If you're a wet nurse," said Chin-lien, "you ought to confine yourself to being a wet nurse, instead of preening yourself on your ability to play the preternatural role of:

The fox who flaunted the tiger's might,⁸
in these quarters.

As an old hand at snaring wild geese,⁹
I'll hardly let you get away with any
of your devilish tricks."

As she continued to curse away, who should appear but Meng Yü-lou, who came strolling out from the rear compound and intervened, saying, "Sister Six, I invited you to come back to my place for a board game. Why haven't you come, instead of getting into a brawl over something here?"

She then grabbed hold of Chin-lien with one hand, dragged her back to her quarters, and sat her down, saying, "Tell me, what's it all about?"

Chin-lien allowed her anger to gradually subside, and Ch'un-mei served them with tea, while drinking which she said, "Just look. That lousy whore has made me so angry my hands are cold, and I can hardly lift my tea cup."

She then went on to say, "I was in my quarters, engaged in sketching a design to be embroidered on a pair of shoes, when you sent Hsiao-luan to invite me over. I told her I'd come after lying down for a while, and I was reclining on the bed without having yet fallen asleep, when I became aware that this little piece of mine was anxious to beat the skirts she had been laundering for me. I told her, 'Why don't you beat these foot bindings of mine while you're at it?' After what seemed like half a day, I heard the sound of a dispute. She had sent Ch'iu-chü next door to borrow a laundry bat for this purpose, and Ju-i had refused to give it to her, grabbing it back out of her hands and saying, 'You borrowed a laundry bat for your own use just the other day, and now that you can't find it, you're here asking for it again. We're just about to use it to beat some clothes of Father's.' Upon hearing this, I became annoyed, and said to

Ch'un-mei, 'You go there yourself and give that lousy whore a piece of your mind.' Since when has she found the nerve to lord it over other people this way? As though we would ever let her get away with it. Who does she think she is, putting on such airs in those quarters of hers? Just as though she had been weighty enough to risk breaking the carrying poles of the bridal palanquin on being brought into the household. Why you're not even a match for that wife of Lai-wang's. I chose to follow right behind Ch'un-mei, and when we got there, Ju-i was still spouting off, yakkety-yak, with that mouth of hers. I gave her a severe tongue-lashing, and if it hadn't been for Auntie Han, who stepped between us and obstinately insisted¹⁰ on dragging me away, I'd have hooked the guts of that lousy, shameless, man-baiting whore right out through her mouth. Does she really think she can pull the wool over our eyes in those quarters of hers by selling scallions for leeks and suchlike mischief? Have you ever seen the likes of our elder sister's irresponsibility? It's reminiscent of the way she indulged that lousy slave of a whore, Lai-wang's wife, to the point where she lost all sense of decorum, with the result that the two of us ended up:



P'an Chin-lien Thumps Chang Ju-i's Stomach with Her Fists

Feeling resentment and harboring hostility,
toward each other. And after that, she had the nerve to besmirch me with the gross allegation that I was responsible for driving that
slave out of the household. Now, once again, she's indulging this woman to the point that:

All the rules of propriety are turned upside down.¹¹

If you're a wet nurse, you ought to confine yourself to being a wet nurse, rather than being allowed to flaunt your:

Showy glamour and gaudy airs.

I'm really:

Not the sort of person to let dust
be thrown in her eyes.

And as for that shameless good-for-nothing:

Nobody knows where the dead end up going to,

but he persists in frequenting her quarters. No matter where he's been, on coming home, he makes a point of going in there, bowing before her portrait, and muttering some mumbo jumbo of who knows what significance. During the night, if he happens to want some tea to drink, that whore gets up and bestirs herself to serve the tea to him, and even goes so far as to adjust his bedding for him. And, the next thing you know, the two of them are going at it together. She's nothing but an inveterate whore. When he calls for the maidservant to bring him some tea, who authorized you to insist upon:

Sticking your neck out and homing in,¹²

that way, in your craving for a man? And how is it that, when she asked him for a jacket, that shameless good-for-nothing lost no time in going out to the shop, getting some silk fabric, and having it made into a jacket for her? And there's something else you don't know about. On the day of the final weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, Father was persuaded to go into her quarters to burn some paper money and caught the maidservant and that woman sitting on the k'ang engaged in playing a game of jacks, which they hadn't had time to clear away before he came in. But, rather than raising any objection, he said, 'Go on playing if you like, and you needn't bother to send the offerings of dumplings and wine back to the rear compound. You can enjoy them yourselves.' For him to indulge her to such an extent was in recompense for what do you suppose? That whore responded by saying, 'Father, you can come and join us or not, as you see fit. We won't wait up for you.' What she could not have anticipated was that I chose to:

Take two or three strides,

and walk right in on her, which startled her to such an extent that she was rendered:

Wide-eyed and speechless,

whereupon she had nothing more to say. In the eyes of that good-for-nothing of ours, what kind of a decent woman is she, anyway? She's nothing but a lousy whore, and with a living husband to boot. And yet, you respond to her just like someone whose:

Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin;

and insist on sheltering her:

Regardless of the outcome for good or ill.¹³

The fact of the matter is, she's a good-for-nothing overripe peach with too much fire in her eyes. How could she be expected to pay any attention to the proprieties? That whore may allege that her husband is dead, but the other day, was that not her husband, with a baby boy in his arms, inquiring after her at the front gate? She's utterly:

Open-eyed and brazen-faced,¹⁴

in the way she tries to deceive people with her tricks. Just look at the way she persists in putting on the gaudy airs that she's so good at right in front of people's eyes, constantly altering her demeanor to suit the circumstances. You can tell from the way she carries on that she regards herself as a reincarnation of Li P'ing-erh. And meanwhile, our elder sister keeps to the rear compound:

Pretending to be both deaf and dumb,

and criticizing anyone who opens her mouth about it."

When Meng Yü-lou had heard her out, she merely smiled.

Chin-lien said:

"Just as Nanking has its Shen Wan-san,¹⁵

Peking has its withered willows;

Just as a man has his reputation,

A tree has its shadow.

How can she fail to be aware that:

If one buries a body in the snow,

It will be exposed when it melts."¹⁶

"It was originally claimed that this woman had no husband," said Meng Yü-lou. "Where did this husband of hers appear from?"

Chin-lien responded, saying:

"If the day lacks wind, it will not be clear;

If people don't lie, they will never succeed.

If she had not resorted to deception, how could she have hoped to find employment? Remember what she looked like when she first came here. She had a ravenous-looking face, her yellow skin was sallow and withered, and she appeared to be:

Both impoverished and emaciated,¹⁷

but after two years of eating her fill, the lousy whore is robust enough to resort to her man-baiting tricks. If you don't attempt to restrain her, before you know it, she'll start:

Assuming privileges above her station;

and if, in due course, she should happen to produce a child, whose would it be?"

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "Slavey Six, you surely don't lack the cunning to deal with it."

After sitting a while longer, the two of them went back to the rear compound to play a board game together. Truly:

The three luminaries cast shadows, but
who can catch them;
The ten thousand things have no roots, they
just arise of themselves.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

A mere handful of spring warmth suffices
to stir nature into glory,
Bright crimsons and light greens¹⁸ begin
to be engendered everywhere.
Even the wild plum blossom provides ample
stimulation for enjoyment,
What need is there to insist upon having
a tree of purple magnolias?¹⁹

To make a long story short, one day, in the afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived back in Ch'ing-ho district and told Pen the Fourth and Wang Ching to take the luggage and go to the house before him, while he accompanied Ho Yung-shou to the yamen. After seeing that the residential quarters there were properly prepared and swept out in order to provide him with a place to stay, he mounted his horse and returned home.

Wu Yüeh-niang received him in the rear reception hall and proceeded to dust the dirt from the journey off his clothes and ladle out some water so he could wash his face. No sooner was he done with his ablutions than he ordered a maidservant to set up a table in the courtyard, where he:

Lit a full burner of incense,
and proceeded to make a vow before the tablets representing Heaven and Earth.

"Why are you making such a vow?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"Not to mention anything else," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm lucky to be alive."

He then proceeded to tell her about the events on the road during their return trip, saying, "Just yesterday, on the twenty-second day of the eleventh month, we had barely crossed the Yellow River and arrived at Pa-chiao Chen in I-shui district when we ran into a violent windstorm, so nasty that we were blinded by the blowing sand and quite unable to proceed any further. It was late in the day already, and we hadn't seen a soul for the last hundred li of our journey, which threw us all into consternation. On top of which, we had numerous saddlebags and trunks full of valuables and didn't know what to do if we were confronted by robbers. As we proceeded, we came upon an old monastery. Though it was already night, the monks there were so impoverished they didn't even have a lamp lighted. Each of us had some dry rations and hardtack with us, and the abbot not only lent us a light and cooked up a pot of lentil-flavored congee, which we shared between us, but also cut some fodder with which to feed our horses. I then spent the night, foot to foot, on a meditation platform with Ho Yung-shou. The next day, it was only after the wind had died down that we were able to set out again. These hardships were ten times more severe than those I encountered on my last trip to the capital. That time, although the weather was hot, it was not too bad; but this time, not only was the weather bitterly cold, but we had to put up with some fearful conditions. Fortunately, we were on level ground at the time. If we had encountered such a tempest on the Yellow River, who knows what we would have done. While I was still on the road, I made a vow that on the first day of the twelfth month I would sacrifice a pig and a sheep to Heaven and Earth."

"Why didn't you come straight home, just now," asked Yüeh-niang, "instead of going first to the yamen?"

"Hsia Yen-ling," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has recently been promoted to the position of commander of the escort for imperial processions and will consequently no longer be returning here. Ho Yung-shou, the nephew of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury, has just been promoted to my former post as assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. He is not more than nineteen years old, just a little squirt of a youngster, and quite ignorant of the bureaucratic world. His uncle, the eunuch director, repeatedly urged me to look after him in all things and offer him the benefit of my experience. If I had not accompanied him to the yamen and arranged a place for him to stay, he wouldn't have known what to do. I have also made a deal for him to buy that house of Hsia Yen-ling's for twelve hundred taels of silver, but, for the time being, he will have to put up in the yamen until Hsia Yen-ling has vacated the premises, so he can arrange for his own dependents to move in.

"The other day, before we even left town, Hsia Yen-ling was unhappy about the prospect of being transferred to a position in the capital. Some unknown person must have leaked the news of our impending appointments to him. When we arrived in the capital, it turned out that he had previously spent who knows how much silver to solicit the intervention of Perfect Man Lin Ling-su at court, who informed Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien that Hsia Yen-ling wished to retain his rank of battalion commander and preferred to remain in his current post as judicial commissioner for another three years. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, accordingly, took the matter up with His Honor the grand preceptor, which put him in an extremely awkward position. If Kinsman Chai Ch'ien had not done everything in his power to maintain my interest, I would have been shunted aside. When I arrived there, Kinsman Chai Ch'ien was extremely annoyed with me and reproached me for not being able to keep a secret. I don't know who it could have been that leaked the information to him."

"You don't believe what I say," responded Yüeh-niang, "but you're altogether too impulsive in the way you carry on, just as if your legs were on fire. You can't keep anything to yourself but are always telling specious stories, first to this one, and then to that, giving people the impression that you're only:

Peddling your influence and parading your wealth.

Truly:

When the mindful plot against the unmindful,
How can the unprepared cope with the prepared?

Having already seen the way you carry on, people think they know what you're up to and can't be bothered to take you seriously. They are able to pursue their own interests on the quiet:

Just as easy as you please,
without your knowing anything about it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "When I was about to depart from the capital, Hsia Yen-ling repeatedly requested that I look after the welfare of his family, early and late. Someday soon, you ought to buy an appropriate gift and go pay a call on them."

"Since his wife's birthday is on the second day of the coming month," said Yüeh-niang, "I can accomplish both purposes by paying a call on her then. As I was saying, in the future, you ought to amend the reckless way you go about your business. As the sayings go:

On first meeting one should express no more than
three-tenths of one's thoughts;
Never under any circumstances should one disclose
the whole content of one's heart.
Even one's wife may harbor duplicitous intent,
Not to mention people in the world at large."

As they were talking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and reported, "Pen the Fourth would like to know whether Father is ready to have him go to the home of His Honor Hsia in order to let them know what has happened, or not?"

"Tell him to go after he has had something to eat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He says he doesn't need to eat anything," replied Tai-an.

At this point, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all trooped in to pay their respects, ask about his trip, and keep him company. Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to remember that when he had returned from his former trip to the Eastern Capital, Li P'ing-erh had also been among them, but today she was no longer there. Without more ado, he went out to her quarters in the front compound, bowed before her spirit tablet, and shed a few tears, after which Ju-i, Ying-ch'un, and Hsiu-ch'un all came forward and kowtowed to him.

Yüeh-niang lost no time in sending Hsiao-yü out to invite him back to the rear compound for a meal. When he had finished eating, he ordered that four taels of silver should be provided to reward the officers who had looked after the ponies on his trip, and he also wrote a calling card thanking Commandant Chou Hsiu for their loan. In addition, he told Lai-hsing to procure a half-carass of pork, a half-carass of mutton, forty catties of white flour, a package of white rice, a jar of wine, two legs of smoked pork, two geese, ten chickens, kindling and charcoal, and appropriate amounts of cooking oil, salt, vinegar, and the like, to be delivered to Ho Yung-shou as a welcome gift to provide for his needs. He also engaged the services of a chef to cater to him there.

Just as these provisions were being collected in the reception hall, preparatory to Tai-an's delivering them, Ch'in-t'ung suddenly came in and said, "Master Wen and Ying the Second have come to pay you a visit."

"Invite them to come in," Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly responded.

Licentiate Wen, wearing a gown of green satin, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest, and Ying Po-chüeh, in a jacket of purple velvet, came in from the front compound to pay their respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Bowing repeatedly in greeting, they asked him about the hardships of wind and frost he had been exposed to on his journey.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, said, "I am grateful to you two gentlemen for keeping an eye on my home, early and late."

"Not only did I keep an eye on your home," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but this morning, when I was about to get up, I suddenly heard the chattering of auspicious magpies on the roof of the house. My wife anticipated me by saying, 'I imagine it's an indication that His Honor has returned home. Why don't you go take a look?' To which I replied, 'Brother departed on the twelfth, and it's only been half a month or so since then. How could he get back so quickly? Every third day I go by there to ask after him, but I haven't heard any news as yet.' 'No matter whether he's come back or not,' said my wife, 'why don't you go take a look?' And she urged me to get dressed. When I arrived at your place, I was surprised to hear that Brother had actually returned, and when I ventured across the street to call on the venerable Master Wen, I found that he, too, was just putting on his clothes. 'Why don't I go over there with you, venerable sir?' he said."

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask whom he had encountered on the road to the Eastern Capital. He also noticed that there were quantities of foodstuffs, wine, rice, and so forth, packed up and resting on the stylobate outside the reception hall, and asked, "Who are these for?"

"They are for my new colleague, His Honor Ho Yung-shou," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He accompanied me on my return trip, but his dependents have not arrived yet, so he is staying temporarily in the yamen. I am sending these things to him as a gift to provide for his needs while he is there. I am also sending him a card inviting him to come over tomorrow for a welcoming party after the hardships of the road. I'm not planning to invite anyone else, but I hope that you two gentlemen and my brother-in-law Wu K'ai will be able to come and keep him company."

"There is one problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Your brother-in-law Wu K'ai, like you, Brother, are both officials, and Master Wen, here, wears a square-cut scholar's cap, while I am only entitled to wear a commoner's skullcap. How can I be comfortable socializing with him? Who knows what he will make of me? Will I not be merely an object of amusement in his eyes?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "In that case, I'll lend you my newly purchased silk 'loyal and tranquil hat' to wear, and if he

should ask you about it, you can say that you are my eldest son. How would that be?"

They all had a laugh at this.

"To get serious about it," continued Ying Po-chüeh, "my head size is eight and three-tenths inches, so I couldn't wear any hat of yours."

Licentiate Wen chimed in, saying, "Your pupil's head size is also eight and three-tenths inches; so how would it be if I lent you my square-cut scholar's cap to wear?"

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you mustn't lend it to him. If he gets used to borrowing it, he might violate protocol by forgetfully showing up with it when reporting for duty at the local office of the Board of Rites, and you would be implicated."

"What a thing to say, venerable sir!" laughed Licentiate Wen. "What a thing to say! No doubt I'd end up being dragged into the soup with him."

At this point, a servant served them with tea, and after they had drunk it, Licentiate Wen inquired, "So His Honor Hsia Yen-ling has received a capital appointment and will not be coming back here anymore?"

"He has been elevated to the position of a senior official," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As the commander of the escort for imperial processions, he is entitled to wear a mandarin square featuring a *ch'i-lin*,²⁰ and wield a rattan cane. As the holder of such an illustrious position in the capital, why should he return here?"

Before long, after the invitation had been written, the gifts had been carried outside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had deputed Tai-an to take charge of their delivery, he conducted Licentiate Wen and Ying Po-chüeh into an anteroom where they could sit down on a heated k'ang, and warm themselves at a brazier. He also dispatched Ch'in-t'ung to the licensed quarter to engage the services of the four boy actors, Wu Hui, Cheng Ch'un, Cheng Feng, and Tso Shun, who were to report for duty early the next day. He then arranged to have a table set up so he could keep his two guests company for a drink of wine.

When Lai-an had brought the table in and set it up, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Bring another place setting of goblet and chopsticks, and invite my son-in-law to join us."

In due course, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, bowed to the company, and took a seat to one side. The four of them sat down together around the brazier and proceeded to pour the wine, after which, they fell to talking about Hsi-men Ch'ing's adventures on the road.

"Brother," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "you must have a good heart. Since:

One case of good fortune can override

a hundred calamities,²¹

even if there had been highwaymen about at the time, the threat they posed would naturally have been dissipated."

Licentiate Wen chimed in, saying:

"If good men were to rule a state for a hundred years,

they could put an end to violence and killing."²²

Quite aside from the fact, venerable sir, that you are forever galloping abroad upon the ruler's business, High Heaven will not permit good people to suffer injury."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "Did anything of importance happen at home during my absence?"

"After Father's departure," replied Ch'en Ching-chi, "nothing particular happened at home. The only thing is that His Honor An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works sent people to ask after you twice. Yesterday they came again to ask me, and I told them that you had not returned yet."

As they were talking, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in carrying a large platter of stuffed, chive-flavored, pork dumplings. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept them company as they ate but had only had time to eat one dumpling for himself, when P'ing-an came in and announced that two clerks from the yamen office and a group of adjutants had come to report on something. Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the reception hall, where he remained standing, and ordered them to come in.

The two clerks knelt down in front of him and asked, "If it please Your Honor, on what day do you intend to assume your new office? And how much in the way of public funds should be drawn upon for the occasion?"

"Just do as you have been accustomed to do in the past," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Last year," said the clerks, "Your Honor was the only one to assume office. But now, not only has Your Honor been promoted to the post of judicial commissioner, but His Honor Ho Yung-shou is also assuming office as assistant judicial commissioner. Since these two events are occurring together, the normal precedents do not apply."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can spend another ten taels of silver for the occasion, making a total of thirty taels in all."

The two clerks assented and were on their way out when Hsi-men Ch'ing called them back and said, "As for the day on which to schedule our formal assumption of office, you can ask His Honor Ho Yung-shou when he would like it to be."

"His Honor Ho Yung-shou has already determined that he would like it to be on the twenty-fifth,"²³ the two clerks reported.

"In that case," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can go ahead and prepare for it then."

The two of them then proceeded to draw the specified amount of silver and expend it on arranging the necessary table settings, and purchasing provisions for the occasion.

Sometime later, Ch'iao Hung also came by to pay his respects and proffer his congratulations. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him to stay for a visit, but he declined and, after drinking a serving of tea, got up and departed. Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to keep his two guests company until lamplighting time before the party broke up, after which, he went back to Yüeh-niang's quarters, where he spent the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, preparations were set in order for the party to welcome Ho Yung-shou after the hardships of his trip.

Auntie Wen had also learned of Hsi-men Ch'ing's homecoming by this time and mentioned it to Wang the Third, who immediately prepared a calling card inviting him to come over for a visit. Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by arranging for the purchase of two sets of pig's trotters, two fresh fish, two roast ducks, and a jar of southern wine, and sending Tai-an to deliver them as a belated birthday present for Lady Lin. Tai-an was rewarded for his efforts with a gratuity of three mace of silver. But no more of this.

In the main reception hall the preparations for the party were complete.

The brocade screens dazzled the eyes,
The tables and chairs were spic-and-span,
The floor was covered with brocade carpets,
Landscapes by famous artists adorned the walls.

Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen all came ahead of time. Hsi-men Ch'ing joined them while tea was served and sent someone to remind Ho Yung-shou of his invitation. In a little while, the boy actors appeared and kowtowed to the company.

"Brother," inquired Ying Po-chüeh, "why did you not engage the services of Li Ming for this occasion?"

"He no longer frequents my household," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I no longer employ him."

"I guess you're still angry with them," said Ying Po-chüeh, but he did not pursue the matter further.

As they were talking, whom should they see but P'ing-an, who hastily came in with a calling card and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has come to pay his respects and has already dismounted."

At this, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh all retired to an anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, while Hsi-men Ch'ing donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome his guest into the reception hall. After exchanging the customary amenities, Chou Hsiu spoke of Hsi-men Ch'ing's recent promotion and extended his congratulations, and Hsi-men Ch'ing thanked him for the loan of the officers and horses for his trip. Thereupon, the two of them sat down in the positions of guest and host, while Chou Hsiu asked him to describe his experience of the imperial audience in the capital. Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by telling him about it in some detail.

"Since Hsia Yen-ling is not coming back," said Chou Hsiu, "he surely must be planning to send someone to conduct his dependents to the capital."

"He is not going to send for them until sometime next month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In the interim, my colleague Ho Yung-shou is staying at the yamen. In response to my advocacy, Hsia Yen-ling has also agreed to sell his house to him."

"That sounds like an ideal solution," said Chou Hsiu.

Upon noticing the preparations for a party in the reception hall, he then went on to ask, "Who are you entertaining today?"

"I'm merely providing a libation to welcome His Honor Ho Yung-shou after the hardships of his journey," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since we are now colleagues, it's the least I can do for him."

When the two of them had finished their tea, Chou Hsiu got up to go, saying, "Someday soon, the officers of the guard will get together to offer their congratulations to you two gentlemen."

"How could I presume to put you to such trouble?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I am grateful for your offer."

After bowing to his host, Chou Hsiu went out the gate, mounted his horse, and departed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then came back inside, divested himself of his formal attire, and rejoined his three visitors, after which, a meal was served for them in the studio.

It was already afternoon by the time Ho Yung-shou arrived. Wu K'ai and the others were all introduced to him, and, when they had finished with the customary amenities, they proceeded to chat about the weather. When the first serving of tea had been replaced, they all relaxed by loosening their clothing.

Ho Yung-shou perceived that Hsi-men Ch'ing's household was appropriately prosperous, and that the preparations for the party were lavishly complete. The four boy musicians, with their:

Silver psalteries, ivory clappers,
Jade mandolas, and balloon guitars,

joined the company to serve the wine. Within the hall:

Animal-shaped briquettes burn in golden braziers;
Jade goblets are overflowing with Yang-kao wine.

The blinds are all suspended, so that:

The whole area is suffused with spring warmth;
The entire hall is filled with genial feeling.²⁴

Truly, it is a case of:

Golden goblets are brimming with vintage wine;
Jade candles are trimmed amid sounds of spring.

The party continued until the first watch, when Ho Yung-shou got up and returned to the yamen, while Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen also took their leave and returned home. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen the boy actors off, he ordered the utensils to be cleared away and made his way to P'an Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound.

The woman, for her part, was waiting in her room, where she had proceeded to:

Apply generous coats of rouge and powder,

Deck herself out in a new set of apparel,
Light incense and wash her private parts,
in the hope that Hsi-men Ch'ing would visit her quarters.

Her face was wreathed in smiles,²⁵
as she went forward to help him off with his clothes and promptly ordered Ch'un-mei to pour out a serving of tea for him. After he had drunk the tea, the two of them went to bed for the night. Truly:

Under heated bedding and heated quilts,
Brocade curtains hold an air of spring,
And the fragrance of musk is luxuriant.
Beneath the quilt, their white bodies
are in intimate contact;
Upon the pillow, their smooth breasts
press against each other.
Above, they project their clove-shaped tongues;
Below, the pearl is imbedded inside the oyster.

As for the woman:

Throughout the game of clouds and rain,²⁶
Her hundred allurements are on display;²⁷

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing:

When through thrusting and retracting,
His "magic rhinoceros horn" is erect.²⁸

Unable to go to sleep, they spent some time discussing events during their period of separation. Even after intercourse, their lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, and Hsi-men Ch'ing obliged her to get down and play his phoenix flute. As for the woman, her sole desire was to strengthen her hold upon Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart. Moreover, having been neglected for half a month:

Her innermost feelings were starved,²⁹
Her libidinous desires were on fire.

Now that his body was again at her disposal, her only regret was that she couldn't:

Bore her way into his belly,
and she was prepared to toy with his organ all night without its ever leaving her mouth.

Hsi-men Ch'ing needed to get out of bed in order to urinate, but the woman wouldn't let him go, saying, "My darling, no matter how much urine you may have, go ahead and piss it into my mouth, and I'll swallow it for you. It's ice-cold, and it would be better not to have to expose your warm body to the frigid temperature."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was more gratified than ever and exclaimed, "My precious child, no one else cares for me as much as you do."

Thereupon, he actually pissed into the woman's mouth, while she allowed the urine to collect there, and then slowly swallowed it in one mouthful.

"How do you like the taste?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"It has a somewhat salty flavor," responded Chin-lien. "If you have any breath-sweetening lozenges handy, give me some of them to suppress the odor."

"The breath-sweetening lozenges are in my white satin jacket," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can help yourself to them."

The woman put an end to the episode by tugging at the sleeve of his jacket, which was lying over the headboard, groping out a few lozenges, and popping them into her mouth. Truly:

The minister in waiting is not as thirsty
as the diabetic Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju;³⁰
But is willing to accept the gift of a cup
of dew from atop a brazen pillar.³¹

Gentle reader take note: It is all too often the way of wives or concubines to set out deliberately to bewitch their husbands:

There is no length to which they will not go,
Humbling themselves to the most shameful acts,
Without showing even a trace of embarrassment.

Legitimate wives, on the other hand, are:

Straightforward and honorable,³²
and could never bring themselves to resort to such practices.

That night, Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman continued to dally with each other without restraint.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing reported to the yamen early in order to participate, together with Ho Yung-shou, in the ceremony marking their formal assumption of office, and to attend the public banquet arranged to celebrate the occasion. Musicians from the two

Music Offices were enlisted to provide for their entertainment. It was already afternoon by the time he returned home, and orderlies from the yamen also delivered to his residence what remained from his table setting at the banquet.

Wang the Third also sent someone to extend an invitation to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by sending Tai-an to the silk goods store to pick up an outfit of clothing as a gift, and arrange to have it wrapped up in a felt bag.

Just as he was completing his preparations for departure, an attendant came in and announced that His Honor An Ch'en had come to pay him a visit, which threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hardly had time to straighten his clothing before going out to welcome him.

An Ch'en, who was benefiting from his newly enhanced rank as secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, was wearing a girdle with a decorative plaque encased with gold, and a mandarin square emblazoned with a silver pheasant, and was followed by a retinue of lesser officials.

His face was wreathed in smiles,

as he was conducted into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities and congratulated each other on their recent promotions.

When they had seated themselves in the positions of guest and host, Secretary An Ch'en said, "Your pupil has sent people to ask after you several times, but they were told that you had not yet returned."

"That was the case," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I had to remain in the capital until I could attend the great audience at the time of the winter solstice, and submit my congratulatory memorial, before I was able to set out for home."

In a little while, after they had consumed a serving of tea, An Ch'en said, "Your pupil has respectfully come to ask a favor that it is probably inappropriate to trouble you with. At present, the prefect of Chiu-chiang, Ts'ai Hsiu, who is the ninth son of the venerable Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching,³³ is en route to the capital for his triennial audience with the Emperor. The other day, I received a letter from him, stating that he would be arriving here very soon. Your pupil, along with Sung Ch'iao-nien, Ch'ien Lung-yeh, and Huang Pao-kuang, the four of us in all, intend to play host to him and would like to borrow the use of your mansion for the purpose, and invite him to a feast. But we don't know whether you will consent to this or not."

"If that is your esteemed behest, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

"I could hardly presume to disobey it."³⁴

Just let me know when it will be needed."

"It will be on the twenty-seventh," responded An Ch'en. "Your pupil will send over our joint contributions toward the cost of the event tomorrow. If your exemplary staff is able to manage it for us, it would be an ample demonstration of your consideration."

Having finished speaking, and having consumed another serving of tea, he took his leave, mounted his horse, and went his way, accompanied by outriders shouting to clear the way.

Immediately thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to go out the gate and make his way to the mansion of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan in order to attend the party to which he had been invited. Upon arriving at the gate, he sent in his calling card, and when Wang the Third heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he hastened out to welcome him and escorted him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities.

It so happens that this hall was a spacious thirty-foot-wide structure, with a rounded goalpost-shaped main door; topped with a double-eaved, five-ridged, gable and hip roof, decorated with animal figures; and enhanced with doors and windows of caltrop-patterned latticework. Over the lintel a plaque was suspended that had been presented by the Emperor and was inscribed in the imperial hand with three gold characters that read "Hall of Ancestral Loyalty." To either side of the door were suspended tablets inscribed with the parallel statements:

Mansion of a pillar of the state;

Home of a protector of the realm.³⁵

In the place of honor in the middle of the hall was positioned a formal chair, upholstered in tiger skin, with a closely clipped woolen rug on the floor in front of it.

After Wang the Third had greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with the appropriate amenities, he ushered him to the seat of honor, while he drew up a chair for himself and sat down to one side. Before long, a serving of tea was brought out on a red lacquer tray. When they had politely offered cups to each other and consumed the tea, the attendants took the utensils away, and they fell into casual conversation. It was only after this that the drinking vessels were laid out and the wine poured. It so happens that Wang the Third had engaged the services of two boy actors to entertain them by singing and playing their musical instruments.

Hsi-men Ch'ing interrupted the proceedings by saying, "Why don't you invite the venerable lady of the house to come out so that I can pay her my respects?"

This elicited such consternation on the part of Wang the Third that he promptly told an attendant to go back to the interior of the residence and convey the request.

In a little while, the attendant came out again and said, "Her Ladyship invites His Honor to come visit her inside."

Wang the Third, accordingly, prepared to usher him inside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My worthy acquaintance, pray precede me."

Thereupon, they went straight back to the main room in the interior of the residence.

Lady Lin was already fully decked out for the occasion.

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,³⁶

her torso was garbed in a scarlet full-sleeved robe; her waist was encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold, beneath which she wore a flower-sprigged skirt of jet brocade; her face was so heavily daubed with makeup that she resembled a

silver figurine; her hair was done up in a raised coiffure; her lips were red with rouge; her earlobes were adorned with a pair of pearl earrings; and from the upper border of her skirt were suspended two strings of:

Jade pendants that tinkled when she moved.³⁷

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance,
saying, "Will Your Ladyship please assume the position of honor."

"Your Honor is our guest," responded Lady Lin. "Will you please assume the position of honor?"

After dickering for what seemed like half a day, the two of them ended up kowtowing to each other.

"I fear," said Lady Lin, "that my young son, who is as yet:

Unconscious of right and wrong,
imposed upon Your Honor the other day but was fortunate enough to receive your forgiveness. And you also undertook to settle matters with that bunch of characters on his behalf, for which:

My gratitude knows no bounds.

Today I have prepared a meager cup of watery wine and invited you here, with the intention of kowtowing to you in order to express my gratitude. How is it that, instead, I have been the recipient of Your Honor's gifts, putting me in a position in which it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and

Embarrassing to accept?"

"How could I be so presumptuous?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was only because your pupil had to go to the Eastern Capital on business and was therefore unable to proffer my congratulations on the occasion of Your Ladyship's birthday that I have offered this:

Insignificant lot of paltry gifts,³⁸
to Your Ladyship to give away to someone if you like."

Upon noticing that Auntie Wen was also present, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to her, saying, "Auntie Wen, would you fetch me a set of goblets on raised stands so I can proffer a drink of birthday wine to Her Ladyship."

He also hastily called for Tai-an to come forward. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared an outfit of fashionable brocaded clothing as a birthday present for Lady Lin, which Tai-an was carrying in his felt bag. It consisted of a lilac-colored, wide-sleeved, satin jacket, and a kingfisher-blue, long trailing skirt, and was presented to her upon a tray. When Lady Lin saw it, with its:

Golden tints that caught the eye,
she was more than a little delighted.

Auntie Wen forthwith presented a set of:

Golden goblets on silver stands,³⁹
and Wang the Third also ordered the two boy actors to bring their musical instruments and come in to help celebrate the occasion.

But Lady Lin protested, saying, "See here, what's the point of calling them in here? Let them wait outside for now."

Accordingly, they were sent outside again.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then toasted her with a goblet of wine, and Lady Lin expressed her gratitude by returning the compliment.

After this, Wang the Third proffered Hsi-men Ch'ing a goblet of wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to kowtow to him in return, but Lady Lin intervened, saying, "Your Honor, please get up, and permit him to kowtow to you."

"How could I do that?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"My good sir," said Lady Lin, "how can you talk that way? Do you mean to suggest that someone with such a high-ranking office as yours is not fit to be his adopted father? My son has been undereducated since his childhood and has not had the opportunity to associate with the right sort of people. If Your Honor will only deign to demonstrate your good will by teaching him how to become a better person in all respects, I will have him, today, in my presence, kowtow to Your Honor as his adopted father. If you should detect any faults in his conduct, Your Honor should feel free to admonish him. I will certainly not endeavor to defend his shortcomings."

"Although there is something to what Your Ladyship suggests," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your noble son, my worthy acquaintance, is naturally endowed with intelligence. At present, he is young and is still feeling his way with regard to the rules of proper conduct. In the future:

When the scope of his perceptions has become broader,

He will correct his faults and change for the better.⁴⁰
Your Ladyship need not be concerned about it."

Thereupon, Lady Lin had Hsi-men Ch'ing assume the position of honor, while Wang the Third poured out three goblets of wine and performed the ceremony of kowtowing to him four times. When these acts of homage had been performed, Hsi-men Ch'ing moved to a lesser position and bowed to Lady Lin to express his gratification, in response to which, she smiled broadly and made him a deep obeisance in return. From this time on, whenever Wang the Third encountered Hsi-men Ch'ing, he addressed him as Father. Can such things be? As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, truly:

He was ever prepared to enjoy the pleasure of

"abusing the innocent and good";

As a makeshift substitute for the delight of

"addiction to clouds and rain."

The poet, on observing this conduct, must have felt a sense of outrage, which inspired him to compose a poem lamenting it.

Since men and women are forbidden to exchange
drinks with each other;
Flaunting one's beauty and inviting seduction⁴¹
are really shameful acts.
But Wang the Third, who was in the dark about
the significance of it all;
Not only contributed to his mother's adultery
but kowtowed to her lover.

There is also another poem inspired by this event:

The women's quarters of great households
should be strictly guarded;
For the hen to announce the break of dawn⁴²
is extremely inauspicious.
Not only does it forebode the destruction
of the family's reputation;
But it desecrates the name of the Hall of
Integrity and Righteousness.

After they had consumed the wine, Lady Lin directed Wang the Third to invite Hsi-men Ch'ing back to the reception hall in the front of the residence, where the two of them sat down and loosened their clothing. Tai-an brought out Hsi-men Ch'ing's "loyal and tranquil hat," and he changed into it.

It was not long before the table settings were arranged and they sat down in their places, while the boy actors struck up their musical instruments and prepared to sing for their entertainment. The chef came out and carved the entrée, while Tai-an stood by to offer him an appropriate gratuity. Standing in front of the company, the boy actors then proceeded to sing the song suite that begins with the tune "Fresh Water Song":



Wang Ts'ai Kowtows to Hsi-men Ch'ing as an Adopted Father

Kingfisher blinds closely enclose
the small chamber;
The jade hook of the moon dangles
low in the heavens.
Within the suspended felt drapery,
And tortoiseshell brocade screens,
An amorous atmosphere is suffused.
Branches of plum blossoms exude a subtle fragrance.

TO THE TUNE "A TRICKY PLAY"

Their slender shadows cross the window lattices;⁴³
Green parakeets are hanging on them upside down.
Snow, like a cloud of pear blossoms, re-creates
the dream on Mount Lo-fu.⁴⁴
It is deep at night and the dripping of the cold
clepsydra seems endless.

TO THE TUNE "SWEET WATER SONG"

The alabaster trees have borne blossoms;
The jade dragons have lost their scales;
Bits of hail cascade from the Milky Way;
Auspicious snow dances in the swirling wind.
The azure empyrean is immaculate;

Pale moonlight browses the eaves;
Dark clouds invade the ridgepole;
The iridescent gates and pearly palaces⁴⁵
present a blinding whiteness.

TO THE TUNE “PLUCKING THE CASSIA”

The brocade setting enhances his delight
in the creative work of spring,
The pubescent maidservants,
And teenaged singing boys.

He plays “Hiding the Tally” under the flowers,⁴⁶
Gaming at forfeits during a drinking bout,
Or throwing the dice at the banquet table.
Alluringly, she contends in beauty
and competes for favor;
Jubilantly, he hugs the turquoise
and cuddles the red.

She serves cups and offers goblets;⁴⁷

Alters the pitch or switches modes;⁴⁸

Dances seductively and sings songs;⁴⁹

Gently strums or lightly melodizes.⁵⁰

TO THE TUNE “THE WATER NYMPHS”

The fragrant fumes of musk-scented charcoal
form ornate lotus blossoms;

The wavery light of phoenix-painted candles⁵¹
engenders aureate rainbows;

Ivory bedsteads provide a springtime warmth
in the lanes of the quarter.

The rouge and powder exude fragrance where
pearls and trinkets cluster;

Like strata of colored clouds, the layers
of silken fabrics are thick.

The scent of ambergris in jeweled censers
is diaphanous;

Animal-shaped briquettes in gold braziers
glow fire-red;

A warm aura creates the genial atmosphere
of the spring breeze.

TO THE BINARY TUNES “WILD GEESE ALIGHT” AND “VICTORY SONG”

On the silver psaltery the bridges are
ranged like wild geese;

The sound of the jade flute is like the
warble of a baby oriole;

The flowers are as brightly colored as
a kingfisher's wings;

A plenitude of wine fills to the brim
the vitreous decanter.

Variegated sleeves proffer golden goblets;

Slender fingers handle silk handkerchiefs;

The frosty rinds of fresh oranges are peeled;

Melted snow is used to boil the fragrant tea.

Pleasure abounds,

Inebriated feelings are profoundly stimulated;

The feast is over,

The night is late but desire is not yet sated.

TO THE TUNE “PROCURING GOOD WINE”

By means of only a single glance and a smile,
Their mutual feelings are fully communicated.

Under the lamplight, he scrutinizes
the object of his desire;

She is like Ch'ang-o emerging from
her palace in the moon;

Or the Goddess of Witches' Mountain
descending from her peak.

TO THE TUNE “SONG OF GREAT PEACE”

From the sloping hair at her temples the flying
phoenix hairpin has fallen;

The kingfisher-hued motif of a coiled dragon on
her dancing skirt is loose;

Her powdered sweat moistens the white cosmetics
on her bewitching features;

Sticking out its tip, she tentatively lets her
clove-shaped tongue protrude.

Her arm is encircled with a bracelet, and the
red mark of a chastity charm.⁵²

Truly, they make a pair of fledgling male and
captivating female phoenixes.⁵³

TO THE TUNE “RIVER-BOBBED OARS”

It is a happy reunion,
A reunion with the object of his desire.
Her willows are fatigued, her blossoms languid;⁵⁴
Her jadelike body is warm, her breast melting;
As they savor to the full the romance
of their rendezvous.
Quivering, her chignon becomes disheveled;
Lazily, the autumn ripples of her eyes stir;
Archly, the mascara of her eyebrows gathers.

TO THE TUNE "SEVEN BROTHERS"

Intoxication ignites,
Her jade countenance,
Into a delicate red glow.
Addicted to flowers and lusting for jade,
they indulge their desires.
He actually believes he is participating,
while in a somnolent trance,
In a dream visit to the goddess who lives
in the Floriate Pearl Palace.⁵⁵

TO THE TUNE "PLUM BLOSSOM WINE"

As they reach the climax of their game
of clouds and rain,
They are in a dither, though the event
is ordinary enough.⁵⁶
The watch drums sound incessantly,
The chimes under the eaves tinkle;
The neighboring cock crows,
The trumpet plays reveille;
The jade clepsydra drips,
Resounding reiteratively;
The silver lamp burns out,
Casting its golden sparks;
Beyond the silken windows,
The light of dawn impends;
At the azure Heaven's rim,
The sun begins to radiate.

TO THE TUNE "CONQUERING THE SOUTHLAND"

Ah! What does he hear but the sound of the well-pulley
beyond the whitewashed wall;⁵⁷
And the early cawing of the ravens in the phoenix trees
beside the gilded wellhead?
Spring beauty still fills his eyes, but
he is not yet fully awake.
Alas, this vision of surreptitious joy
and secret infatuation,⁵⁸
Has been idly interrupted for no good
reason, which is a pity.⁵⁹

Before long, after:

Five main courses had been served, and

Two suites of songs had been performed,

the candles were lit, and Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to change his clothes and take his leave. Wang the Third, however, insisted upon retaining him a little longer and invited him into his private studio, which was located at the side of the courtyard. It was a small, freestanding structure, only eighteen feet wide, but inside:

Flowers and trees cast intersecting shadows, and

The cultural artifacts were elegantly displayed.

A plaque emblazoned with four powdered-gold characters read "San-ch'üan's Poetic Skiff." On the four walls there hung antique paintings depicting the following subjects:

The Yellow Emperor Asks about the Way,⁶⁰

Fu Sheng Conceals the Forbidden Books,⁶¹

Ping Chi Makes Inquiries about the Ox,⁶²

Sung Ching Examines the History Books.⁶³

Upon seeing the plaque, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Who might San-ch'üan, or Three Springs, be?"

Wang the Third endeavored to avoid the question and did not wish to reply, but finally, after what seemed like half a day, he said, "It is your son's insignificant courtesy name."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon hearing this, did not have another word to say on the subject.

At this point, a tall narrow-necked vessel was brought in, and they proceeded to play pitch-pot and drink wine together, while the two boy actors stood to one side, struck up their instruments, and sang for their entertainment. Meanwhile, Lady Lin, in the rear of the residence, supervised her maidservants and waiting women in replenishing their refreshments, and supplying them with saucers of

seasonal delicacies. They continued drinking until the second watch, when Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already half inebriated, took his leave and got up to go. He gave each of the boy actors a tip of three mace of silver, and Wang the Third escorted him to the front gate and saw him into his sedan chair. The two orderlies who had accompanied him lit their lanterns, while Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his earmuffs, donned his sable cloak, said goodbye to his host, and set out for home.

When he arrived there, he remembered something Chin-lien had said to him earlier in the day and made his way straight into her quarters. It so happens that the woman had not yet gone to bed but had just taken off her headdress and was engaged in doing up her cloud-shaped chignon. Still:

Delicately made up and heavily powdered,⁶⁴

she was in her room, leaning on the base of her makeup stand, with her feet propped on the rim of the brazier, cracking melon seeds in her mouth as she waited for him. Beside the brazier:

A kettle of hydrangea-flavored tea was brewing;⁶⁵

upon the table:

Incense curled from a golden lion-shaped censer.⁶⁶

As soon as she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,

Gently lifted her beige skirt,

and hastened forward to take his outer garments and put them away. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on her bed, while Ch'un-mei brought out a clean cup for him, and the woman, after brushing away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup with her slender fingers, poured out a cupful of dense and full-bodied tender-leaved Sparrow Tongue Liu-an tea,⁶⁷ steeped with sesame seeds, marinated bamboo shoots, shredded chestnuts, melon seeds, a blend of walnut kernels and potherb mustard greens called "The Sea Eagle Attacks the Swan," osmanthus, and attar of roses. Upon swallowing no more than a mouthful and savoring its delectable fragrance and sweetness, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted. He then had Ch'un-mei:

Take off his boots, unfasten his girdle,⁶⁸

and help him into bed. Meanwhile the woman, under the lamplight, removed her head ornaments and changed into her sleeping shoes, after which the two of them lay down:

Head to head and thigh over thigh, while

The coverlet was disturbed by crimson waves,

And they reposed upon their phoenix pillows.

Ch'un-mei extinguished the silver lamp on the table, closed the two leaves of the door, and went into the adjacent room.

Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to pillow the woman's head on his arm and embrace her naked body, which was just like:

Soft jade and warm incense.

The two of them fell to it, with their:

Creamy breasts squeezed together,

Their jadelike legs intertwined;

Their two faces nuzzling each other,⁶⁹

Audibly sucking each other's tongues.

The woman picked up a handful of melon seed kernels that were in a saucer beside her pillow, popped them into her mouth, and transmitted them into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth with the tip of her tongue. It was not long before:

Her sweet spittle transfused his heart, and

His magic rhinoceros horn was awakened.

The woman reached down and manipulated his organ persistently with one hand, while she opened the bag of sexual implements with the other and proceeded to fasten the silver clasp in place.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "My child, while I was away from home, did you think of me, or not?"

"During the half-month or so that you were away," the woman said, "I couldn't get you out of my mind for so much as a quarter of an hour. When evening came, the nights were long, and, all by myself, I was unable to sleep. No matter what lengths I went to in order to:

Warm the bed and warm the bedding,

I continued to feel cold. When I extended my legs and encountered a cold spot, I had to retract them, and my hands became so cracked that they hurt. I would count the days till your return, but you failed to appear. There is no telling how many tears I shed upon my pillow. After a while, that little piece Ch'un-mei noticed the extent to which I was giving vent to:

Long sighs as well as short,

and persuaded me to kill time by playing board games with her in the evening. After sitting together till the first watch, the two of us would lie down foot-to-foot on the same k'ang and go to sleep together. My brother, that's what my feelings were for you. But I don't know what your feelings were for me."

"You crazy oily mouth!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Although there are those others in the household, who is not aware that I prefer to spend my time with you?"

"That's enough of that," the woman responded. "Who do you think you're kidding? You tend to:

Wolf down the rice in your bowl,
While keeping an eye on the pot.

It's the same way you carried on with that wife of Lai-wang's:

Mixing oil in with the honey,

while ignoring me completely. And afterwards, when Li P'ing-erh produced a son, you treated me just like an angry fighting cock. Now that the two of them have gone to their fates, whatever they may be, I'm the only one left at your disposal. You're just like:

A willow catkin in the wind,⁷⁰

Bobbing up and bobbing down.⁷¹

And now you've started to bestow your favor on Ju-i, that lousy splay-legged creature. No matter how you look at it, she's only a wet nurse, and since she manifestly already has a husband of her own, she's the wife of a flesh-and-blood person. If you insist on taking her for yourself, in the future, her husband is likely to:

Come grazing his sheep in front of your gate,

The better to befoul it with their droppings.

Since you are:

An incumbent, office-holding official,

if word of this should get out, it will hardly redound to your credit. Just look at the way that lousy whore carried on the other day while you were away. In the course of a dispute with Ch'un-mei over a laundry bat, the two of them got into:

A vituperative altercation,

and she wouldn't allow me to get a word in edgewise."

"My child," admonished Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No matter how you look at it, she's only a servant. How could she have the:

Seven heads and eight galls,

to challenge you?

If you raise your hand,

She will be able to get by;

If you lower your hand,

She'll be unable to get by."

"Ai-ya!" the woman exclaimed. "You may say that I have the power to either raise my hand or prevent her from getting by, but after the death of Li P'ingerh, she took over her place in the nest. I've heard tell that you said to her, 'If you do your best to cater to me, I'll turn over your mistress's property to you.' Did you ever really say that to her?"

"Don't be so foolishly suspicious," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since when did I say any such thing? If you are so magnanimous as to forgive her, I'll tell her to come kowtow to you and apologize tomorrow."

"There's no need for her to come and apologize to me," the woman said, "but I won't permit you to go on sleeping in her room."

"The only reason I sleep in her place," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is that I can't get over my feelings for Li P'ing-erh if I have to spend so much as a night or two away from her quarters. As for Ju-i, she's only there to keep vigil over her spirit tablet. Since when have I been indulging in any:

Illicit salt or illicit vinegar,

with her."

"I don't believe those excuses of yours," declared the woman. "She's already been dead for more than a hundred days, so what need is there for anyone to keep vigil over her spirit tablet? She's not there to keep vigil over any spirit tablet. She's more like:

The watchman at a rice warehouse, who spends

The first half of the night ringing his bell,

And the second half, like a voyeuristic maid,

Listening to the sound of the pounding inside.

With these few words she managed to get under Hsi-men Ch'ing's skin, with the result that he embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy little whore! You're up to your usual tricks."

Thereupon, he had her turn over so he could:

Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains,

inserted his organ into her vagina, embraced her legs under the quilt, and proceeded to slam away at her with all his might until:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly,

causing the woman to cry out, "What an enormous thing!"

"Do you fear me, or not?" he demanded. "Will you dare to keep on trying to manage me in the future?"

"You crazy knave!" the woman exclaimed. "If there were no one to manage you, you would fly straight up to Heaven, I suppose. I'm well aware that you can't bring yourself to shake off that whore. In the future, however, you'd better get my permission before going over to her place. And if she asks you for anything, you'd better tell me about it, rather than giving it to her surreptitiously. If you violate this compact, and I find out about it, just see whether I kick up a real rumpus about it, or not. I'll put my life up against that whore's any day; what's it to me? It's just like the situation when Li P'ing-erh first entered the household and she cast such a spell on you that the rest of us very nearly ended up being:

Relegated to the realm of the superfluous.

She's nothing but a good-for-nothing, rotten, overripe peach; and it's true, I guess, that:

Bean sprouts don't lend themselves to
being neatly bundled.

But, right now, I've got the upper hand over you both."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this outburst, saying, "You little whore! You're a fine one to play the role of a moralist, enforcing the observance of ritual prescriptions."

Thereupon, the two of them:

Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,
continued to go at it until the third watch before falling asleep. Truly:

If there is an open window and a bird
to seize the occasion;
It will hold spring in its mouth as it
warbles upon a branch.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Bearing raindrops, shrouded in mist,
she is rarely to be seen;
Beguiling in stance, she appears to be
unable to support herself.
Throughout the night, she deliberately
unloads her fragrant heart;
Holding onto the east wind to prevent
it from returning home.⁷²

The two of them:

Head to head and thigh over thigh,
slept together until the morrow dawned, but the woman's lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, and she proceeded to relentlessly manipulate Hsi-men Ch'ing's organ with her hand.

While she manipulated his chowrie handle, she exclaimed, "My own daddy! The one thing I want is to lie on top of you."

So saying, she prostrated herself on Hsi-men Ch'ing's body, proceeded to "dip the candle upside down," embraced him by the neck, and fell to kneading away at him. She directed Hsi-men Ch'ing to grasp her waist with both hands, as tightly as possible, while she lay on top of him, thrusting and retracting for all she was worth. As she rubbed against him while lying prostrate on top of his body, his organ finally penetrated her to the root, but the clasp prevented it from entering quite all the way.

The woman then said, "My own daddy! During the day tomorrow, I'll make you a band of white satin. If you will put some of that aphrodisiac powder the Indian monk gave you inside it, I'll attach two long ribbons to it, and then, when we're ready to go to bed, you can fasten the band around the root of your organ, and tie the two ribbons securely behind your back. Not only will it be warm, but it will allow you to insert your organ all the way. It will be an improvement over that silver clasp, which not only chafes your partner till it hurts, but also prevents us from achieving complete satisfaction."

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you might as well do as you say. The aphrodisiac powder is in that porcelain container on the table. You can go ahead and apply it yourself."

"No matter what," the woman said, "be sure to come back here tonight so we can try it out. How would that be?"

Thereupon, the two of them proceeded to play with each other yet another time.

Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and asked Ch'un-mei, "Has Father gotten up yet? His Honor An Ch'en has sent someone to deliver the joint contributions toward the cost of the forthcoming event. He has also brought two jugs of Chin-hua wine, and four bonsai."

"Father isn't up yet," said Ch'un-mei. "Tell him he'll have to wait a while."

"It's not as though he's on a short mission," said Tai-an. "He still has to report back to the customs station at the port on the New Canal."

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing overheard this exchange from the interior of the room and proceeded to question Tai-an through the window. On opening the accompanying document when it had been brought inside, he found that it read as follows:

Four sealed joint contributions are hereby respectfully offered, making a total of eight taels in all. Only for Ts'ai Hsiu do you need to provide an individual table setting. For the rest, communal seating will suffice. I trust that your servants will be fastidious in their preparations, which would be a more than ample demonstration of your consideration. In addition, I am providing four seasonally appropriate bonsai for your delectation, along with two jugs of Chekiang wine, in order to make a paltry contribution toward the provisions required for the occasion. I hope that you will deign to accept them with a smile. That would be fortunate indeed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the document, he got up and, without bothering to comb his hair, donned a felt cap, put on a loosely cut woolen robe, and went out to the reception hall, where he ordered the messenger from His Honor An Ch'en into his presence, and the latter handed over the joint contributions. Upon observing that the additional gifts consisted of four bonsai, one of red plum, one of white plum, one of jasmine, and one of purple magnolia, along with two jugs of southern wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted.

He promptly arranged for them to be put away, wrote a card in reply, rewarded the messenger with five mace of silver, and asked him, "At what time will the gentlemen be arriving tomorrow, and will they expect actors to be engaged for the occasion, or not?"

"They will probably be arriving early," replied the messenger. "As for the actors, you should engage those from Hai-yen, rather than local ones."

The messenger was then sent on his way.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to take the miniature flowering plants and put them in his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. He also engaged a mason to erect two heated k'angs there, with a firebox outside the retaining wall, so that the fumes from the burning charcoal would not affect the plants, and assigned Ch'un-hung and Lai-an the task of seeing that they were regularly watered, without fail. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent Tai-an off to engage the services of the actors and weighed out an appropriate amount of silver for Lai-an so that he could purchase the necessary provisions. That day was also the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, so arrangements were made to hire some boy musicians from the licensed quarter to play and sing in celebration of the occasion that evening. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.

To resume our story, while still at home, Ying Po-chüeh took five blank calling cards, had Ying Pao put them in a box, and set out for the house across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, in order to ask Licentiate Wen to inscribe them with invitations to the five ladies of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, asking them to come to his home for the full-month celebration of the birth of his son on the twenty-eighth.

He had just gone out the door and turned onto the main street when someone behind him called out in a loud voice, "Master Two, please come back here for a minute."

Ying Po-chüeh turned around to look back and, seeing that it was Li Ming, came to a standstill.

Li Ming walked up to him and asked, "Master Two, where are you going?"

"I'm on my way to Licentiate Wen's place," responded Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got something to ask of him."

"If you'll just return home for a minute," said Li Ming, "I've got something to say to you."

Noticing that he had an idler following closely behind him who was carrying a gift box, Ying Po-chüeh determined that he might do well to invite him back into the parlor of his residence. Upon arriving there, Li Ming promptly kowtowed to him and, getting up, directed that the gift box be brought inside and put down. When it was opened, it turned out to contain two roast ducks and two jars of vintage wine.

"Having nothing better to offer," said Li Ming, "these paltry gifts are merely an expression of my filial regard, for you to give away to someone if you like. I have made bold to come here, Master Two, in order to make a request of you."

So saying, he knelt down on the floor and refused to get up.

Ying Po-chüeh pulled him to his feet with one hand, saying, "You silly child! If you have something to say, just say it to me. What need was there for you to purchase any gifts for me?"

"Ever since I was a youngster," said Li Ming, "I have served in Father's household for lo these many years. But now, Father is patronizing others and is no longer calling upon me. No doubt, it is on account of that affair of Li Kuei-chieh's. But the two of us:

Maintain independent establishments,

and the members of my household do not even know what she is up to. Since Father is upset with her, he is giving me a hard time, and as a result, I have:

Suffered injustice and harbor resentment,

but I have no place to seek redress. That is why I have sought you out, Master Two. If you happen to visit his residence and run into Father, perhaps you could put in a good word on my behalf and explain the situation to him. Kueichieh may well be guilty of:

Some kind of misdeed or indiscretion,

but that has nothing to do with me. The mere fact that Father has chosen to be irritated with me is neither here nor there, but my colleagues have also taken to treating me disdainfully."

"Do you mean to say that you actually haven't been performing in his household for all this time?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"I haven't been called upon to do so," replied Li Ming.

"No wonder, then," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that the other day, after your Father returned from the Eastern Capital, on the occasion when he hosted a welcoming party for Ho Yung-shou, to which I, along with his brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Licentiate Wen, were invited, he only engaged the services of Wu Hui, Cheng Ch'un, Cheng Feng, and Tso Shun. When I wondered why I didn't see you there and asked him about it, he said, 'If he doesn't show up, do you expect me to send for him?' You silly child! You would do well to bestir yourself. Who have you got to blame but yourself?"

"If someone from Father's household doesn't send for me," said Li Ming, "how can I simply go there on my own? The other day, he called on those four to perform for him, and since today is the eve of the Third Lady's birthday, early this morning, he sent Tai-an into the quarter to engage the services of another two musicians for the occasion. Tomorrow, Father is putting on another party, for which he has once again engaged the services of those four. But I am being left out in the cold. How could I not be upset about it? My only hope, Master Two, is that you will put in a word on my behalf, and if you are successful, I will come and kowtow to you tomorrow."

"I will not fail to speak up for you," said Ying Po-chüeh. "All this while, I don't know how many times I've intervened to help people out with their problems. How could I fail to speak up on your behalf about such a paltry matter as that you're asking me about? Do as I say, and take these gifts of yours back. What would I want with that hard-earned money of yours, anyway? Just come along with me now, and I'll find a way of gently approaching your Father on the subject."

"Master Two," objected Li Ming, "if you refuse to accept these gifts, I won't presume to accompany you. Though they may not mean much to you, they are merely intended to be:

A token of my gratitude."

So saying, with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,

he implored his assistance again and again.

Ying Po-chüeh finally agreed to accept the gifts and came up with a gratuity of thirty candareens for the man who had carried the box before sending him on his way.

"Permit me to leave the box here at your place for the time being," said Li Ming. "I'll come back and get it after visiting the mansion."

Thereupon, he accompanied Ying Po-chüeh out the gate as they wended their way:

Rounding bends and turning corners,
to the house across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.

Upon reaching the gate to the studio therein, and rapping the door knocker, Ying Po-chüeh inquired, "Is the venerable gentleman Wen Pi-ku at home?"

Licentiate Wen, who was engaged at the time in writing a note under the studio window, promptly responded, "Please come in and have a seat."

Hua-t'ung opened the door for them, and Ying Po-chüeh took a seat in the well-lighted parlor within. At the upper end of the room four Tung-p'o chairs⁷³ were formally arrayed to either side of a hanging scroll depicting the philosopher Chuang-tzu regretting the evanescence of time. On the two side walls were displayed ink rubbings of the parallel statements:

The aroma of the plum blossoms in the vase
invades the brush and inkstone;

The coldness of the snow outside the window
permeates the zither and books.

The door of the room was protected by a cloth portiere.

When Licentiate Wen saw that they had arrived, he came out from inside to greet them and, after exchanging the customary amenities and asking them to be seated, said, "Venerable sir, you are up early today. What are you about?"

"I make so bold," said Ying Po-chüeh, "as to avail myself of your great literary talent to compose a few invitations for me. It so happens that the full-month celebration of the birth of my son falls on the twenty-eighth of the month, and I would like to invite the ladies of the Hsi-men household to come visit for the event."

"Where are the cards?" said Licentiate Wen. "Give them to me and your pupil will write them out for you."

Ying Po-chüeh told Ying Pao to take out the five cards and hand them over, after which, Licentiate Wen took them into his inner room and ground some new ink for the purpose.

He had only finished writing two of them when whom should they see but Ch'i-t'ung, who came inside in a state of obvious agitation and said, "Master Wen, write out another two cards in the First Lady's name. She also wants to invite Kinswoman Ch'iao from the eastern quarter, and Sister-in-law Wu. Have the two cards that Ch'in-t'ung came for a while ago, addressed to Mrs. Han, the Third Lady's elder sister from outside the city gate, and her second brother's wife Mrs. Meng, been sent off yet, or not?"

"Your brother-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, took care of sending them off some time ago," responded Licentiate Wen.

"Master Wen," said Ch'i-t'ung, "after you have done writing out these two invitations, you are requested to compose four more, for the wife of Pen the Fourth, the wife of Fu Ming, the wife of Han Tao-kuo, and the wife of Kan Jun. I'll have Lai-an come to pick them up."

After he had gone, when Lai-an came by to pick up the four additional invitations, Ying Po-chüeh asked him, "Is your Father at home, or has he gone to the yamen?"

"Father has not gone to the yamen today," said Lai-an. "He is in the reception hall, overseeing the reception of some presents sent by the household of his kinsman Ch'iao Hung. Master Two, you might as well go over there for a visit."

"As soon as these invitation cards have been written out I'll come over," responded Ying Po-chüeh.

"Last night," Licentiate Wen said, "the venerable gentleman arrived home rather late after attending a party at the Wang residence."

"Which Wang residence was that?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"It was the residence of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang," said Licentiate Wen.

The implications of this fact were not lost on Ying Po-chüeh.

It was sometime later, after Lai-an had waited for his cards and gone his way, before the remaining invitations for Ying Po-chüeh were completed, and he took Li Ming with him across the street. He found Hsi-men Ch'ing, with his hair still in disarray, supervising the reception of presents in the reception hall, and preparing the replies for them. The table settings he had ordered were arrayed to one side. When he saw Ying Po-chüeh come in, he greeted him with a bow and offered him a seat. A brazier was burning to heat the room.

Ying Po-chüeh thanked him for his hospitality the other day and then went on to ask, "Brother, who are these table settings provided for?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained that Secretary An Ch'en had shown up and asked him to host a party the following day for Ts'ai Hsiu, the prefect of Chiu-chiang.

"Will you be engaging the services of an acting troupe or boy musicians on that occasion?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"I have already hired a troupe of Hai-yen actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have also engaged the services of four boy musicians

to entertain the company.”

“Which four boy musicians might they be, Brother?” asked Ying Pochüeh.

“Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, Cheng Ch’un, and Tso Shun,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“Brother,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “why don’t you employ Li Ming?”

“He’s already flown to a higher branch,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “What interest would he have in a place like mine?”

“Brother, how can you say such a thing?” expostulated Ying Po-chüeh. “Only if you summon him would he presume to come. I also was unaware that you have been annoyed with him all this while. The two of them operate independently of each other, and the cause of your displeasure has nothing to do with him. He is hardly privy to the doings of Auntie Li the Third and her establishment. You ought not to do him the injustice of presuming such a thing. Early this morning, he showed up at my place, weeping and wailing, and said to me, ‘Quite aside from the fact that my elder sister is one of the ladies in Father’s household, I, too, have been accustomed to serve there for lo these many years. But now, he is employing others, and there is no longer any place there for me.’

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,

he assured me again and again that he didn’t know a word about the goings on of Auntie Li the Third and her establishment. The fact that you have made him a target of your annoyance has made life very difficult for him. After all, for a person of such inferior status, what sort of standing does he possess? If you take it into your head to turn against him, how could he hope to withstand you?”

He then proceeded to summon Li Ming, saying, “Come over here and explain things to your Father in person. What are you keeping out of sight for? You’re acting like the proverbial:

Ugly daughter-in-law who is fearful of
seeing her parents-in-law.”⁷⁴

Li Ming had moved closer and was standing by the latticework partition:

With lowered head and dragging feet,

Like a ghost trying to abide unseen,

as he observed the two of them discussing his case, without daring to utter a word.

Upon hearing Ying Po-chüeh call for him, he went inside, knelt stiff-leggedly down on the floor, and kowtowed, saying, “Father, you really ought to look more closely into what they’ve been up to over there. If I knew so much as a single word about it, I would deserve to be run over by a chariot, trampled by horses, subjected to judicial punishment, and put to death by dismemberment. The kindness you have shown me and my entire family all this while is:

As high as Heaven and as thick as Earth.”⁷⁵

Though:

My body should be pulverized and my bones shattered,

I could hardly hope to repay you. But now that you have chosen to show your displeasure toward me, I have been subjected to ridicule by the colleagues in my profession, and taken advantage of by them. Under the circumstances, where am I to turn in order to discover a patron?”

When he had finished speaking, he gave vent to loud sobs and cried out in pain as he knelt on the ground and refused to get up.

“That’s enough! That’s enough!” interjected Ying Po-chüeh from the sidelines. “Brother, you really ought to give him another chance. After all:

A great person does not deign to notice
the faults of petty persons.

Quite aside from the fact that he is not at fault, even if he had actually done something to offend you, his willingness to appeal to you in this way should lead you to make amends by forgiving him.”

“As for you,” he continued, addressing himself to Li Ming, “come over here. It has always been the case that:

If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.

Now that I have explained the situation to your Father, he should no longer hold anything against you.”

“What you say is true, Master Two,” responded Li Ming.

“If one is aware of a fault one must correct it.”⁷⁶

I will act accordingly in the future.”

Ying Po-chüeh said:

“You’ve only endured a slap with a flour sack,
but you’ve done a complete about-face.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing thought to himself in silence for some time before saying, “Since Master Two has repeatedly interceded on your behalf, I will no longer harbor any resentment toward you. You can get up now, and remain in attendance.”

“You had better kowtow, and be quick about it,” chimed in Ying Po-chüeh.

Li Ming hastily performed a kowtow and then proceeded to stand in attendance to one side.

Only after this did Ying Po-chüeh tell Ying Pao to take out the five invitation cards and give them to Hsi-men Ch’ing, saying as he did so, “The twenty-eighth is the day for the full-month celebration of the birth of my baby son. I am inviting the entire group of my sisters-in-law to be so good as to pay a visit to my humble household in honor of the occasion.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened one of the invitations and saw that the text read as follows:

The twenty-eighth is the date for the full-month ceremony to celebrate the birth of our baby son. Our humble household has prepared a meager potation as a deferential compensation for your generous largess. It is our ardent wish that you will deign to mount your elegant equipages and condescend to attend. Our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.
Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Tu, of the Ying family.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the text, he ordered Lai-an to take the invitations, together with the box that they came in, to show to the First Lady and then said to Ying Po-chüeh, "You can be certain that they won't be able to go to your place the day after tomorrow. The truth of the matter is that tomorrow is the Third Lady's birthday, and moreover, I will also be hosting a party for Secretary An Ch'en at my place. And on the twenty-eighth the First Lady is planning to pay a call on the wife of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling. So they will hardly be able to go to your place."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're killing me. If they refuse to go:

Though one's orchard may contain
a variety of fruits:

On which can one rely?

I guess I'll just have to go back to their quarters and invite them myself."

In a little while, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came out carrying the empty box and reported, "The First Lady says to thank you for the invitation, which is gratefully accepted."

Ying Po-chüeh turned the box over to Ying Pao and laughed, saying, "Brother, you were kidding me just now. If my sisters-in-law had refused the invitation I would have kowtowed to them until my head was bloody in order to induce them to attend, no matter what."

To this Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "Don't you go off now, but have a seat in the studio while I go inside to comb my hair, after which we can have something to eat together."

When he had finished speaking, he headed back into the rear compound.

Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Li Ming and said, "How do you like that? If I hadn't spoken to him the way I did just now, he would have continued to harbor his resentment against you. It's the nature of those possessed of money to insist on having their say, and you just have to put up with it. As the saying goes:

An angry fist does not strike a smiling face.⁷⁷

In this day and age, if you wish to play the role of a sycophant, whatever capital you may have for your undertaking, you must be prepared to sacrifice 30 percent of it in order to maintain goodwill. If you insist on propelling your craft against the current, who will pay any attention to you? Quite aside from the fact that you must be ready to:

Adjust yourself to circumstances as they arise,⁷⁸

only if you are prepared to move in any direction, as the flow of the current allows, will you be capable of making any money. If you insist on butting your head against the wall, others will be able to eat their fill while you suffer from starvation. You have been dancing attendance on him for all these years, but you still don't seem to understand his temperament. Tomorrow, if you get that Kuei-chieh of yours to follow hot on your heels in coming to celebrate the Third Lady's birthday, you can kill two birds with one stone. If she will only consent to make him a propitiatory obeisance, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion."

"Master Two," responded Li Ming, "what you say makes sense. As soon as I get home, I'll go over and speak to Auntie Li the Third about it."

Whom should they see at this point but Lai-an, who came in to set the table and said, "Master Ying the Second, please have a seat. Father will be out in a minute."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having performed his ablutions, came out and sat down to keep Ying Po-chüeh company, asking him as he did so, "Have you seen anything of Sun T'ien-hua or Chu Jih-nien recently?"

"I have run into them," replied Ying Po-chüeh, "but they are apprehensive lest you are still ill-disposed toward them. I said to them, 'Brother is a man of magnanimous feelings, who:

Looks up to those above and regards those below.⁷⁹

It is true that on that occasion:

The locust and the grasshopper,
Were swatted in the same breath,

but what are you prepared to do about it?' They swore an oath that in the future they would not run around with that young rascal Wang the Third any more. I have heard that yesterday you attended a party at his place, but they didn't know anything about it."

"Yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "thus and so, he laid on quite a spread on my behalf and acknowledged me as his adopted father. I didn't get home afterwards until the second watch. As for their not associating with him any longer, so long as their actions don't interfere with mine, let them do as they please. What do I care? After all, I am not Wang the Third's real father, so I am not in a position to control his conduct."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if that is the position you have decided to take, the two of them will seek you out in a day or two and offer you a propitiatory gift in order to ameliorate the rift between you."

"You can simply tell them to come by," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need is there for any propitiatory gift?"

At this juncture, Lai-an brought in a repast, consisting of various tasty delicacies, both roasted and boiled, which Hsi-men Ch'ing partook of with his congee, while Ying Po-chüeh ate rice.

When they had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired, "Have those two boy actors shown up, or not?"

"They've already been here for some time," said Lai-an.

Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that they should be given something to eat, along with Li Ming. The two of them, whose names were Han Tso and Shao Ch'ien, came forward and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they withdrew in order to eat.

After a while, Ying Po-chüeh stood up, and said, "I've got to go. The members of my household are, no doubt, anxiously awaiting me. People of humble status such as myself find it very hard to keep up appearances. Whenever we entertain, everything has to be newly purchased, from the base underneath the frame of the brazier to the door of the parlor."

"You go and take care of things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and when you're done, come back for a visit this evening in order to offer your birthday greetings and kowtow to the Third Lady on the eve of her birthday, thereby demonstrating your filial respect."

"I'll be certain to come," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "and I'll have my wife send her a birthday present to boot."

When he had finished speaking, he took himself off without more ado.

Truly:

When a favored friend arrives, one's feelings
can never be satiated;

When a real confidant shows up, conversation
is mutually agreeable.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

If you wish to get along, say what people want to hear;
If you try to be honest, you'll only arouse antagonism.
In the affairs of this world, it is best to be lukewarm;
People's true sentiments become apparent only with time.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 73

P'AN CHIN-LIEN IS IRKED BY THE SONG "I REMEMBER HER FLUTE-PLAYING"; BIG SISTER YÜ SINGS "GETTING THROUGH THE FIVE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT"

If you're clever, you'll be considered labored,
if you're awkward, idle;
If you're good, you'll be disdained as weak,
if you're bad, callous.
If you're rich, you'll meet with envy,
if you're poor, disgrace;
If you're diligent, you'll be thought grasping,
if you're economical, stingy.
If you deal with things consistently,
you'll be scorned as simple;
If you adapt yourself to circumstances,
you'll be suspected of deceit.
If you think about it, it is hardly possible
to satisfy anyone;
The role of human being is an arduous one,
to be a man is hard.¹

THE STORY GOES that, after Ying Po-chüeh went home, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the Hidden Spring Grotto in his garden and sat down to watch the mason working on the two heated k'angs, with a firebox outside the retaining wall, so that the floor of the interior would be as warm as spring, and the fumes from the burning charcoal would not affect the plants that had been placed there.

Who should suddenly appear at this point but P'ing-an, who brought in a calling card and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has sent a courier to deliver some joint contributions."

The box they came in contained five packets, enclosing five mace of silver and two ordinary handkerchiefs each, from Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the two eunuch directors Liu and Hsüeh, and were said to be deferentially presented as tokens of their respect. Hsi-men Ch'ing told his attendants to take them back to the rear compound and sent the courier off with a calling card in reply.

To resume our story, that day Aunt Yang, along with Sister-in-law Wu and old Mrs. P'an, arrived early in their sedan chairs and were followed by Nun Hsüeh, the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, Nun Wang, Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng, and Big Sister Yü, all of whom had purchased gift boxes and had come to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Wu Yüeh-niang served them with tea in the master suite, and the whole sorority of wives and concubines were also there to keep them company. Before long, they finished their tea and then proceeded to visit together at leisure.

Before anyone knew it, P'an Chin-lien, who remembered that she had promised to make a band of white satin in order to enhance Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual performance, took herself off to her room, got out her sewing box, selected a strip of white satin, and employed backstitching in order to crimp it. She then reached into the porcelain container in her cabinet with her slender fingers, poured out some of the aphrodisiac powder called "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties,"² and backstitched it securely inside the band with her deft technique, so that it would be ready that evening when she indulged with Hsi-men Ch'ing in:

The pleasures of clouds and rain.³

Who could have anticipated that at this juncture Nun Hsüeh suddenly came into the room in order to bring her the fertility potion containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that would enable her to conceive. The woman hurriedly put aside what she was doing and sat down to consult with her.

Nun Hsüeh, upon seeing that:

There was nobody about,

furtively handed the potion to her, saying, "It's all been properly prepared. If you select a *jen-tzu* day and imbibe it on an empty stomach before sleeping with your husband that night, you will be sure to conceive. For corroboration, you can look to the case of the First Bodhisattva in the rear compound. It was I who enabled her to conceive, and she's already got half a bulge in her belly to show for it. I've also got another trick to share with you. If you make a brocade scent bag, I'll slip you a charm inscribed with cinnabar and realgar. If you put it inside the scent bag and wear it next to your body, you are sure to give birth to a male child. It's guaranteed to be effective."

Upon hearing this, the woman was utterly delighted. On the one hand, she took the fertility potion and concealed it in a trunk, while on the other, she consulted a calendar and saw that the twenty-ninth was a *jen-tzu* day.

Thereupon, she weighed out three mace of silver and gave it to Nun Hsüeh, saying, "This doesn't amount to anything. Just take it home and use it to buy yourself a vegetable to eat. But should I really conceive, and you bring me the charm inscribed in cinnabar, I'll give you a bolt of silk to make a garment out of."

"Bodhisattva," said Nun Hsüeh, "there's no need for you to engage in such calculations. I'm not avaricious in the way that Nun Wang is. In the past, when I undertook to recite scriptures on behalf of that deceased Bodhisattva, she claimed that I was trying to do her out of a piece of patronage. The two of us had quite a quarrel over it, and she has been slandering me wherever she goes. My God! Let her suffer the consequences of her evil karma. I'm not going to waste my time contending with her, but devote myself instead to doing good deeds for others, and rescuing people from their calamities."

"Mistress Hsüeh," the woman said, "you can do as you like. It's just a case of:

Different people having different intentions.

But you mustn't mention a word of this business of mine to her."

Nun Hsüeh responded:

"The dharma must not be divulged to six ears.

How could I ever mention it to her? Last year, in connection with the pregnancy of the First Bodhisattva in the rear compound, she accused me of making a considerable profit behind her back, and I had to split the proceeds with her before she was willing to call it quits. Though she may be a member of the Buddhist sangha, she ignores her vows, and her avariciousness is notorious. Though she accepts alms from:

The patrons in the ten directions,⁴

she does not perform meritorious works on their behalf. When she dies in the future, she won't even deserve to be reborn:

With hair on her body and horns on her head."⁵

After they had talked for a while, the woman ordered Ch'un-mei to provide a serving of tea for Nun Hsüeh. When she had finished the tea, the two of them went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and paid their respects to her spirit tablet, after which they went back to join the others in the rear compound.

That afternoon, Wu Yüeh-niang had two tables put up in the room with the k'ang in her quarters and invited her guests to be seated there. She also saw to the setting up of:

Brocaded curtains and standing screens,⁶

in the parlor, along with an Eight Immortals table, replete with appetizers to go with the drinks.

That evening, when the time came for Meng Yü-lou to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a drink, he wore the variegated flying fish python robe that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin had bestowed upon him, over a tunic of white satin, and occupied the position of honor together with Yüeh-niang, while the four other ladies of the household were arranged to either side of them. Before long, within the chamber:

Painted candles burned high,⁷

while in the flagons:

Yang-kao wine brimmed over.

The two boy actors, Shao Ch'ien and Han Tso, with their:

Silver psaltery, ivory clappers,

And moon-shaped balloon guitar,

proceeded to accompany themselves as they sang the birthday song suite that begins with the tune "A Sprig of Flowers," the opening lines of which are:

Swirling around, the auspicious vapors blow;

One by one, the propitious clouds come down.⁸

Meng Yü-lou was made up so that she looked to be:

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade; and

Her lotus face evoked an air of spring,⁹

as she offered a drink to Hsi-men Ch'ing and kowtowed to him four times:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying.

Only after this did she pay obeisance to Yüeh-niang and her fellow ladies and take her place at the table. Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'en Ching-chi, accompanied by Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who held the flagon as he offered drinks to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, before wishing Meng Yü-lou a happy birthday. When they had finished their obeisances, they sat down to one side. Meanwhile, birthday noodles and dessert treats were brought in together from the kitchen.

Who should appear at this point but Lai-an, who came in with a gift box, saying, "Ying Pao has come to deliver some presents."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told Yüeh-niang to accept them and then said to Lai-an, "Take a card in reply to Brother Ying's wife, and invite Ying the Second, along with Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, to come visit with us. I know that his wife will probably not consent to join us tomorrow, but ask Brother Ying the Second to come see us today. We'll take care of sending return gifts to them another day."

Lai-an, accordingly, took the return card and went off along with Ying Pao.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing sat at the head of the table, it occurred to him unconsciously that, on the occasion of Meng Yü-lou's birthday the previous year, Li P'ing-erh had been there with them; but that today, among the sorority of five ladies, only she was absent. As a

result, he couldn't help being pained at heart, and tears began to drop from his eyes.

Sometime later, after the musicians had consumed their soup and rice below, Li Ming poured a round of drinks for the company, and the two boy actors came before them.

Wu Yüeh-niang asked them, "Do you know the song suite that begins with the tune 'Four Pieces of Jade,' the opening lines of which are:

Like lovebirds, flying wing to wing;
Or trees with intertwining branches?"¹⁰

"Yes we do," replied Han Tso.

They were just about to pick up their instruments and start to sing, when Hsi-men Ch'ing called them before him and ordered, "You perform the song suite that begins with the words:

I remember her flute-playing."

The two boy actors hastily switched modes and proceeded to perform the song suite in question, beginning with the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests":

I remember her flute-playing, but where is
the jade damsel now?¹¹
Tonight, my lovesickness grows more intense.
The white dew is cold, and the scent of the
autumn lotus blossoms is fading;
Beneath the whitewashed wall the bright moon
insists on sinking out of sight.
Though merely a case of temporary separation, the mirror
is fractured and the hairpin divided;¹²
Which is much better than a period of ten years in which
news is interrupted and word cut off.
Facing the west wind, all I can do is lean against the
belvedere and sigh to myself in vain.
The tiers upon tiers of trees upon the mountain ridge
stretch as far as the eye can see.
What I fear is that time flows away like
a galloping steed,
Or like a long snakelike formation of
migrating geese.

TO THE TUNE "FREE AND EASY WANDERING"

The pleasure we shared on that previous evening,
Was presaged by the popping of the lantern-wick.
A fragrance wafted from the clasp of her girdle.
But no sooner had we discovered our mutual affinity,
Than, unexpectedly, we were obliged to be separated.
I constantly remember the way we laughed and joked
as we snuggled up against each other.
Within the decorated hall everything that day was
done with extravagant pretentiousness.
We enjoyed the wine, gleaming with glaucous foam,
The music of red ivory clappers under dancing fans,¹³
And the frolicking of butterflies upon the pillow.

TO THE TUNE "GOURD OF VINEGAR"

On the day that she and I first met, my visage
revealed my embarrassment.
When we first engaged in amorous sport together
I was apprehensive at heart;
Half feigning to be drunk, half feigning to be
sober, half feigning to be silly.
Our feelings for each other were so intense
that I have yet to get over them.
No sooner were we warm inside the brocade curtains,
beneath the mandarin duck bedding,
Than her phoenix hairpin ended up getting broken
into some two or three pieces.

TO THE SAME TUNE

On her account, I struggled to compose good lines
of poetry by lamplight,
The better to express my heartfelt feelings behind
other people's backs,
Until the shadow of the phoenix tree outside the
window began to sink.
Loving flowers as I do, I fear to reveal the ardor
of my spring feelings.
Treading the green moss, I step lightly
on the tips of my shoes;
The pearls of dew constantly wetting my
meadow-tripping boots.

TO THE SAME TUNE

On her account, I went so far as to tell lies
even among my friends;
On my account, she engaged in deceptive conduct
even before her mother.
On her account, I exhausted my artful tongue in
order to deceive the family;
On my account, she doffed her skirt and accepted
the bloodstains on the azalea.¹⁴

It so happens that when P'an Chin-lien heard the performance of this song suite, she was fully aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing had called for it because he was thinking of Li P'ing-erh.

Upon the singing of the last line, she deliberately began to stroke her cheek with her finger, first this way and then that, in order to embarrass Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the company, saying, "My child, you're just like:

Chu Pa-chieh, sitting in a homeless shelter."¹⁵

How much more ugly can you get?

For someone who had been previously married and was certainly no virgin, how could she have come up with any 'bloodstains on the azalea'? What a shameless good-for-nothing you are."

"You crazy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand the situation, but what do you know about it?"

The two boy actors continued to sing:

On her account, my ears were forever burning;
On my account, she hid her blushes with a fan.

TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE"

One of us was an amorous maiden from
a minister's mansion,
One of us was a sword-strumming client
from before his gate,¹⁶

Who happened to encounter each other
in the course of our lives.

After only a few nights worth a
thousand pieces of gold,

We were, all of a sudden, forced to
abandon each other.

How could I ever consent to be
so depraved as to,

Go and pick another flower from
atop a garden wall?

TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD"

Upon my pillow, fluttering airily,
I dream of a butterfly;

As I hear the ding-donging of the
chimes under the eaves.

No sooner did I have the temerity to tender

Wen Ch'iao's mirror stand,¹⁷
Than the vehicle of Cho Wen-chün's intended
elopement was intercepted,¹⁸

Leaving me here, unable to do anything
but sigh in distress.

The phoenix bed curtains are cold, the fragrance
of orchid and musk has dissipated.¹⁹



Chin-lien Is Irked over "I Remember Her Flute-playing"

Beset by fatigue, I have just fallen asleep,
 But the road to the Radiant Terrace is long.
 How can I ever overcome this sorrow of mine?
 I am doomed to suffer from this lovesickness.
 Gazing at the Milky Way, it seems straight and then bent;
 Facing the lonely lamp, it lights up and then fades away.

TO THE TUNE "THE GREENHORN"

Ah! The wind wildly scatters the yellow leaves
 on the stairways, on the stairways;
 The clouds half conceal the waning moon amid the
 willow branches, the willow branches.
 This sorrow at separation has become even harder
 to endure than it seemed last spring.
 I am so affected that things are all a blur;²⁰
 I am so emaciated that I can hardly bear it.²¹
 Even when the mulberry fields are resubmerged
 and the sea has once again dried up,
 This karmic debt of love can never be fully repaid.²²

TO THE TUNE "BORNE ON THE WAVES"

No sooner had this sorrow ceased to hover

about the corners of my eyes,
Than it came back to haunt me above the eyebrows,
Wishing to engrave itself upon the spirits of the
Three Corpses in my innermost heart.
If the day comes when, within the brocade curtains,
our jade bodies should touch again,
I will take the tips of her fingers in my hand
and gently squeeze them,
As I talk to her until the handle of the Northern
Dipper sets above our abode.²³

When they had finished singing, P'an Chin-lien was still upset at the fact that he had called for them to perform this particular song suite, and the two of them continued to bandy words about it in front of the company.

When Yüeh-niang could abide it no longer, she said, "Sister Six, show a little patience. What are the two of you squabbling about, anyway? Aunt Yang and Sister-in-law Wu have been left to themselves in the other room, without anyone to keep them company. Two of you ought to go there to visit with them, and I'll join you in a minute."

Thereupon, P'an Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh proceeded to go into the other room to keep Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and Sister-in-law Wu company.

Before long, who should appear but Lai-an, who came in and reported, "The card for Ying the Second's wife has been delivered, and Master Ying the Second himself has arrived. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai will be here shortly."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "Go across the street and invite Master Wen to come join us."

Turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "Tell the kitchen to send the refreshments out to us. I'm going to the front compound to keep them company."

He then called up Li Ming and said, "You go up to the front compound too, in order to sing for us."

Li Ming, accordingly, accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing out to the front compound, where they joined Ying Po-chüeh in the studio on the west side of the courtyard.

Hsi-men Ch'ing thanked Ying Po-chüeh for his gifts and said, "Whatever happens, be sure to invite your wife to come visit us tomorrow."

"I'm afraid she won't be able to come," said Ying Po-chüeh. "There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."

After some time, Licentiate Wen arrived, bowed to the company, and sat down.

Ying Po-chüeh raised his hand in greeting and said, "I really put you to a lot of trouble this morning, venerable sir."

"It was nothing worth mentioning," responded Licentiate Wen.

Brother-in-law Wu also arrived, and after he had exchanged greetings with the company and been offered a seat, Ch'in-t'ung came in with some candles, and the four of them sat down together around the brazier, while Lai-an brought in a platter of appetizers to go with the wine and placed it on the table.

Under the lamplight, Ying Po-chüeh observed that, over his white satin tunic, Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a green velvet variegated flying fish python robe, the coiled image on which was:

Showing its claws and brandishing its fangs,²⁴
The horns on its head projecting formidably;²⁵
Flaunting its whiskers and shaking its mane,
Its golds and greens setting each other off.

It gave him quite a start, and he asked, "Brother, where did that garment of yours come from?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by standing up and saying, "Take a good look at it, all of you, and then guess where it came from."

"How could we hope to guess correctly?" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"It was given to me by Eunuch Director Ho Hsin in the Eastern Capital," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was having a drink at his place and was feeling cold, so he brought out this garment and gave it to me to put on. This is the flying fish version of the python robe. Since the Emperor had recently bestowed a regular python robe and a jade girdle upon him, he no longer planned to wear this one, so he gave it to me, which was a considerable favor."

Ying Po-chüeh, expressing himself in exaggerated terms, said, "Such an ornately decorated garment must, at the very least, be worth a good deal of money. This is a propitious omen for you, Brother. In the future, when you are promoted to the position of commander-in-chief, you need not worry about wearing a regular python robe and a jade girdle yourself, not to mention a flying fish robe, for your rank will entitle you to more than that."

As they talked together, Ch'in-t'ung set out the goblets and chopsticks, soup and rice, appetizers and wine, while Li Ming prepared to sing for their entertainment.

"I really ought to go inside and offer a cup of wine to my third sister-in-law," said Ying Po-chüeh, "before commencing to drink out here."

"My son," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you really have such filial intentions, you might as well go back to the rear compound and kowtow to her. What need is there to ask?"

"It doesn't matter," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'll go and kowtow to her. And, if there's any problem with that, and I don't succeed in kowtowing to her, I'll simply come back out after giving her a taste of my prowess on the edge of the k'ang."

At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave him a sharp rap on the top of his head and cursed, saying, "You dog! As ever, you choose to ignore

distinctions of status.”

“Even if we children of yours wished to,” responded Ying Po-chüeh, “which of us would feel it right to assume the superior position?”

The two of them continued to bandy words with each other for a while.

Before long, the birthday noodles were served, and Hsi-men Ch’ing offered portions of them to Brother-in-law Wu, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh. Because he had already eaten in the rear compound, he gave his own portion to Li Ming. When Li Ming had finished eating his noodles, he came before them once again to sing for their entertainment. Ying Po-chüeh urged Brother-in-law Wu to select a song suite for him to sing, but he demurred, saying, “I don’t want to put him to any trouble. Just let him sing one that he’s familiar with.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “My brother-in-law is fond of the suite that begins with the tune “The Earthenware Crock.”

He then told Ch’in-t’ung to pour another round of wine, while Li Ming, with:

The bridges on his psaltery ranged like wild geese,

Gently adjusted the icy strings,

and proceeded to sing the song suite in question, the opening lines of which were:

It’s enough to cause one to stare at
the scenery in silence;
As one’s fragrant countenance grows
more emaciated by the day.²⁶

When he had finished singing, he retired.

Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who came in and reported, “The chef is about to go home and wants to know how many people you will need for tomorrow.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “Tell him that I will need six cooks and two waiters for the banquet tomorrow. There will be five table settings, and I want them all to be properly prepared.”

Lai-an assented and went out.

At this point, Wu K’ai asked, “Brother-in-law, who are you entertaining tomorrow?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing explained about how Secretary An Ch’en of the Ministry of Works was hosting a party for Ts’ai Hsiu, the prefect of Chiu-chiang.

“If the secretary is going to be at the party tomorrow,” said Wu K’ai, “that’s very fortunate.”

“Why so?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“It’s on account of my part in supervising the repair of the local Charity Granary,” said Wu K’ai. “Since it is the secretary’s responsibility to submit a report on the project, I hope that you will speak to him about it tomorrow, and urge him to look upon my efforts favorably, in the hope that when his term of office expires at the end of the year he may be willing to put in a good word on my behalf. It would be a great favor to me, Brother-in-law, if you were to do so.”

“That’s no problem,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “If you will write out a card with your curriculum vitae and get it to me by tomorrow, I’ll speak to him about it when a convenient opportunity arises.”

Wu K’ai promptly got up and bowed to him in gratitude.

“Venerable Brother-in-law,” interjected Ying Po-chüeh, “you can relax about that. After all, you are a mainstay of the family. If he were unwilling to speak up on your behalf, on whose behalf would he consent to do so? You can rest assured that it will take but little in the way of a recommendation from him to insure that he will:

Hit the bull’s-eye with the first arrow.”

They continued drinking in the front compound until the second watch before the party broke up.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing was seeing Li Ming and the boy actors out the gate, he said, “See to it that you all report early tomorrow.”

When Li Ming and the others had left, the servants cleared up the utensils and took them back to the rear compound.

The master suite was still crowded with people, but when they heard that the party in the front compound had broken up, they went back to their various quarters.

To resume our story, P’an Chin-lien was expecting that Hsi-men Ch’ing would go straight to her own quarters, so she hastily headed out in that direction, but, contrary to her expectations, he made his way past the ceremonial gate into the rear compound. Chin-lien concealed herself in the black shadow behind the spirit screen to keep track of him, and when she saw that he went into the master suite, she surreptitiously crept under the window to eavesdrop on him.

Whom should she see at this juncture but Yü-hsiao, who was standing in the doorway of the parlor and said, “Fifth Lady, why don’t you go inside? Father is there, keeping company with the Third Lady, is he not?”

She also went on to ask, “And where is Old Mrs. P’an?”

“The old good-for-nothing,” responded Chin-lien, “is suffering from some bodily discomfort, so she has gone back to her room to sleep.”

Before long, she overheard Yüeh-niang saying, “Why ever did you engage the services of those two little bastards today? They hardly know how to sing. All they can sing is that song suite the first number of which, to the tune “Powdery Butterflies,” begins with the words:

Three Variations on the Plum Blossom.²⁷

“It was only toward the end,” said Meng Yü-lou, “when you asked them to sing that song suite the first number of which, to the tune ‘Drunk in the Flowers’ Shade,” begins with the words:

By the Phoenix Bank, the lotus blooms,²⁸

that they acceded to your request and sang the suite in question. What slippery little bastards they are. We don’t even know their names. All they did for the whole day they were here was to enjoy themselves.”

“One of them is called Han Tso,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “and the other one is called Shao Ch’ien.”

“Who cares whether they are called this or that?” said Yüeh-niang.

Before they knew it, P’an Chin-lien, who had slowly proceeded with:

Skulking step and lurking gait,

to lift aside the portiere, sneak in, and position herself behind the heated k’ang, spoke up, saying, “What you should be asking him is why he didn’t let them sing the song suite that his legitimate wife had called for, but instead, for no good reason, proceeded to:

Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves,

telling them to sing:

I remember her flute-playing,

that is to say, Li P’ing-erh’s flute-playing; thereby throwing the two little bastards into such consternation that they didn’t know who they were supposed to take their orders from?”

When Meng Yü-lou turned her head around and saw that it was Chin-lien who had spoken, she said, “So it’s Slavey Six, is it? Where did you appear from? When you suddenly intervened with that speech of yours, you gave me quite a start. You’re always up to mischief of some kind. How long have you been standing behind me there? How is it that I didn’t see you come in, or hear the sound of your footsteps?”

“The Fifth Lady has been there behind the Third Lady for some time already,” said Hsiao-yü.

Chin-lien nodded her head and then said to Hsi-men Ch’ing, “Brother, you’d do well to slack off a bit. Do you really think that no one else is onto those little tricks of yours? What kind of an ‘amorous maiden from a minister’s mansion’ was she, anyway? She was like me in that we had both been previously married. How can you pretend that on your account ‘she doffed her skirt and accepted the bloodstains on the azalea?’ It’s like:

Three officials, only two of whom bother

to bow to each other:

Whoever saw such a thing?²⁹

My response is the one received by that oaf, Squire Sun, when he questioned his clever servant, Chu Chi,³⁰ that is to say, ‘I may be willing to overlook everything else; but this I will never accept.’ You actually went so far as to complain to someone, ‘Ever since she died, I haven’t been served so much as a single saucer of food that appeals to my taste.’ As the saying goes:

Since Butcher Wang is dead and gone,

One must eat pork with the bristles.³¹

The implication is that your bevy of womenfolk merely stand by with their eyes open as you are constrained to stuff yourself with shit every day. You may retain some respect for our elder sister as your legitimate wife, but the rest of us don’t count for anything, since none of us appeals to your taste. And even though our elder sister may be able to take charge of the household, she doesn’t seem to be able to satisfy your needs. Since only the Sixth Lady was good enough for you, it would seem, why didn’t you hold on to her and prevent her from dying? Originally, before she entered the household, you managed to get on all right, but now, no matter what the rest of us do, it fails to meet with your approval. Whenever the thought of her comes up, it causes your heart to start thumping away. But now that you’ve found someone else as a stand-in for her, it’s like:

Trying a new sauce with your noodles,

and you’re as pleased as can be. Can it be that only the water from her quarters appeals to your taste?”

“Good Sister Six,” interjected Yüeh-niang, “as the saying puts it all too well:

Good people do not live for long,³²

The wicked live a thousand years.

It has always been true that:

What you can’t round on the lathe,

You can round with an axe.

You and I are only pieces of inferior merchandise, incapable of appealing to his taste. Let him say what he likes, and let it go at that.”

“It’s not that,” said Chin-lien. “It’s just that if I don’t call him to account, the things he says are too depressing. I’m merely pointing out that people can’t get over their resentment at the things he says.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing merely laughed at this and chided her, saying, “You crazy little whore! You’re talking nonsense. When did I ever say anything like that?”

“It was on that day when you were entertaining Eunuch Director Huang Ching-ch’en,” said Chin-lien. “While you were talking with Ying the Second and that southerner Licentiate Wen, did you not say to them, ‘Ever since she died, I haven’t been provided with so much as a single saucer’s worth of decent food?’ It’s no wonder you feel that way, since you act as though the rest of your womenfolk have all died off. Even when she was still alive, you didn’t pay much attention to the rest of us. No doubt, in the future, you’ll raise up

someone else to be a match for her, won't you? You lousy, shameless, profligate good-for-nothing!"

This speech of hers got under Hsi-men Ch'ing's skin to such an extent that he jumped up and chased after her in the endeavor to give her a kick with his booted foot, but the woman had already made it out the door and disappeared in a puff of smoke. Hsi-men Ch'ing chased outside after her, but she was nowhere to be seen. The only thing he saw was Ch'un-mei, who was standing outside the door of the master suite, so he proceeded to grab her with one hand and set out for the front compound, supporting himself on the back of her shoulder.

Yüeh-niang, who had observed that he was drunk, had only been waiting for an opportunity to bundle him off to the front compound to sleep it off, because she wanted to spend the evening listening to the three nuns recite a precious scroll. Thereupon, she told Hsiao-yü to take a lantern and escort him to the front compound. Chin-lien and Yü-hsiao were standing concealed in the black shadow underneath the veranda, so Hsi-men Ch'ing did not see them.

Yü-hsiao said to Chin-lien, "My guess would be that Father is surely headed for your quarters."

"He's drunk enough to start acting up," responded Chin-lien. "Let him go to sleep first, and I'll join him a little later."

"If you'll wait for me," said Yü-hsiao, "I'll get you some fruit for your mother to eat."

Thereupon, she went into the bedroom, hid two tangerines, two apples, a package of candied sweetmeats, and three pomegranates in her sleeve and brought them out to give to the woman, who put them in her own sleeve, and then headed straight back toward the front compound.

Whom should she run into at this point but Hsiao-yü, who was on her way back after escorting Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Fifth Lady, where have you been? Father has been looking all over for you."

When Chin-lien arrived at the door of her quarters, she didn't go inside but peeked through an aperture in the window lattice and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting on the bed, embracing Ch'un-mei and amusing himself with her.

Not wishing to disturb them, she hastily slipped into the other room, turned the fruit over to Ch'iu-chü, and asked her, "Has my mother gone to sleep yet, or not?"

"She's been asleep for some time already," replied Ch'iu-chü.

After enjoining her to be sure to put the fruit safely away in the cabinet, Chin-lien went back to the rear compound.

What should she find upon her arrival in the master suite but a whole roomful of people sitting together, including Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the three nuns, along with their two teenage disciples Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng. The nuns were seated on Yüeh-niang's k'ang, with their legs folded in the lotus position, and Nun Hsüeh in the center. A bed table had been placed in front of her, on which incense was burning, and the rest of the company were crowded around them, waiting to hear the exposition of the Buddhist dharma.

Whom should they see at this point but Chin-lien, who lifted the portiere aside with a smile and came in, causing Yüeh-niang to say, "You've brought a calamity down on your own head. He's gone to your quarters looking for you. If you haven't been able to get him to bed, what have you come back here for? Did he beat you when he got to your place?"

Chin-lien laughed at this, saying, "Just ask him whether he dares to beat me, or not."

"If he doesn't beat you," said Yüeh-niang, "it must be because he's afraid of the stink it would cause. It seems to me that you took him to task somewhat too severely just now. As the saying goes:

The male of the species has dog's hair

growing on his face;³³

The woman of the species has the fleece

of a female phoenix.

He was drunk, after all. My fear is that if you irritate him to the point where he loses his temper:

If he doesn't beat you,

Should he beat the dog instead?

I actually broke into a sweat on your behalf, but it turns out you're enough of a minx to tough it out."

"Even if he loses his temper with me," said Chin-lien, "I'm not afraid of him. But I can't put up with his sorting people differentially into:

Three classes and nine categories.

He didn't let them sing the song suite that his legitimate wife had called for but instead cast about:

Plowing the eastern ditch, and

Harrowing the western ditch;³⁴

thereby throwing the two little bastards into such confusion that they didn't know who they were supposed to take their orders from. Since this is our third sister Meng Yü-lou's birthday, it was inappropriate to sing a song suite like the one beginning with the words:

I remember her flute-playing,

which deals with the sorrows of separation. After all:

Nobody knows where the dead end up going to,

but he insists on exhibiting this counterfeit compassion and fake filiality. I can't stomach it."

"You sisters have been quarreling with each other all this time," interjected Sister-in-law Wu, "and I don't even know what it's about. My brother-in-law came in and sat down politely, so why was he driven out again?"

"Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you don't understand what happened. That husband of mine recalled the fact that Sister Li was still with us on the occasion of Sister Meng Yü-lou's birthday last year, but that she is no longer with us this year, which caused him to shed a few tears. So he told the boy actors to sing the song suite that begins with the words:

I remember her flute-playing, but where is
the jade damsel now?

This sister here was angry at the fact that he called for this song suite and told him off so effectively that she got under his skin and caused him to chase after her with the intent of giving her a drubbing. That's why the rascal ran out on us."

"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "you ought to let your husband call for whatever song suite he likes. What's the point of taking him to task over it. I imagine that he's accustomed to seeing all you sisters together but noticed that Li P'ing-erh was not here today. How could his heart not be stricken under the circumstances?"

"My good lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "they've been singing what they were asked to sing for what seems like half a day already, and who among the rest of us objected to what they sang? But Sister Six here has always had a better understanding of the significance of the songs than the rest of us. This song suite suggests that Li P'ing-erh was superior to any of the female paragons of old, extols the closeness of their relationship, and how they swore to be as faithful as the hills and seas, you to me, and I to you, as though she were utterly incomparable. So this inveterate nitpicker of ours couldn't help taking him verbally to task for it and has been giving him a hard time ever since."

"So this sister of ours is as sharp as all that," remarked Aunt Yang.

"What songs are there that she doesn't know?" said Yüeh-niang.

"If you quote the first line,

She'll come up with the last.³⁵

As for the likes of me, if we engage the services of professional female singers or boy actors, all we can do is let them sing and leave it at that. She is the only one among us who can say, 'That segment wasn't performed correctly; that line wasn't sung right; or that section was left out.' Whenever our husband proposes a song, she starts to carry on with him, giving him tit for tat, until he really becomes annoyed, before laying off, while the rest of us merely let them go at it."

"Aunt Yang," Meng Yü-lou interjected humorously, "you may not be aware of it, but I've had three or four children, of whom this slavey is the only one who survived. She has always been clever but unmannerly, and now that she has grown up and become a woman, she no longer allows herself to be governed by me."

Chin-lien responded by giving her a playful slap and laughed, saying, "So you're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"

"You see," said Meng Yü-lou, "she's been spoiled to the point that she's so:

Discourteous and ill-bred,
as to strike a member of the older generation."

"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "you'd do well in the future to let that husband of yours have his say. As the sayings go:

One night as man and wife gives rise to
a hundred nights of love.

To walk a hundred steps with one another,

Is enough to develop a lingering affinity.

She still seems vibrantly alive to him. You womenfolk of his are like his fingers. If he should lose one of them, how could he fail to think of it, to yearn for it, and to commemorate it?"

"Whether he thinks of her or not," responded Chin-lien, "there ought to be an appropriate time for it. We are all spouses of his after all. What does he mean by:

Raising one person up, and

Putting another down?

Are we all nothing but:

The ghosts of Liu Chan's daughters,

Who don't amount to anything?³⁶

Our elder sister resides in the rear compound and may not be aware of it, or have seen what he's up to. Every day, when he comes home after drinking somewhere, he makes his way first to her quarters, where he bows deeply before her portrait, mutters some mumbo jumbo on her behalf, makes her an offering of soup and rice, and proffers her something with his chopsticks just as though she were alive. Who knows what all he's up to? And he criticizes the rest of us for not wearing mourning on her behalf. As we have pointed out to him, none of us stands to her in the position of a mother. We all wore mourning for her through the final weekly commemoration of her death. How much longer are we supposed to do so? But he continues to quarrel with us about it."

"Sisters," responded Aunt Yang, "you ought to:

Take notice of half of what he does,

And take no notice of the other half."

"How time flies," said Sister-in-law Wu. "The seventh weekly commemoration occurred some time ago, and now the hundredth-day anniversary of her death is about to come up."

"When will the hundredth-day anniversary occur?" asked Aunt Yang.

"It's early yet," said Yüeh-niang. "It will not be until the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month."

“You’ll have to have a scripture-reading ceremony to mark the occasion,” said Nun Wang.

“It will fall too close to the New Year’s celebrations,” said Yüeh-niang, “for us to have any scripture-reading then. Father will probably put the scripture-reading off until after the New Year’s festival.”

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Hsiao-yü, who brought in a serving of tea flavored with taro, a cup of which was provided for each of them.

Shortly thereafter, when they had drunk their tea, Yüeh-niang washed her hands, lit some incense in the burner, and prepared to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound the Buddhist dharma.³⁷

Nun Hsüeh began by reciting a gatha, which went as follows:

The Ch’an school of the Buddhist teaching
is really quite extraordinary;
It has been transmitted by the Buddhas and
patriarchs to the human world.
It is easy enough for a wind-blown leaf to
fall tumbling to the ground;
But for it ever to be reattached to its
original branch is difficult.³⁸

These four lines of verse refer to the fact that for monks to adhere faithfully to their vows is difficult. It points out that man’s life is like a leaf on an iron tree, which may fall off easily, but will find it hard to ever be reattached to its original branch. It is easy enough to suffer the consequences of one’s evil karma, but difficult to become a Buddha or a patriarch.³⁹

To resume our story, originally, during the Chih-p’ing reign period (1064–67), in the ancient Ching-tz’u Hsiao-kuang Monastery on the Southern Mountain outside the Ch’ien-t’ang Gate of Ning-hai military prefecture in Chekiang province, there were two dedicated monks who had attained to an understanding of the Way. One of them was called Ch’an Master Wu-chieh (Five Precepts), and the other Ch’an Master Ming-wu (Clear Enlightenment). To what does the term Five Precepts refer? The first is to abstain from killing; the second is to abstain from stealing; the third is to abstain from lascivious music and alluring beauty;⁴⁰ the fourth is to abstain from drinking wine or eating meat;⁴¹ and the fifth is to abstain from uttering untrue or misleading statements.⁴² To what does the term Clear Enlightenment refer? It means to illuminate one’s mind and perceive one’s nature,⁴³ thereby achieving an understanding of one’s true self. Now this Ch’an Master Wu-chieh was just thirty years old in terms of lay reckoning, was not quite three feet tall, and presented an altogether most extraordinary aspect. He had been intelligent ever since his youth but was blind in one eye. His lay surname was Chin, and he was thoroughly versed in the Ch’an School and Buddhist doctrine. He and Ming-wu were like elder and younger brothers in the dharma. One day they visited the monastery together to call on the Ch’an Master Ta-hsing, and when the Master realized that Wu-chieh was so well versed in Buddhist doctrine, he retained him in the monastery in the post of rector. Some years later, when Ta-hsing passed away, the monks of the monastery made him the abbot, and henceforth he spent his days in meditation. The other one, Ming-wu, was twenty-eight years old and was born with a round head and large ears,⁴⁴ a broad face and a square mouth.⁴⁵ He was tall of stature,⁴⁶ and his appearance resembled that of an arhat. His lay surname was Wang, and the two of them were as close as though they were born of the same mother. When the time came to explicate the dharma, the two of them would mount the rostrum together.

One day, at the end of winter and the onset of spring, the weather was extremely cold. Snow had been falling for two days but had finally ended, and the sky was clear. Ch’an Master Wu-chieh was sitting on his meditation chair early that morning when his ears caught the sound of an infant crying in the distance. Turning to the trusted lay worker at his side, whose name was Ch’ing-i, he said to him, “Go out in front of the monastery gate to see what is going on, and report back to me.” The lay worker opened the gate of the monastery and saw a baby lying on a tattered mat on the snowy ground under a pine tree. “I wonder who could have left the child here?” he thought to himself. When he went closer to take a look, he found that it was a five- or six-month-old baby girl, wrapped in ragged clothing, who had a strip of paper on her breast inscribed with the eight characters indicating the year, month, date, and hour of her birth. Ch’ing-i thought to himself, “To save a single human life is better than building a seven-story pagoda.”⁴⁷

Hastening back to the abbot’s quarters, he told him what he had found. “Good!” said the abbot. “Someone with a heart as good as yours is hard to find. Take her back to your quarters and see that she is properly nourished. To have saved her life is a good deed.” When she had lived through her first year, the abbot gave her the name Hung-lien, or Red Lotus.

As the days went and the months came,⁴⁸ the lay worker Ch’ing-i raised her in his quarters in the monastery, without anyone being the wiser,⁴⁹ and in a while the abbot himself forgot all about it.

Before anyone knew it, Hung-lien grew to the age of fifteen. The lay worker Ch’ing-i kept her secluded in his own quarters, locking the door every day, each time he went out or came in, just as though she were his own daughter. The girl’s clothing, shoes, and socks were all those of a male novice, and she was favored with a naturally clear-cut appearance. When she had nothing else to do, she devoted herself to needlework in her room. The only hope of Ch’ing-i was that he might find her a husband so that the two of them could support him in his old age and arrange for his funeral.⁵⁰

One day, during the hot weather of the sixth month, Ch’an Master Wu-chieh happened to remember the events that had occurred more than ten years before and went directly back to the lay worker Ch’ing-i’s quarters behind the Hall of a Thousand Buddhas. “You seldom venture here,” said Ch’ing-i. “What brings you here today?” “Where is that girl Hung-lien?” asked Ch’an Master Wu-chieh. Ch’ing-i did not dare to conceal the truth of the matter⁵¹ and led the abbot into his quarters.

No sooner did he catch sight of Hung-lien than his thoughts were led astray,⁵² and lustful desires were suddenly aroused. “Tonight you must bring her to my quarters,” he instructed Ch’ing-i. “You must do so without fail.⁵³ If you consent to do as I say, I will see to it that your lot is improved in the future, but you must not let anyone else into the secret.” Ch’ing-i did not dare not to comply, but thought to himself, “Tonight this girl of mine is sure to lose her virginity.” When the abbot saw that his response was somewhat reluctant, he called him into his own quarters and gave him ten taels of silver, along with an ordination certificate that would entitle him to become a monk himself. Ch’ing-i felt that he had no alternative but to accept the silver.

That evening, he took Hung-lien to the abbot’s quarters, and the abbot accordingly deflowered her. After this, the abbot kept her hidden out of sight in a paper-curtained cabinet behind his bed and personally provided her with enough food to eat.

To resume our story, that very night, when the abbot’s brother-monk Ch’an Master Ming-wu emerged from a trance while sitting on his meditation couch, he was already aware that Wu-chieh had allowed his thoughts to stray and had broken his vow to abstain from sexual activity by violating the girl Hung-lien, thereby allowing his virtuous conduct of many years to be cast aside on a single day. “I had better go and admonish him to mend his ways,” he thought to himself.

The next day, the lotus flowers were in bloom in front of the monastery gate. Ming-wu ordered an acolyte to pluck a white lotus for him, put it in a gallbladder-shaped vase, and then invite Wu-chieh to come join him in enjoying the lotus blossoms, and composing verses, while chatting and laughing together. Before long, Wu-chieh arrived, and the two Ch’an Masters sat down beside each other. “My Brother,” said Ming-wu, “I noticed today that these flowers were in full bloom and invited you to come enjoy them with me, and each compose a verse on the subject.”

When the acolyte had served them with tea, and they had finished drinking it, they were provided with the four treasures of the writer’s studio.⁵⁴

“Let’s choose the lotus root as our topic,” said Wu-chieh, but Ming-wu said, “No, let’s choose the lotus flowers as our topic instead.” Wu-chieh took up his brush and composed a quatrain, as follows:

The petals of the stalk of lotus flowers
are in full bloom;
Accompanied by the hollyhocks, exuding
their rich fragrance.
The fiery red pomegranates are ablaze
like rolls of brocade;
But their scent is no match for that of
the green-coated caltrops.

“Since my elder brother has composed a poem,” said Ming-wu, “how could I fail to do so?” Whereupon, he also picked up his brush and composed a quatrain, as follows:

In spring, the peach trees, apricots, and
willows begin to flourish;
Their thousand blossoms and myriad blooms
contending in fragrance.
In summer, one enjoys the caltrop and the
lotus, in all their glory;
But the red lotus is no match for the white
lotus in its fragrance.⁵⁵

When he had finished writing it out, he laughed out loud.

Upon hearing the words of this poem, Wu-chieh realized their significance, and his embarrassment showed in his face.⁵⁶ Turning around and excusing himself, he returned to the abbot’s quarters,

where he told an acolyte to heat some bath water. After bathing himself, and changing into a new set of clothing, he took paper and brush and hastily wrote a farewell elegy of eight lines, as follows:

Now I have existed forty-seven years,
The myriad phenomena revert to unity.
Only because my thoughts went astray,
I must now suddenly depart this life.
My message to my fellow monk Ming-wu,
Is, "There is no need to pressure me."
My ephemeral body is like lightning,
That leaves the sky azure as before.

When he had finished writing it, he placed it in front of an image of the Buddha, returned to his meditation couch, and passed away in the lotus position.

An acolyte hastened to report this event to Ming-wu, who was greatly surprised to hear it. Upon going in front of the Buddha's image and reading the farewell elegy, he said, "You were not a bad monk, after all, but it's too bad that you made this one false move. And now, although you may be reborn as a man, you will grow up not believing in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha; and are sure to disparage the Buddha and slander the clergy, bringing bitter consequences on yourself in future lives, and preventing yourself from reverting to the true path."⁵⁷ It is greatly to be regretted. Do you really think that you have gotten away, and that I will not be able to catch up with you?"

Thereupon, he returned to his quarters, told an acolyte to heat bath water for him, bathed, and sat down on his meditation couch. Turning to the acolyte, he said, "I am going to pursue my fellow monk Wu-chieh. You can place our bodies in two caskets, and see that they are properly cremated together, after lying in state for three days." When he had finished speaking, he also passed away while sitting in the lotus position.

His fellow monks were all astonished at this extraordinary event, and word that two monks at the monastery had passed away sitting in the lotus position on successive days quickly spread to the four quarters. As a result, when their caskets were carried out in front of the monastery and cremated, mountains and seas of people came to burn incense, pay their respects, and offer donations. The lay worker Ch'ing-i subsequently married Hung-lien to a commoner so that they could support him in his old age. But no more of this.

In later days, Wu-chieh was reborn as the son of the layman Su Hsün of Mei prefecture in western Szechwan, who was given the name Su Shih,⁵⁸ and is also known by the courtesy name Tzu-chan, and the cognomen Tung-p'o. Ming-wu was reborn as the son of one Hsieh Tao-ch'ing from the same prefecture, who was given the name Tuan-ch'ing, and later left home to become a monk,⁵⁹ who took the name Fo-yin. The two of them continued to confront each other in their new incarnations, and their relationship remained extremely close. Truly:

Since he arrived in Szechwan several
decades have gone by;
During which he has devoted himself
to the Buddha Vairocana.⁶⁰
Although he apprehended the crux of
Chao-chou's⁶¹ sayings;
His good affinity has turned out to
be a bad affinity.
The red peach blossoms and the green
willows remain the same;
The water flowing over the boulders
makes a gurgling sound.
Today, the road to enlightenment has
been pointed out to you;
Never again allow your thoughts to
stray for love of Hung-lien.⁶²

When Nun Hsüeh finished her recitation, whom should they see but Lan-hsiang, from Meng Yü-lou's quarters, who brought in two square boxes of fastidiously prepared vegetarian fare, saucers of fruit, tea pastries, and sweetmeats, which were placed on the table after the incense burner had been removed. A kettle of tea was also provided, and the audience joined the three nuns in enjoying the repast. After this, some meat dishes were served, a jug of Ma-ku wine was opened, and the company gathered around the brazier to enjoy the wine.

Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu began to throw dice as they played "Competing for the Red," while Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh played guess-fingers with each other. Yü-hsiao stood beside them to pour the wine and at the same time passed information to Chin-lien underneath the table, which enabled her to win round after round, forcing Li Chiao-erh to down several cups of wine.

"Let me play with you," said Meng Yü-lou. "You seem bent only on beating her."

She then went on to say, "Chin-lien, expose your hands. You mustn't conceal them in your sleeves that way. And Yü-hsiao must not be allowed to stay so close to you."

As a result, that evening, she succeeded in overcoming Chin-lien, who was forced to down several cups of wine.

They also asked Big Sister Yü to play and sing for them, Yüeh-niang telling her, "Sing a version of 'Getting through the Five Watches of the Night' for us."

Big Sister Yü, thereupon, tuned the strings of her instrument and sang in a loud voice the song suite that begins with the tune "Interlaced Jade Branches":

Amid dense masses of dark clouds,
Like bits of goose down, the snowflakes
are dancing wildly.
The north wind is piercingly cold,⁶³ as it
penetrates the windows.
Your heart is hard, and I have been
the victim of it.
The abuse I have suffered at the hands of
my parents is too cruel.
The promises you made me have been
utterly ignored.
All I can do is count the watches
of the night.

TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":

The night is long, and I have been
left all alone.
It is desolate in the quiet of
the early watches.

You have not sent me a single sheet
of news about yourself.
My cheeks are streaked with pearly tears.
Our good times together are nothing to you.
During the first watch, my suffering
is unbounded.

TO THE TUNE “INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES”:

The first watch is finally over;
But I have been left all alone here
amid the bed curtains.

I toss first this way and then that,
but how am I to sleep?
During the second watch my
pearly tears fall.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

The second watch is hard to endure.
In trying to go to sleep, I do
periodically nod off,
Hoping that this night, this night, he will
appear to me in my dreams.
I long for him; he longs for me.
When he first left, the flowering crab apple
had just begun to bloom;
But by this time, the leaves of the tree
have all fallen;
Leaving me with no recourse but to
foolishly wait in vain.

TO THE TUNE “SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD”:

I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will you ever consent to come?
We spend less time together than apart;⁶⁴
it's just my bad luck, bad luck.
I have been left all alone, but
what can I do about it?
It makes it really hard to keep going.
During the third watch, my dreams
are recurrent.

TO THE TUNE “INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES”:

By the third watch the moon has risen.
How hard it is to bear this
interminable night.
The candle in its silver stand
is sputtering out.
My pearly tears fall in two
or three streaks.
Under my red satin comforter, half
the bed is empty.
Where has he bestowed the handkerchief that
I recently stitched for him?
My waist has become emaciated, as emaciated
as that of Shen Yüeh.⁶⁵

TO THE TUNE “SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD”:

My waist has become as emaciated
as that of Shen Yüeh.
Every day I am more brokenhearted
than ever with sorrow.
Yearning for my lover,⁶⁶ I shed tears
in two streams, two streams.
Facing the caltrop-patterned mirror, I am
reluctant to make myself up.
My alluring figure has become emaciated.⁶⁷
During the fourth watch, the night seems
longer than ever.

TO THE TUNE “INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES”:

The fourth watch is as long as the day.
As I think of him on my pillow, before I
know it, my tears begin to flow.
In the numinous god's temple, we swore
fealty to each other.
We exchanged snippets of black hair
as tokens of our love.
But the promises he made to me
have not been kept.
By now, he has abandoned me just like
that “willow” in the quarter;⁶⁸
And I am left foolishly waiting
for him in vain.

TO THE TUNE “SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD”:

I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will this ever cease?
Longing for my lover, in vain do I lean on the
belvedere, lean on the belvedere.
I fear my lover has wiped the slate clean
with a single stroke.
I can't help knitting my brows.
During the fifth watch my
pearly tears flow.

TO THE TUNE “INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES”:

At the fifth watch the cock crows.⁶⁹
Gradually I perceive that the day
is beginning to dawn.
Breaking into tears, I am about to
break into tears,
But I fear that other people will
only laugh at me.
For a time my heart is on fire;
Burning incense, I seek my fortune
before the gods.
The intentions of my fickle lover
are known only to Heaven;
And I am left foolishly waiting
for him in vain.

TO THE TUNE “SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD”:

I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will this ever end?
Beyond the eaves, ding-dong the wind chimes
sound, the wind chimes sound;
Making it impossible for me to sleep.
While, at the same time, the
cold ravens caw;
Desolately and disconsolately,⁷⁰
right up till dawn.

TO THE TUNE “INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES”:

At dawn I do my hair and wash my face;
But, confronting my dressing mirror, I am
reluctant to paint my eyebrows.
Then, on the eaves of my room, auspicious
magpies begin to chatter;
And my maidservant comes to report the good news,
Saying, “Your lover has actually
chosen to return.”
As the two of us enter the silken
bed curtains together,
I tell him, “You come closer. ‘I’ve
got something to ask you.’”

TO THE TUNE “THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD”:

“I’ve got something to ask you, you
unfaithful scoundrel.
As you well know, you’ve been away
for half a year now;
So why didn’t you send me so much
as a single letter?
I believed that you had gone to take the examinations
in order to become an official;
How could I know you were bewitched by ‘misty willows’
and addicted to the wine cup?
On your account, I had no choice but
to endure loneliness;
While you were there, cuddling the red
and hugging the turquoise.
On your account, I am sick with depression
and unable to eat,
So that my jade body has become
utterly emaciated.
I can endure the clear mornings, but
fear the evenings.
During the first watch, I heard the cry of the
solitary wild goose at the sky’s edge;
During the second watch, I suffered my dreaming
soul to yearn after my absent lover;
But, during the fifth watch, upon my awakening,
I was unable to see any trace of you.”

TO THE TUNE “THE LEAVES OF THE WILLOW TREE”:

“Ah! I found myself all alone beneath my

mandarin duck brocade quilt;
Deserted for my swallows' tryst, swallows'
tryst or orioles' assignation.
In the Temple of the God of the Sea⁷¹ may
be found an analogous case.⁷²
I could hardly help being angry at heart.
As you well know, the intentions of my fickle
lover are known only to Heaven."

CODA:

Within the tasseled brocade curtains,⁷³
the lovers are entwined;
Beneath the brocade quilt, the mandarin
ducks proceed to pair.
They will remain forever reunited,⁷⁴ till
the end of their lives.⁷⁵

By this time, Chin-lien had lost a series of rounds as she played at guess-fingers with Meng Yü-lou and had been forced to down ten or twenty cups of wine. No longer able to sit at her place, she set off for her quarters in the front compound, where she had to call out for what seemed like half a day before the postern gate was opened for her by Ch'iu-chü, who was still rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"So, you lousy slave, you've been asleep have you?" the woman said to her accusingly.

"I haven't been to sleep," protested Ch'iu-chü.

"It's obvious that you've just gotten up," the woman said. "You're just trying to deceive me. You've been taking it easy, rather than thinking of coming back to the rear compound to get me."

She then went on to ask, "Has Father gone to bed yet?"

"Father's been asleep for some time already," responded Ch'iu-chü.

The woman then went into the room that was furnished with a k'ang, where she pulled up her skirt and sat down on the k'ang to warm herself, while calling for some tea.

Ch'iu-chü hastily poured out a cup of tea for her, but the woman said, "You lousy slave! You'd pour tea for me to drink with those dirty hands of yours, would you? I won't drink any of that stale tea that has been steeped for so long it smells of the pot. Go call Ch'un-mei, and tell her to fill a little kettle with sweet water, put in an abundance of tea leaves, and boil it until it is good and strong, for me to drink."

"She's asleep in the other room with the bed in it," said Ch'iu-chü. "Wait till I call her to bring it for you."

"Don't call her, but let her sleep," the woman said.

Ch'iu-chü did not obey her but went into the other room, where she found Ch'un-mei lying fast asleep at Hsi-men Ch'ing's feet.

Shaking her awake, she said, "Mother has come back and wants some tea to drink. Haven't you even gotten up yet?"

Ch'un-mei spat at her, and cursed, saying, "You slave! You've been seeing things! So Mother has come back. So what? Why should you be in such a frightful stew over it, for no good reason?"

She then proceeded to get up:

Just as slow and easy as you please,
stretched her waist, pulled on her trousers, and came to see the woman, still rubbing her eyes as she approached the k'ang.

The woman, for her part, chose to criticize Ch'iu-chü, saying, "That slave! You were fast asleep, and she woke you up."

"The kerchief on your head has jumped out of place," she then remarked to Ch'un-mei. "Why don't you pull it back down where it belongs?"

She went on to ask, "How is it that you're only wearing one pendant earring? Where did the other one go?"

When Ch'un-mei felt her ears, she found that she was, indeed, wearing only one gold openwork pendant earring. Lighting a lamp, she went to take a look at the bed in the other room but failed to find the missing object. After some time, unexpectedly, she found that it had fallen onto the footboard of the bed and picked it up.

"Where did you find it?" the woman asked her.

"It was all her fault," said Ch'un-mei, "when she insisted on:

Making such an unnecessary fuss,⁷⁶
over waking me up. It got caught on a curtain hook and fell onto the footboard, where I was able to recover it."

"I told her not to disturb you," the woman explained, "but she insisted on waking you up anyway."

"She said that you wanted some tea to drink," said Ch'un-mei.

"I do want a drink of tea," the woman said, "but I fear that her hands are not clean."

Ch'un-mei then dipped up a little kettleful of water, placed it on the brazier, and raked some charcoal around it. Before long it was hot enough to brew tea, and after rinsing out a cup, she poured out a strong serving of tea and handed it to the woman.

The woman then asked Ch'un-mei, "How long has Father been asleep?"

"I helped him to bed some time ago," responded Ch'un-mei. "He asked where you were, and I told him that you had not yet returned from the rear compound."

When the woman had finished her tea, she said to Ch'un-mei, "A while ago, I brought back some fruit and candied sweetmeats in

my sleeve, that had been given to me by Yü-hsiao for my mother to eat. I turned them over to this slave here to take inside for you to put away."

"I haven't seen anything of them," said Ch'un-mei. "Who knows where she put them?"

The woman then called in Ch'iu-chü and asked her, "Where did you put that fruit?"

"It's here," responded Ch'iu-chü. "I put it in the cabinet."

So saying, she went and brought the things over to her.

The woman counted them over and, finding that a tangerine was missing, asked her what had happened to it.

"When Mother gave them to me," said Ch'iu-chü, "I brought them inside and put them in the cabinet. Surely you don't imagine I was suffering from such an avid craving as to blight my own mouth with it, do you?"

"You lousy slave!" the woman responded. "You still insist on talking back, do you? If you didn't snatch it, where did it go? I counted them with my own hand before turning them over to you. You lousy slave! You've simply been picking them up and secreting them for yourself, until only these measly:

Odds and ends,⁷⁷

are left. You've already consumed more than half of them. Under the circumstances, I'll have to teach you a lesson."

Then, turning to Ch'un-mei, she said, "You give that slave ten slaps on each side of her face."

"Those dirty cheeks of hers," responded Ch'un-mei. "I'd only be dirtying this hand of mine."

"You drag her over to me, then," the woman said.

Ch'un-mei pushed her over in front of the woman with both hands, and the woman pinched her cheeks, while taking her to task, saying, "You lousy slave! It was you who snatched this tangerine to eat, wasn't it? If you tell me the truth, I won't beat you. But if you don't, I'll get the riding crop, strip you naked, and whip you until I lose track of the strokes. No doubt, you thought I was drunk enough so that you could snatch it for yourself, while pulling the wool over my eyes, didn't you?"

She then turned to Ch'un-mei and asked her, "Am I drunk, or not?"

"Mother is perfectly sober," replied Ch'un-mei. "What does wine have to do with it? If you believe her, then she didn't eat it. But if you don't believe her, try groping inside her sleeve. I wouldn't be surprised if there were still tangerine peels in her sleeve."

The woman, then, pulled the sleeve over and started to grope inside it, but Ch'iu-chü tried to brush her aside with one hand, in order to prevent her from doing so. Ch'un-mei, then, intervened by pulling her hand away and, sure enough, was able to grope out some remnants of tangerine peel.

The woman responded by pinching her cheeks twice, as hard as she could, and giving her two full-handed slaps on the face, as she reviled her, saying, "You lousy slave! You hopeless scamp of a slave! You're hardly good at anything else, but it seems you're proficient at telling tales and snitching food to eat. These tangerine peels in your sleeve constitute:

Irrefutable proof of your guilt,⁷⁸

so you can hardly try to blame anyone else. I would give you a whipping right now, but Father is asleep here, and it's not an appropriate time to whip you while;

Anticipating tea or recovering from wine.

Tomorrow, when I'm completely myself, I'll settle accounts with you."

"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you ought not to be perfunctory about it tomorrow, but have her stripped completely naked, and get someone to give her a real shellacking, administering several tens of strokes with the bamboo. If she is made to suffer some real pain, it might throw some fear into her. If you merely touch her up with a few strokes of the rod, as if you were playing with a monkey, she won't take it to heart."

Ch'iu-chü's face was swollen from the pinches she had received at the woman's hands, and she took herself off to the kitchen with a pout on her lips.

The woman divided the other tangerine in two and also took an apple, and a pomegranate, and offered them to Ch'un-mei, saying, "I'm giving you these things to eat, while the rest should be kept for my mother."

Ch'un-mei did not evince any interest in these offerings but accepted them as indifferently as though she were:

Uncertain whether they were there or not,
and tossed them into a drawer.

The woman was also about to divide up the candied sweetmeats, but Ch'un-mei said, "There is no need for you to divide them. I am disinclined to eat such sweet things. Save them for your mother."

For this reason, the woman did not divide them and set them aside for her mother. But no more of this.

The woman sat down on the commode and urinated, after which she told Ch'un-mei to bring in the portable bidet and washed her private parts.

She then went on to ask Ch'un-mei, "What time is it by now?"

"The moon is sinking in the West," said Ch'un-mei, "so it must be sometime in the third watch."

The woman took off her jewelry and went into the bedroom, where she saw that the silver lamp on the table was guttering out, and proceeded to trim the wick. When she looked at the bed, she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying there fast asleep and snoring loudly. Unfastening her silken girdle and doffing her skirt, she sat down to change into her sleeping shoes, took off her drawers, climbed into bed, and bored her way under the covers, where she:

Lay down head to head on the same pillow,⁷⁹

with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After lying there for a little while, she reached between his loins and felt for his organ. Although she manipulated it for a while, it refused to stand up. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had engaged in sexual intercourse with Ch'un-mei not long before, so that his organ was as flaccid as cotton and could not be made to rise immediately. The woman, who had a bellyful of wine, and whose:

Lecherous desires were on fire,⁸⁰

squatted down underneath the bedding and began to suck his organ. Titillating the mouth of his urethra with her tongue, she engulfed his turtle head with her mouth and proceeded to move it:

Back and forth without ceasing.⁸¹

Hsi-men Ch'ing abruptly woke up and, seeing what she was up to under the covers, said, "You crazy little whore! Why did you not come back until now?"

"We have been drinking wine in the rear compound," explained the woman, "where Meng the Third had provided two square boxes of delicacies to go with the wine, and Big Sister Yü was singing to entertain us. We were keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang and have been enjoying ourselves all this time playing at guess-fingers and throwing dice. I defeated Li Chiao-erh and made her drunk in the process, but afterwards, Meng the Third out-played me at guess-fingers, and I had to drink several goblets of wine. You're lucky to have had some sleep, but if you think you can hold out on me, just see if I put up with it, or not."

"Have you got that band you were going to make?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's right here under the mattress," the woman said, pulling it out and showing it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

She then proceeded to fasten it around the root of his chowrie handle, and then tie the two ribbons attached to it securely behind his back.

"Have you taken anything?" she went on to ask; to which Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "Yes I have."

Before long, thanks to the woman's manipulation of his organ, behold:

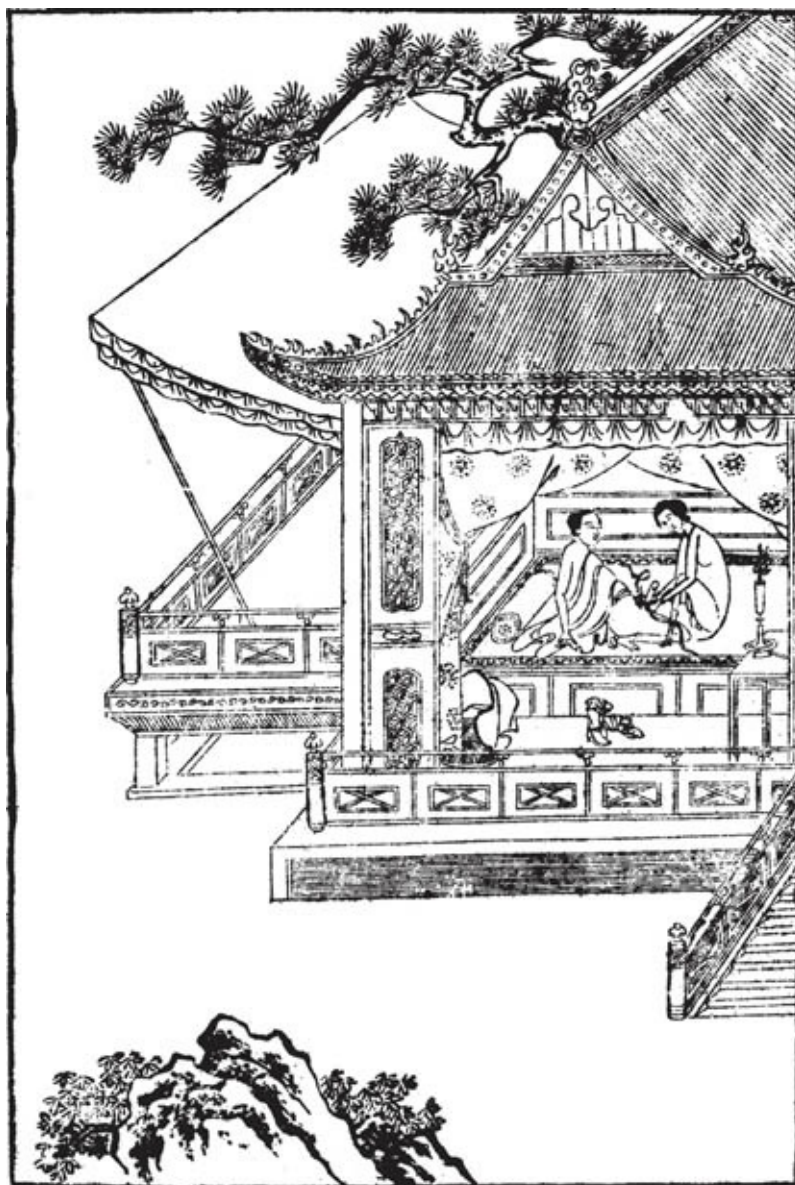
Its protuberances swelled, its head sprang up, and

Its body swelled itself erect,

until it reached the exceptional length of more than seven inches. The woman crawled on top of him and, finding that his turtle head was proud and large, stretched her labia apart with both hands and abruptly inserted it into her vagina. The woman embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing around the neck with both hands and told him to clasp her waist, while she continued to knead away at him in her superior position until his organ finally penetrated her to the root.

"Daddy," the woman cried out to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take my bodice and put it under your waist to prop it up."

Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up her bodice of crimson satin from the head of the bed, folded it over itself four times, and used it to prop up his waist, while the woman straddled his body on all fours. After no more than a few thrusts, his organ penetrated her to the hilt.



Hsi-men Ch'ing First Tries Out the Band of White Satin

"Daddy," the woman said, "you can feel it with your own hand. It's gone all the way in and has stretched me to capacity on the inside. In case you're not satisfied yet, you can try to thrust it in further."

Hsi-men Ch'ing investigated with his hand and found that it had penetrated all the way to the root:

Without leaving a gap of even a hairsbreadth,⁸²

while only his two testicles remained outside,⁸³ and inside he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.

"You certainly were in a hurry," the woman said. "The problem is that it's so cold we can't light a lamp and enjoy the sight of what we're doing. It's not as nice as it is in the summer. During these winter months, it's altogether too cold."

She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How do you find this band compares with that silver clasp? It certainly seems superior to me, in that it doesn't hurt when it rubs against my labia. This band makes your organ grow even larger and increases its length significantly. If you don't believe me, try feeling my lower abdomen. It has penetrated almost as far as my heart."

She then went on to say, "You hold me. Today, I'd like to go to sleep on top of you."

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "go ahead and sleep. Daddy will hold you."

The woman stuck her tongue into his mouth and had him hold it there, while her starry eyes grew dim, as he embraced her fragrant shoulders.

After sleeping for a brief period, she could not prevent the flames of desire from enveloping her body, as her fragrant heart became

disturbed.

Thereupon, supporting herself with her hands on his shoulders, she alternately raised and lowered herself, while he retracted his organ as far as the knob of the glans, and then plunged it in all the way up to the root, as she called out, "My own darling! That's enough. Your Fivey is dying."

But he continued coming and going, thrusting and retracting another three hundred times, until she finally came.

"My own daddy!" the woman cried out. "Squeeze me tightly around the waist."

At the same time, she offered Hsi-men Ch'ing a nipple to suck, and then, before she knew it:

She swooned completely away, and

Her vaginal fluids overflowed.

Before long, as the two of them lay in a mutual embrace, the woman became aware that:

Her heart was hopping like a little fawn.⁸⁴

In no time at all:

Her four limbs had become limp, and

Her cloudy locks were in disarray.

But, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's organ was withdrawn, it was still as stiff and hard as ever.

The woman wiped it off with a handkerchief, saying, "My own daddy! How is it that you haven't ejaculated?"

"Wait until we've had some sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "after which, we can start to play again."

"I'm not sure I'll be up to it," the woman said, "my body's feeling so flaccid and feverish."

Afterwards, once:

The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,
the two of them:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,

went to sleep on the bed:

Unaware that the sun had already

risen in the East.⁸⁵

Truly:

If one were to casually shine the light of
a silver lamp upon them;

They would appear to be a natural-born pair
of interlocking branches.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 74

CENSOR SUNG CH'IAO-NIEN SOLICITS THE EIGHT IMMORTALS TRIPOD; WU YÜEH-NIANG LISTENS TO THE *PRECIOUS SCROLL ON WOMAN HUANG*

Years ago, when I was traveling in the South,
you entertained me as a guest;
Provided with cups of Tun-hsün wine,¹ together
we enjoyed the verdant spring.
Foaming over from its sparrow-shaped vessels,
the barbarian wine was smooth;
As you remind me with the jeweled words of your
message on new Szechwan paper.
The flowers were allured by our passing steeds,
their reds following the bridles;
The grass was attracted by our moving vehicles,
its green surrounding the wheels.
Since we parted amid the flourishing foliage
on the road south of Cheng-chou,
Who knows who has been heir to those beauties
of the breeze and the moonlight?²

THE STORY GOES that Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced P'an Chin-lien and slept until the dawn of the following day.

When the woman saw that his organ was still standing straight up as though it were a stick, she said, "Daddy, you'd better make the best of it by letting me off for now. I can't handle any more. Let me suck you off instead."

"You crazy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well give it a suck. If you succeed in sucking it off, it will be your good fortune."

The woman actually squatted down between his loins and, pillowing her head on one of his thighs, proceeded to manipulate his organ with her mouth, sucking away at it for a good hour, without getting it to ejaculate. Hsi-men Ch'ing held onto her powdered neck with one hand while alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, and wobbling his organ back and forth. She pumped it in and out of her mouth unceasingly, until white saliva overflowed from her lips, and rouge stains appeared on the stem of his organ.

Just as he was about to ejaculate, the woman questioned Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Ying the Second has sent invitations inviting us to his place on the twenty-eighth. Are we going to go, or not?"

"Why shouldn't you go?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You should all get yourselves ready and go."

"There is something I'd like to ask of you," the woman said. "Will you agree to it, or not?"

"You crazy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What have you got to ask? Why not just come out with it?"

"I'd like you to get out that fur coat of Sister Li's and let me wear it," the woman said. "Tomorrow, when we come back from the party, the others will all be wearing their fur coats, but I alone will be without one to wear."

"There is that fur coat that was pawned with us last year by the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well wear that."

"I don't want to wear something that's been pawned," the woman said. "Besides, you've already turned it over to Li Chiao-erh to wear, and given Li Chiao-erh's fur coat to Sun Hsüeh-o. I'd like to wear that fur coat of Sister Li's. If you get it out and give it to me today, I'll attach two crimson brocaded sleeve linings and wear it with my white satin jacket. If you let me have it, rather than giving it to anyone else, it will be an acknowledgment that I've been a good wife to you all this time."

"You lousy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself. That fur coat of hers is worth sixty taels of silver, with its glossy, jet black fur trimming. If you wear it, you will only make an ostentatious show of yourself."

"You crazy slave!" the woman retorted. "It's not as though you were giving it away to the wife of some nobody. After all, it's your own spouse you're giving it to, and it will only serve to enhance your prestige. What's the point of making such a fuss about it? How would you like it if I refused to comply with your wishes in the future?"

"You're:

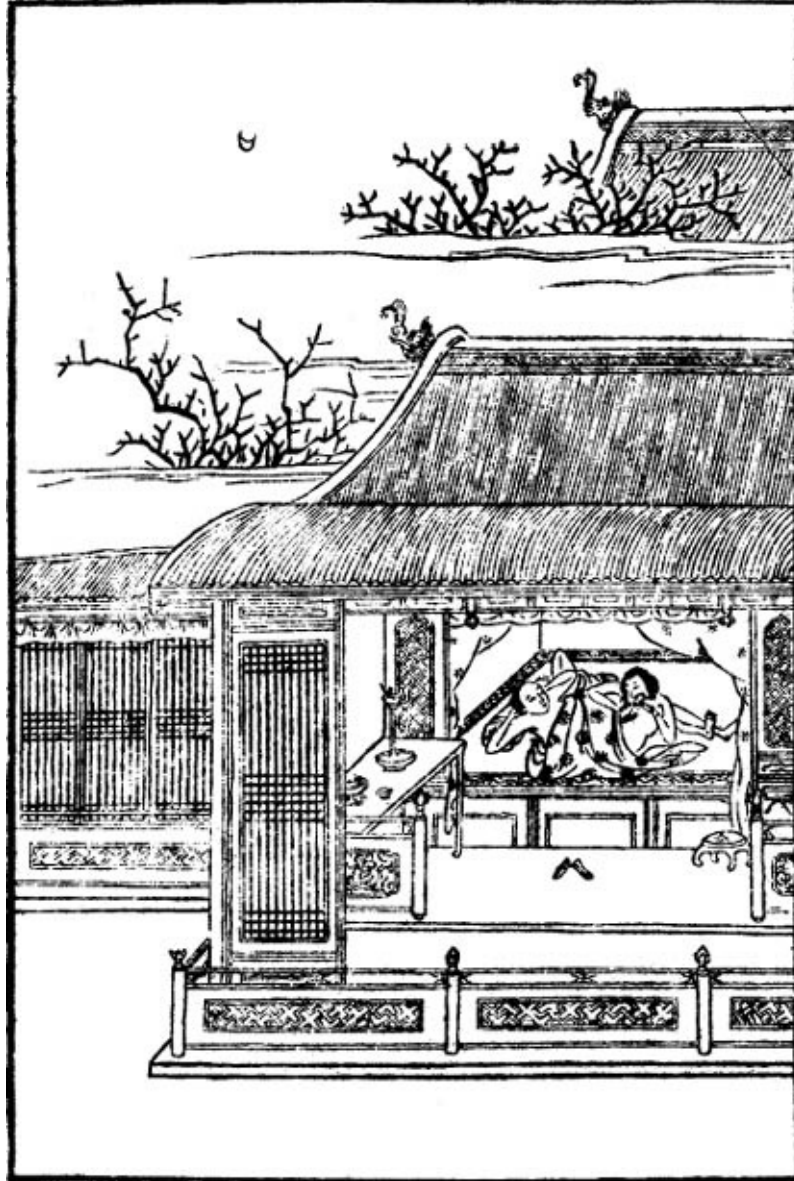
Asking a favor on the one hand, and

Being hard-boiled on the other,"

said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You crazy indecent good-for-nothing!" the woman said. "Am I no more than a maidservant in your room, who must give in to your every demand?"

As she spoke, she laid his organ against her powdered cheek and brushed it back and forth for some time before, once again, inserting it into her mouth,³ and titillating the orifice of his urethra with her tongue. After a while, she fell to licking his frenum with the tip of her tongue and toying with the knob of his glans and then, engulfing it with her ruby lips, devoted herself to moving it back and forth.



P'an Chin-lien Uses Her Fragrant Cheek to Caress the Jade

The extremity of Hsi-men Ch'ing's magic rhinoceros horn felt anointed, his brain was flooded with a range of lustful feelings,⁴ and in a little while, as his semen began to rise, he called out repeatedly, "You little whore! Squeeze it tightly. I'm about to come."

Before he had finished speaking, his semen ejaculated all over the woman's mouth and face, and she dutifully swallowed it down, mouthful after mouthful. Truly:

Past mistress of the intimate arts,
she caters to his every whim;
How quick she is, and diligent,
to "play the purple flute."

That day was the one on which Secretary An Ch'en had arranged to host a party on his premises, so Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to comb

his hair and wash his face and had started to go outside when the woman, who was still lying under the covers, said, "You'd better take this opportunity to find that fur coat for me. If you put it off, you won't have any time to spare."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, made his way over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where the wet nurse and maidservant had already arisen, straightened things up, and prepared a kettle of tea water in anticipation of his arrival.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in and sat down, he asked, "Have you presented an offering to your mistress, or not?"

"By now," said Ju-i, "it is already quite a while since the offering was presented."

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that Ju-i was wearing a jade-colored jacket that opened down the middle, over a white cotton skirt, and pale green satin shoes with high sand-green heels. Her face was lightly daubed with rouge and powder,⁵ her mothlike eyebrows were painted long, her lips were tinted bright red with shiny rouge, from her ears were suspended two gold clove-shaped ear pendants, and on her hands she sported four black gold rings that had been bestowed upon her by Li P'ing-erh. With an ingratiating smile, she presented him with tea and then sat down to one side in order to chat with him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ying-ch'un back to the rear compound to get the keys to the bedroom, and Ju-i asked him, "Father, what are you getting them for?"

"I am looking for her fur coat," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in order to let the Fifth Lady wear it."

"Do you mean that sable coat of Mother's?" asked Ju-i.

"Yes," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She would like to wear it, so I am going to give it to her now."

When Ying-ch'un had departed on her errand, Hsi-men Ch'ing took the woman onto his lap, cupped her breasts with his two hands in order to stimulate her nipples, and remarked, "My child, though you have borne a child, your nipples are still tight."

The two of them then fell to kissing each other face to face, and sucking each other's tongues.

"I have noticed, Father," said Ju-i, "that you are constantly choosing to spend your time with the Fifth Lady. I haven't seen you frequenting the quarters of any of the other ladies. Whatever her other characteristics may be, she is altogether too touchy and unable to make allowances for others. Some time ago, while you were still away from home, she got into a big row with me over the laundry bat, but fortunately Auntie Han and the Third Lady were able to intervene and separate us. Later on, when you returned home, I did not venture to mention it to you; but some talkative person, I don't know who, not only mentioned it to you, but also told her that you had been making out with me. Did she also tell you about our quarrel?"

"Yes, she did tell me about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In the future, you would do well to offer her an apology. If she manages to pick up so much as a sweet date from someone, she's as pleased as can be. Although she may be sharp-tongued, she doesn't really mean what she says."

"When you came home, the day after we had our quarrel," said Ju-i, "she made a point of speaking nicely to me, saying that since you chose to spend much of your time with her, the other ladies of the household were prone to cut her some slack. 'But if you are careful not to keep me in the dark about anything,' she went on to say:

'There's water enough in the channel
for all the boats,

why should I go out of my way to make trouble for you?'"

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the two of you ought to be reconciled to each other."

He then went on to promise the woman, "If you wait up for me, I'll come to this room to sleep tonight."

"Are you really going to come?" asked Ju-i. "Don't try to deceive me."

"Who's trying to deceive you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing protested.

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying-ch'un, who came back with the keys. Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to unlock the bedroom door and then open the cabinet and get out the fur coat. After giving it a good shaking and wrapping it up in a package, he told Ying-ch'un to take it over to the adjacent room.

Ju-i then said to Hsi-men Ch'ing in a low voice, "I don't have a good fur coat myself. How about taking advantage of the occasion to find another one for me? And if any of Mother's undergarments are available, you might also provide me with a set of them."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly told her to open the trunk and came up with a set of clothes consisting of a kingfisher-blue satin jacket, a yellow cotton skirt, a pair of blue Lu-chou silk drawers, and a pair of figured ankle leggings. He turned them over to her, and the woman kowtowed to him in thanks, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing locked the bedroom door and went out, telling her to take the fur coat and deliver it to Chin-lien's quarters next door.

Chin-lien had just gotten up, and was still sitting on her bed engaged in putting on her foot bindings, when Ch'un-mei announced, "Ju-i has come to deliver the fur coat."

The woman, who understood the significance of the fact that she had been sent on this errand, said, "Tell her to come in," and, when she had done so, asked her, "Was it Father that sent you?"

"It was Father who told me to bring it for you to wear," Ju-i replied.

"And did he also present you with anything, or not?" Chin-lien inquired.

"Father did provide me with two items of silk clothing to wear during the New Year's celebrations," said Ju-i. "And he also told me to come and kowtow to you."

So saying, she came forward and kowtowed to her four times.

"That is not appropriate among sisters," the woman said. "If your master has taken a fancy to you, as the saying goes:

A multitude of boats need not clog the channel,

A multitude of carts need not block the road.

Why should I go out of my way to make trouble for you? So long as you do nothing to offend me, I'll have no reason to interfere with you. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is."

"Ever since my mistress died," said Ju-i, "although the First Lady in the rear compound has taken her place, you are still the presiding mistress of the front compound, and the one I look to for support, early and late. If I presumed to take any liberties with you, where would I be when:

The fallen leaves return to the root?"⁶

"As for those items of clothing that you have received," the woman said, "you had better mention the matter to the First Lady, hadn't you?"

"I asked the First Lady for them a while ago," said Ju-i, "and she said, 'Wait until Father opens her bedroom someday, and he'll give you an item or two.'"

"So long as you have spoken to her about it, it should be all right," the woman said.

Ju-i thereupon took her leave and returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door, where she found that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already gone out to the front reception hall.

Ju-i then asked Ying-ch'un, "When you went to get the keys, just now, did the First Lady have anything to say about it?"

"The First Lady asked me, 'What does Father want the keys for?'" replied Ying-ch'un. "But I didn't tell her that he wanted to give her fur coat to the Fifth Lady, but merely said, 'I don't know.' The First Lady didn't have anything further to say."

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the reception hall, he saw that the preparations for the banquet were under way. The troupe of Hai-yen actors, including Chang Mei, Hsü Shun, and Kou Tzu-hsiao, performers of the leading male and female roles, arrived, bearing their costume trunk, and, along with the four boy musicians, Li Ming and company, who had come earlier, they all proceeded to kowtow to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that food should be provided for all of them and then ordered that Li Ming and two of the other boy musicians should perform in the front reception hall, while Tso Shun should entertain the female guests in the rear compound.

That day, Han Tao-kuo's wife Wang Liu-erh did not attend but sent Second Sister Shen in a sedan chair, with two boxes of gifts, accompanied by their servant Chin-ts'ai, in order to help celebrate Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Wang Ching escorted them back to the rear compound and sent the sedan chair on its way. That day, Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, the wife of Han Ming-ch'uan, and her sister-in-law, Meng the Elder's wife, from outside the city gate, also came, as well as the wives of Fu Ming and Kan Jun, Big Sister Tuan, the wife of Ts'ui Pen, and Pen the Fourth's wife.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the reception hall when he saw Tai-an escorting a woman through the enclosed passageway who was petite in stature and was attired in a green satin jacket over a red skirt and a blue gold lamé headband, whose face was devoid of rouge and powder,⁷ and whose two eyes were mere slits, reminding him of the appearance of Cheng Ai-yüeh. When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who it was, Tai-an replied that it was the wife of Pen the Fourth. On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing had nothing further to say but went back to the rear compound to see Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang was serving tea to her guests when Hsi-men Ch'ing came in to eat some congee and handed the keys back to her.

"What did you open her bedroom door for?" asked Yüeh-niang.

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained, "P'an the Sixth said that when you all go to attend the party at Ying the Second's place tomorrow she will be the only one without a fur coat and would like to have Li P'ing-erh's fur coat to wear."

Yüeh-niang gave him a look and said, "You don't seem able to control your own mouth. When she died, you were angry that anyone would even suggest reassigning the maidservants in her quarters, but in the present case, you haven't a word to say about disposing of her property. There is a fur coat available for her, but she refuses to wear it and adamantly insists on having this particular coat to wear. It's lucky for you that Li P'ing-erh is dead, so you can hanker after this fur coat of hers. If she weren't dead, you wouldn't be entitled to do anything more than take a look at it."

With these few words, she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence.

Suddenly, it was reported that School Official Liu had come to return the silver he had borrowed, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the reception hall to receive him.

Who should appear at this point but Tai-an, who came in with a calling card and said, "The household of Imperial Commissioner Wang has delivered some presents."

"What sort of presents are they?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They are congratulatory gifts," said Tai-an, "consisting of a bolt of fabric, a jar of southern wine, and four delicacies to go with the wine."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the calling card read, "Deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your kinsman and pupil Wang Ts'ai."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly summoned Wang Ching and told him to prepare a thank-you note in reply, award the messenger with five mace of silver, and send him on his way.

Who should appear at this point but Li Kuei-chieh, who got out of her sedan chair at the front gate, accompanied by a male servant from her establishment bearing four square boxes of gifts.

This threw Tai-an into such consternation that he offered to carry her felt bag for her, saying, "Kuei-chieh, let me escort you inside through the enclosed passageway. School Official Liu is being entertained in the reception hall."

Li Kuei-chieh, accordingly, made her way back into the rear compound through the enclosed passageway, while Lai-an carried the

gift boxes into Yüeh-niang's room.

"Has Father seen these gifts, or not?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Father is entertaining a guest and hasn't seen them yet," explained Tai-an.

"Leave the gifts in their boxes and put them in the parlor for the time being," directed Yüeh-niang.

After a while, when School Official Liu had left, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back to the master suite to have something to eat, and Yüeh-niang told him, "Li Kuei-chieh has brought some gifts for us here."

"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to open up the boxes, they saw that one contained molded cakes of glutinous rice flour, with a sweet stuffing, and the character for long life embossed on their surfaces; one contained molded cakes embossed with the images of the Eight Immortals and flavored with attar of roses; one contained two roast ducks; and one contained a pair of pig's trotters.

Whom should they see at this point but Li Kuei-chieh, who came out from one of the inner rooms.

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets, further enhanced with a white drawnwork kerchief, and she wore a crimson jacket that opened down the middle, over a blue satin skirt. Facing Hsi-men Ch'ing, she proceeded to kowtow to him four times.

"That's enough of that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What did you go to the trouble of buying these presents for?"

"Just now," said Yüeh-niang, "Kuei-chieh told me that she was afraid you were annoyed with her, but that she was not responsible for what happened. If you consider the matter, it was all her mother's fault. On the day in question, Kuei-chieh was suffering from a headache, when Wang the Third, with a bunch of followers, who was on his way to Ch'in Yü-chih's place to engage her services, happened to pass by the door of her establishment and dropped in for a cup of tea. That was when the authorities stormed in and broke up the party, but Kuei-chieh never even came out to see him."

"On that occasion you never came out to see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and on this occasion you never came out to see him. Your story simply doesn't hold water. But, on due consideration, I'm hardly in a position to control you. It's not as though the door of your Verdant Spring Bordello were piled high with baked wheat cakes, or anything like that."

The hole in the cash has much the same shape

wherever you find it.

I'm really not annoyed with you."

Li Kuei-chieh remained kneeling on the floor and refused to get up, saying, "Father is right to be annoyed. But if he ever laid a hand on me, may my body rot completely away, and develop an abscess in every hair follicle. It was all the fault of my senile old dotard of a mother, who doesn't know what she's doing. She indiscriminately welcomes both the good and the bad into our place and only ends up annoying Father for no good reason."

"Well, since you're here," interjected Yüeh-niang, "you might as well make it up between you. What's the point of continuing to be annoyed?"

"You can get up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm no longer annoyed with you, that's all."

Li Kuei-chieh, putting on a deliberate act, said, "Father, you'll have to give me a smile before I'll get up. If you refuse to give me a smile, I'll remain kneeling here for a year without getting up."

Without any warning, P'an Chin-lien interrupted from the sidelines, saying, "Kuei-chieh, you should stand up for yourself. As long as you continue to kneel there, beseeching the favor of that pip-squeak, you're only encouraging him to put on airs. At present, you may be kneeling to him here, but in the future, when he visits your establishment, he will have to kneel to you. When that happens, you should pay no attention to him."

This speech caused both Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang to laugh, and it was only then that Li Kuei-chieh stood up.

Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came inside in a state of obvious agitation and announced that His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien and His Honor An Ch'en had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent for his formal clothes, put them on, and went out to welcome them.

Li Kuei-chieh then said to Yüeh-niang, "Ai-ya-ya! From now on, I'll have nothing to do with Father but will continue to be a daughter to you, Mother."

"As for those empty oaths of yours," said Yüeh-niang, "I've already heard enough of them. On two earlier occasions when he went into the quarter to visit you, you were nowhere to be found."

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "You're killing me. Father never came to my place. If he ever paid a visit to my place and I allowed him to lay a hand on me, may I die an early death, and my whole body break out in abscesses. Mother, you've been taken in by a false report. It wasn't my place he visited on those two occasions but was probably that of Cheng Ai-yüeh, where he's been patronizing that young powdered face. This accusation must have been fabricated by her and been motivated by jealousy. Why else should Father be annoyed with me?"

"Each of us has her own life to live,"

interjected Chin-lien. "Why should she make such an accusation against you?"

"Fifth Lady," said Kuei-chieh, "you don't understand the nature of people in our profession, who are given to taking out their anger on one another."

Yüeh-niang picked up where she left off, saying, "What is the difference between you denizens of the quarter and the rest of us? We are all alike in that when we get angry with each other, the one with the most favor will trample the other underfoot."

Yüeh-niang then proceeded to provide her with a serving of tea. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had welcomed Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Secretary An Ch'en into the reception hall, they exchanged greetings, and each of them affirmed his esteem by presenting him with the customary gifts of a piece of fabric and a book. Upon seeing the meticulous preparations that had been made for the banquet, they:

Expressed their gratitude without end.⁸

After the three had taken their seats in the positions appropriate for guests and host, the actors were summoned into their presence and instructed that when His Honor Ts'ai Hsiu arrived they should do their utmost to put on a good performance.

Before long, after they had consumed a serving of tea, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien said, "Your pupil has a request that he would like to trouble you with, Ssu-ch'üan. At present, the Grand Coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, has just been promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Your pupil, along with the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, would like to host a party in his honor on the thirtieth, if we could borrow your distinguished premises in order to proffer him a farewell cup of wine, since he is scheduled to leave for the capital on the second day of the coming month. But we don't know if you are willing to consent to this, or not."

"Whatever you propose, venerable sir," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will not fail to comply with your command. But I do not know how many table settings will be required."

"Your pupil has some joint contributions here," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien."

He then summoned an attendant and took out of his felt bag contributions from the officers of the Provincial Administration Commission and Provincial Surveillance Commission, including one from himself, making a total of twelve in all. Each person having contributed one tael, this amounted to a sum of twelve taels of silver.

"We will need," he went on to say, "one table setting of the kind intended as much for display as for eating, while, for the rest, communal seating will suffice. And you will also need to engage a troupe of actors for the occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing consented to the proposal and accepted the contributions, whereupon Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien got up from his place and bowed in gratitude.

In a little while, they were invited to take their seats in the great summer-house in the garden, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, where they were joined before long by the secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of the Lin-ch'ing customs station, Ch'ien Lung-yeh. After greeting each other, and consuming another serving of tea, the three officials proceeded to set out the pieces and play a board game with each other.

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien observed that in Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence:

The buildings were spacious,
The courtyards were secluded, and
The books, paintings, and other cultural objects,
Were among the finest of the day.

He noticed that suspended in the chamber there was an antique horizontal scroll depicting four male figures holding aloft the character for long life. At the upper end of the room there was also a standing screen inlaid with mother-of-pearl, in front of which there stood an incense burner in the shape of a gilded tripod depicting the Eight Immortals bearing birthday gifts, which was several feet high and of exquisite craftsmanship. On seeing that the smoke of aloeswood incense was emerging from the mouths of the auspicious tortoise, crane, and deer depicted thereon, he went up to examine it, praising it unceasingly.

"This incense burning tripod is beautifully made, is it not?" he remarked to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Then, turning to the other two officials, he said, "Your pupil has written to his fellow graduate Mr. Liu in Huai-an, asking him to send such a vessel to me for presentation to the venerable Ts'ai Hsiu, but it has not yet arrived. Where did you ever get such a piece, Ssu-ch'üan?"

"It was also presented to your pupil by someone from the Huai region," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When this conversation ended, they continued to play at their board game. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered his servants to bring in two partitioned tabletop boxes of assorted delicacies and stuffed pastries, and he also called for the actors who played the male and female leads to entertain them with some southern-style songs.

"The guest of honor has not yet arrived," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien. "It would hardly do for him to find the faces of his hosts already flushed from drinking."

"In this cold weather," opined Secretary An Ch'en, "it will do no harm to have a cup."

It so happens that Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had already deputed a functionary to go and extend their invitation to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu aboard the boat he was traveling on. Around noontime, this messenger reported back that he had conveyed the invitation, and that Ts'ai Hsiu was currently playing a game of chess at the home of Minister Huang Pao-kuang of the Imperial Brickyard but would arrive shortly. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien accordingly dismissed him but told him to remain in waiting.

As they continued to play at their board game and drink wine, Secretary An Ch'en called for the players and said to them, "Sing that song suite that begins with the tune 'A Song of Spring' to go with our wine."

Thereupon, the actor who played the *t'ieh-tan* (supporting female role) began to sing to the tune "A Song of Spring".⁹

T'ieh-tan (playing the part of Hung-niang):

First, in order to allay your anxiety,
Second, to thank you for your efforts,
She has slain a sheep and provided refreshments.
By the time you show up, everything
will have been prepared.
Uninvolved persons have not been invited;

It is no party for kinfolk and neighbors;
It is to celebrate your betrothal with Ying-ying.
I can see that nothing in Heaven or Earth
could make him happier,
As he says, "I respectfully accept the invitation."¹⁰

TO THE TUNE "FIVE OFFERINGS":

Back and forth, he regards his image in the mirror.
What a pedantic scholar he seems to be;
what a foppish fellow!
He devotes all this attention to
slicking his hair;
Sooner or later, a fly will lose
his footing on it.
It is so shiny that it bids fair
to blind one's eyes.
His affectedness is enough to set
one's teeth on edge.
What a born young gallant;
What a congenital prodigy!

TO THE TUNE "AN ORIOLE AS ALLURING AS JADE":

During your happy engagement tonight,
Remember that Ying-ying has scarcely
had any experience.¹¹

You must do everything you can to be
tender and gentle.¹²

When entwining your necks like mandarin
ducks under the lamplight,
Give your inamorata a real looking over.
Whether or not you are equally devoted,
The two of you can demonstrate to
each other tonight.

Sheng (male lead):

Thank you sweetheart.
I am touched, Hung-niang, by your misplaced affection,
And your help in consummating this match.

TO THE TUNE "RELIEVING THREE HANGOVERS":

T'ieh-tan:

Tortoiseshell mats are spread; incense
smolders in precious tripods;
Beyond the brocade curtains, the breeze
sweeps the deserted courtyard.
Fallen red petals cover the ground,
their rouge now cold;
On the green jade balustrade,¹³ flowers
cast their shadows.
Awaiting you are gold lamé bed curtains depicting
mandarin ducks in the moonlight;
And folding jade screens adorned with kingfishers
enjoying the breezes of spring.
The music of wedding bells,
Will be accompanied with phoenix flutes
and ivory clappers,¹⁴
Patterned cithara and phoenix pipes.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

Sheng:

Alas, I am a wayfarer with only my books and sword,¹⁵
and can offer little as a betrothal gift.
If this match should actually be consummated,
I cannot thank you enough.
If preparations have really been made for me to
enjoy a wedding celebration,¹⁶
I cannot but respond by plucking the cassia¹⁷
in order to ensure our future.
If we are fortunate enough to ride off together
astride a pair of phoenixes,¹⁸
Tonight you can recline while contemplating
the Herd Boy and the Weaving Maid.¹⁹
It is not mere luck that I may revel amid clustering
pearls and kingfisher ornaments;
And thus conclude my former routine of devotion to
yellow scrolls under a blue lamp.²⁰

CODA:

T'ieh-tan:

My venerable mistress is anxiously awaiting you.

Sheng:

As the saying goes, a respectful demeanor is not

as good as obedient compliance.²¹

T'ieh-tan:

Don't make Hung-niang come to summon you again.²²

When they had finished singing, a docket officer suddenly came in and announced that His Honor Ts'ai Hsiu and His Honor Huang Pao-kuang had arrived. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien promptly ordered that the table should be cleared, and, after adjusting their attire, they went out to receive their guests.

Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu was wearing a plain gown and a girdle with a plaque of gold and was accompanied by a considerable number of functionaries. He presented his calling card, which read, "Your devoted servant Ts'ai Hsiu," to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and then proceeded into the reception hall.

"This is our host, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing," Secretary An Ch'en said by way of introduction. "He is currently serving as a battalion commander here and is also a protégé of your venerable father in the capital."

Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu bowed to him once again, saying politely, "I have long been an admirer of yours."

"I shall owe you a return visit," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When they had finished with the customary amenities, they all loosened their clothing before sitting down, while the attendants served them with tea. After chatting for some time, they took their places at the table, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed the boy actors to stand by in order to play and sing for them. Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu occupied the seat of honor, while the other four took their places as hosts. The chef came out and carved the entrée, which was accompanied by soup and rice, and the Hai-yen actors presented the list of pieces they were prepared to perform, from which Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu selected the drama *Shuang-chung chi*, or *The Loyal Pair*.²³

After two scenes had been performed, and:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed,

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien called for the players of the leading male and female roles to serve them with drinks and then perform the song suite that begins with the tune "Fresh Water Song," the first line of which is:

On my proud piebald steed I depart
the imperial capital.²⁴

Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu laughed, saying, "What an appropriate choice of a piece for performance, sir. You can be said to be:

The censor on a new piebald steed;
while these three gentlemen are like:

The purple-bearded adjutant of old."²⁵

"Today," said Secretary An Ch'en, "one can hardly say:

The marshall of Chiang-chou's blue gown

is wet with tears."²⁶

When he finished speaking, they all broke out laughing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ch'un-hung to sing the song suite the first line of which is:

At the palace gate he has presented a memorial
about pacifying the barbarians,²⁷

which made Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien as pleased as could be.

He then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "This lad is quite adorable."

"He is one of my servants," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and is a native of Yang-chou."

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took him by the hand, asked him to pour a cup of wine for him, and rewarded him with three mace of silver, for which Ch'un-hung kowtowed to him in thanks. Truly:

The sunlight outside the window goes its way
in a snap of the fingers;
The flower shadows in the banquet hall move
among the revelers' seats.
No cup is drained but to the accompaniment of
the music of pipes and song;
As, from below the steps, one hears the news
that it is already 4:00PM.²⁸

Before anyone knew it:

The sun began to sink in the West.²⁹

When Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu became aware that it was getting late, he ordered his attendants to fetch his outer garments, put them on, and announced his departure. The other members of the company were unable to detain him any longer and escorted him to the front gate to see him off. Two docket officers were immediately dispatched to deliver his table setting of mutton and wine and a complimentary bolt of fabric to the port on the New Canal where he was staying overnight. But no more of this.

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien also bade Hsi-men Ch'ing farewell, saying, "I will not bother to express my gratitude today, since we will be troubling you again in a few days."

He and his fellow officials then got into their sedan chairs and departed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside after seeing them off, he dismissed the actors and enjoined them, saying, "You are engaged to come back and perform again two days from tomorrow. Be sure to bring some of your best singers with you. His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is entertaining Grand Coordinator Hou Meng that day."

"We understand," the actors replied.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered that another table for a drinking party be set up and sent Tai-an to invite Licentiate Wen to join him, and Lai-an to go and invite Ying Po-chüeh. It was not long before they arrived, one after the other, bowed in greeting, and took their seats, while three boy musicians stood by to entertain them and pour the wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "When your sisters-in-law attend your celebration tomorrow, have you engaged singing girls, or vaudeville performers, for the occasion?"

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you have a nice way of putting it. How could a poor household like mine accommodate such numbers? I've merely engaged two singing girls, that's all. I hope that my sisters-in-law will deign to come by early tomorrow."

To resume our story, the two boy musicians, Cheng Ch'un and Tso Shun, had been singing all day to entertain the ladies in the rear compound, when Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, and her sister-in-law, Meng the Elder's wife, were the first to get up and go.

Later on, Aunt Yang also prepared to leave, but Yüeh-niang said, "Auntie, why don't you stay another day before going home? Nun Hsüeh has instructed her disciples to bring a precious scroll with them, and they are going to recite it for us tonight."

"To tell you the truth," said Aunt Yang, "I would prefer to stay, were it not for the fact that my second nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, from outside the city gate, has sent someone to invite me to his betrothal party, which is taking place tomorrow, and I would like to attend."

Thereupon, she said her farewells and departed.

Yüeh-niang kept the wives of Fu Ming and Kan Jun, along with Pen the Fourth's wife, and Big Sister Tuan, in the master suite to keep company with Sister-in-law Wu, Old Mrs. P'an, and Li Kuei-chieh, while Second Sister Shen and Big Sister Yü took turns singing song suites to entertain them, the two boy musicians having been sent off to the reception hall in the front compound. The party continued until after the lamps had been lighted, when the wives of Hsi-men Ch'ing's three employees said goodbye and left. Only Big Sister Tuan remained, and she went off to spend the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound, while Old Mrs. P'an made her way to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. The only people left sitting in Yüeh-niang's room were Sister-in-law Wu, Li Kuei-chieh, Second Sister Shen, and the three nuns, along with Big Sister Yü, and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien.

Suddenly, they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing's drinking party had broken up, and the page boys began to bring back the utensils, at which Chin-lien hastily withdrew and set out toward the front compound. When she arrived there, she stood silently in the dark shadows beside the postern gate, where she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, being supported by Lai-an, as he staggered in the direction of Li P'ing-erh's quarters. When he caught sight of Chin-lien standing by the gate, he took her by the hand and accompanied her into her quarters, while Lai-an proceeded back to the master suite to turn over the goblets and chopsticks he was carrying.

Yüeh-niang, assuming that Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his way back, sent Second Sister Shen, Li Kuei-chieh, and Big Sister Yü off to Li Chiao-erh's quarters and asked Lai-an, "Has Father come with you? What's he doing in the front compound?"

"Father has retired to the Fifth Lady's quarters," replied Lai-an. "He's had enough of it for this evening."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she became annoyed at heart and said to Meng Yü-lou, "Just look at that feckless good-for-nothing! I assumed that tonight, of all nights, when he came back inside, he would plan to go into your quarters, but instead, without anyone's knowing it, he has groped his way into that place of hers. These last few days, he has been so driven by his lecherous desires that all he wants to do is fool around with her in the front compound."

"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "let him fool around if he likes. If we object, it makes it look as though we give this one thing priority over everything else and are merely competing with each other for his favors. It reminds me of the punchline in that joke of Nun Wang's. After all, he has the run of all six chambers, does he not?³⁰ What Father lusts after in his heart is not something that you or I can control."

"It must surely have been prearranged," remarked Yüeh-niang. "Just now, upon hearing that the party up front had broken up, she took off for the front compound as though her life depended on it."

She then turned to Hsiao-yü and said, "If there is no longer anyone working in the kitchen, you can lock the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds for me, and then invite the three nuns to come back here, so we can listen to them recite a precious scroll for us."

She also invited Li Kuei-chieh, Second Sister Shen, Big Sister Tuan, and Big Sister Yü to rejoin them, after which, she turned to Sister-in-law Wu and explained, "I have already asked the nuns to send one of their disciples to fetch a copy of *Huang-shih nü chüan*, or *The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang*, to recite for us. It's too bad that Aunt Yang has already left today."

She then ordered Yü-hsiao to brew some good tea, but Meng Yü-lou addressed Li Chiao-erh, saying, "Let the two of us take turns providing the tea. It's not appropriate to impose a further burden on Elder Sister's staff."

Thereupon, they each went back to their own quarters and told their maidservants to take care of the tea.

Before long, when the three nuns had come in, and a bed table had been placed on the k'ang, they seated themselves behind it, in the lotus position, while the rest of the company crowded into the room and took their seats in order to hear the recitation of the precious scroll. Yüeh-niang washed her hands and lit some incense, while Nun Hsüeh opened *The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang* and proceeded to declaim it in a loud voice as follows.³¹

I have heard tell that, although the Dharma is not subject to annihilation, it is through extinction that we achieve nirvana; although the Way is not created, it is through creation that it is negated. The dharmakāya gave rise to the eight phases of the Buddha's life; the eight phases were manifestations of the dharmakāya. The lamp of wisdom is burning brightly,³² the better to open the doorways of this world; the mirror of the Buddha is shining clearly, in order to illuminate the paths of darkness.³³ The events of our hundred years of life elapse in an instant; the four elements that form our bodies³⁴ are as ephemeral as bubbles or shadows. Every day we exhaust ourselves in mundane labor; all day long we are obsessed by karmic consciousness. How can we comprehend perfect

enlightenment³⁵ when our six senses are devoted to greed and lust? World-famous achievements³⁶ are merely grandiose dreams;³⁷ the most amazing wealth and distinction will not enable us to evade the word impermanence.³⁸ When we expire like wind or fire, neither the old nor the young are spared;³⁹ when the hills and streams are eroded away, what heroes will there be?⁴⁰ What I propose to do is: broadcast a gatha to the ten directions, summoning all eight classes of supernatural beings to the altar,⁴¹ to save them from incineration in the burning house,⁴² and give them a key to nirvana.



Nun Hstieh Recites a Precious Scroll in the Buddhist Style

Gatha:

Wealth and distinction, poverty and want,⁴³
 each have their causes;
 Since they are predetermined, there is no
 reason to question them.
 If you have neglected to plant your seeds
 during the springtime;
 It is vain to expect your barren fields to
 produce an autumn harvest.⁴⁴

If you assembled bodhisattvas will listen to my exposition of the Buddhist dharma, this gatha of four lines that I have just recited was bequeathed to us by a patriarch of old. How should we explain the line:

Wealth and distinction, poverty and want,
 each have their causes?

In the case of you bodhisattvas, you are married to a husband who is possessed of high office and ample emolument,⁴⁵ and you reside in vast courtyards and secluded mansions. You have slaves and maidservants at your beck and call and are studded with gold and decked with silver. You grew up amid nests of satin and brocade and were born amid piles of silk and gauze.⁴⁶ When you desire clothing, you have a thousand trunks of satin and brocade; when you want food, you have delicacies of every variety.⁴⁷ You are fated to bask in glory and luxury, and enjoy wealth and distinction. These

are all the results of the karma accumulated in your prior lives, which has bequeathed you a solid foundation, to which you are entitled without having to ask for it. For the same reason, I am fortunate to be here promulgating the scriptures and reciting Buddha's name, as well as enjoying such delicious refreshments, thanks to your benevolent hospitality. That I am fated to fare so well is no inconsequential matter.⁴⁸ We are all predestined to be present at the Dragon Flower Assembly,⁴⁹ thanks to the good karma that we have earned during our previous lives. Had we failed to do so, it would be like neglecting to plant seeds in the springtime, only to face barren fields at the time of the autumn harvest. In such a case, where would the ripened seed-bearing fruit come from? Truly:

Sweep clear the spirit tower of your mind,
the better to begin to work;
However happy and gratified you may become,
do not relax your efforts.
Struggle to wash clean the five impurities
along with the six senses;
Only then will you apprehend the mysterious
doctrine⁵⁰ and find the truth.

The hundred years of one's human existence⁵¹
vanish in the blink of an eye;
This body of ours is fated to be transformed
into nothing but flying ashes.
Who is able during this present incarnation
to attain true enlightenment;
To arrive at total comprehension of the need
to revert to the noncreated?⁵²

Human existence is absolutely impermanent,⁵³
gone in the space of a breath;
It resembles the sight of the red sun as it
sinks behind the western hills.
Just like returning empty-handed after one
traverses a hill of treasures;
Once your human life is lost,⁵⁴ it may be hard
to recover in a myriad kalpas.⁵⁵

When one comes to think about it, wealth and honor, glory and luxury,⁵⁶ are like snow when sprinkled with scalding water.⁵⁷ Upon careful consideration, not one of them amounts to anything; but will prove to be as evanescent as an interrupted dream. Though you may, at present, have achieved incarnation as a human being, in your heart you are distressed⁵⁸ and troubled lest, upon your death, the four elements of which you are constituted may be transformed to dust,⁵⁹ and you do not even know where what is left of your soul will be sent to suffer. If you are fearful of the revolving wheel of life and death,⁶⁰ you must resolve to take a step in order to move forward.⁶¹

TO THE TUNE "A SINGLE MISSIVE":

Confronted with the alternatives
of life and death,
One's days are spent sighing over
this floating life.
Though one may have rooms full of
boys and girls,
When death comes, one is forced to
face it oneself.
One's life is like a spring dream,⁶²
certain to be short;
One's fate is but a wind-blown lamp⁶³
that cannot last long.⁶⁴
When one thinks about it,
One can only be saddened;
To bring it up is enough to cause
one's heart to break.⁶⁵

The prolegomenon of the precious scroll says: The Buddha who reveals himself in response to cries of distress, who neither comes nor goes,⁶⁶ the supreme patriarch Amitābha, whose great vows are so vast and profound, has sworn his forty-eight vows⁶⁷ to work for the salvation of all living beings, until each and every one of them is enabled to achieve the realization of his true nature. The mind of Amitābha is ever pure, enabling him to ferry all living beings across the sea of bitterness, the great waves of the sea of bitterness, so they may attain the wonderful fruits of enlightenment. The recitation of this text will serve to alleviate sins as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; the invocation of this text will serve to augment good fortune without limit. Those who copy this text or recite it will be reborn in the Heaven of the Lotus Treasury,⁶⁸ those who either read it or hear it, upon their deaths will proceed to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. All those who recite Buddha's name will achieve unlimited merit. Relying on his compassion, his compassion, his great compassion, commit yourselves to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha in all ten directions, sincerely paying homage to the eternal nature of the Three Jewels, for the wheel of the law turns unceasingly, to save all living beings.⁶⁹

Gatha:

The subtle and mysterious dharma
of utmost profundity,
Is difficult to encounter even
in myriads of kalpas.
Now that we have heard it, and
are able to keep it,
We wish to understand the true
meaning of the Tathāgata.⁷⁰

The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang
has just been opened;
May all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas⁷¹
come down to hear it.⁷²
The incense in the burner permeates
the world of vacuity;
The sound of Buddha's names shakes
the nine directions.

In former days, when the Han emperor governed the world, the rains were seasonable, the winds were favorable,⁷³ the country prospered, and the people were content,⁷⁴ which elicited the birth of a

good-hearted woman, the daughter of a householder named Huang, who resided in Nan-hua district of Ts'ao-chou prefecture. She possessed well-proportioned and good-looking features and was only six years old when she determined to restrict herself to vegetarian fare,⁷⁵ and recite the Diamond Sutra, in order to repay the profound kindness of her father and mother.⁷⁶ She did this every day without fail, which moved the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin to manifest herself to her in midair. When her parents saw that she devoted herself all day long to the recitation of the sutra, they did their best to dissuade her, but she refused to comply. One day, they sought out a go-between, selected a propitious day and hour,⁷⁷ and married her off to a son-in-law, whose name was Chao Ling-fang, and who was a butcher by vocation. They remained married for twelve years, during which they gave birth to one son and two daughters. One day, Woman Huang said to her husband, "You and I have been married for twelve years and have given birth to these attractive children, but to devote ourselves solely to our mutual affection is to be eternally immersed in samsara."⁷⁸ I happen to know a little lyric, which I would persuade you to listen to, my husband. It goes as follows:

Our fates determined that we should become
a couple as husband and wife.
Although we have a son and daughters,
Who can enable us to stave off death?
I humbly hope that you as my husband,
Will reach a determination like mine,
To practice religious cultivation,
For the rest of our natural lives.
Our fondness for wealth and honor,
Should be given a diminished role.
Ceasing to long for fame and fortune,
We should live out our allotted days.

When Chao Ling-fang had assimilated the content of the lyric, he did not feel that he could accept it. One day, he said farewell and set out for Shantung in order to purchase some pigs. Woman Huang, seeing that her husband was not at home, took her rest in a purified chamber every day, faithfully performed her ablutions, lit incense, and devoted herself to the reverent recitation of the *Diamond Sutra*.

Chao Ling-fang, at the time, had already
departed for Shantung;
While their three boys and girls were to
be found in the parlor.

Gatha in decasyllabic verse:

The Woman Huang, in her western chamber,
bathed in perfumed water;⁷⁹
Changed her clothes, removed her earrings,
and made herself up lightly.
Every single day, she faced toward the west,
burnt incense, and worshipped;
Confronted her rosary, and precious scroll,
and recited the *Diamond Sutra*.
While perusing the text, before she had done,
the incense smoke dispersed;
Reciting Buddha's name, her voice resounded,
pervading the empty firmament.
At the gates of Hell, and the halls of Heaven,
rays of light became manifest;
When King Yama himself, became aware of this,
his face was suffused with joy.
"It must be that, in the realm of the living,
a Buddhist patriarch has appeared."
Hastily calling his two underworld Assessors,
he bade them ascertain the details.
The Assessors reported back, "Your Majesty,
the testimony heard affirms that,
In Nan-hua district, of Ts'ao-chou prefecture,
there is a virtuous believer;
The Woman Huang, who studies the sacred texts,
and eats only vegetarian fare;
Whose good deeds, and meritorious austerities,
have startled the halls of Heaven."

TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":

On hearing these words, King Yama's heart
was moved to respond,
And he hastily called before him a pair of
messengers of death.
The pair of messengers speedily hastened to
the Chao family's home.
The Woman Huang was at the time engaged in
reading the sacred texts,
When she suddenly observed that there were
two immortal lads before her.

RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:

Virtuous persons are summoned to the shades
by immortal lads;
Whereas evil persons must have yakshas sent
to summon them.
Woman Huang, while perusing her sacred text,
quickly enquired,
"Whose young lads are you that have chosen
to come visit me?"
The immortal lads responded to Woman Huang
with the words,
"Good-hearted woman that you are, you need
not be concerned.
We do not belong among the mortal denizens

of the mundane world,
 But are, rather, immortal lads who come from
 the world of shades.
 At present, because you so assiduously study
 the sacred texts,
 King Yama himself has sent you an invitation,
 good-hearted lady.”
 Upon hearing these words, Woman Huang became
 disturbed at heart,
 Proceeding, one point at a time, to plead with
 the immortal lads,
 “You must be looking for someone of the same
 name and surname.
 Why should you be so insistent on summoning me
 before King Yama?
 I am not unwilling to suffer a thousand or ten
 thousand deaths.⁸⁰
 But how can I abandon my precious boy and my
 two daughters?
 My eldest daughter, Chiao-ku, is only eight
 years of age.
 Pan-chiao is only five. How could she manage
 without her mother?
 My precious son, Ch’ang-shou, is merely two
 years of age.
 I constantly cradle him in my arms and could
 never forget him.
 If you can, somehow, find a way to spare this
 soul of mine,
 I undertake to perform more meritorious deeds
 on your behalf.”
 The immortal lads only replied to Woman Huang
 by reiterating,
 “Who is there as assiduous as you in reciting
 the *Diamond Sutra*?”

PROSE:

The two lads responsible for recording good and evil deeds⁸¹ were piteously pleaded with by Woman Huang, who repeatedly expressed her reluctance⁸² to proceed to the Underworld because of her love for her three children, whom she could bear neither to leave nor to abandon. The immortal lads urged her, saying, “Good-hearted woman:

If the Underworld decides to summon you
 during the third watch;
 The hour of your death cannot be delayed
 until the fourth watch.⁸³

The situation is not like that in the world of the living, where deadlines can be evaded. When you are summoned by the Underworld, if the deadline is not met, we are held strictly accountable, with no room for allowances.”

RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:

Woman Huang, after considering the situation
 in her heart,
 Proceeded to order a maidservant to heat hot
 water for her.
 No sooner did she finish bathing herself in
 perfumed water,
 Than she proceeded to make her way into the
 Buddhist chapel,
 Where she sat down in the lotus position and
 remained silent,
 While her numinous soul’s true being appeared
 before King Yama.⁸⁴

TO THE TUNE “AUTUMN ON THE CH’U RIVER”:

During the dream of mankind’s life,⁸⁵
 One’s allotted time is not enduring.
 When faced with danger, each of us is
 but a wind-blown lamp;
 In no time at all, we must return once
 more to face King Yama.
 One must hastily prepare for the journey,
 And gaze upon one’s home from the Terrace
 of Homeward Gazing Spirits.⁸⁶
 As one’s sons cry and one’s daughters weep,⁸⁷
 it is a scene of desolation.
 To the tune of clanging cymbals and beating
 drums, the funeral is held;
 Donning hempen garments and mourning apparel,
 one’s family lays one to rest.

RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:

Rather than speaking of Chao Ling-fang’s
 sense of desolation,
 Let us tell of the trip of Woman Huang’s
 soul to the underworld.

As she gradually approached the bank of
 the River of No Recourse,
 She came to a Golden Bridge that enabled
 her to cross unharmed.
 Should you enquire what the function of
 this bridge might be,
 It is only for those who read sutras and
 recite Buddha's name.⁸⁸
 By the banks of the River of No Recourse
 flow waves of blood,
 In which are seen the numerous drowning
 souls of sinful beings.
 The sorrowful sound of their weeping and
 wailing is ever present,
 As, on all sides, poisonous serpents bite
 into their exposed sinews.
 As she continued, she came to the Mountain
 of Damaged Paper Money.
 Woman Huang then stepped forward and asked
 to have it explained to her.
 "When you inhabitants of the world of the
 living burn paper money,
 And neglectfully discard it before it has
 been completely incinerated,
 The remains of it are blown about, reduced
 to tattered fragments,
 And are collected here to form the Mountain
 of Damaged Paper Money."
 Her route then took her by the base of the
 City of the Unjustly Dead,⁸⁹
 Where there were innumerable homeless souls
 who had not yet been reborn.
 When Woman Huang learned of this, her heart
 was filled with compassion,
 And, lifting up her voice, she proceeded to
 recite the *Diamond Sutra*.
 At this, the sinful beings in the River of No
 Recourse opened their eyes;
 Lunar woods became perceptible to the corpses
 of the burned and flayed;
 Lotus blossoms appeared to those in boiling
 cauldrons and lakes of fire;
 And auspicious clouds, forthwith, descended
 to envelop the Avici Hell.
 Thereupon, the immortal lads could not help
 feeling the pressing need,
 To hasten as quickly as possible in order to
 make a report to King Yama.

TO THE TUNE "SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN SLOPE":

When Woman Huang found herself in the
 Sen-lo Palace of King Yama,
 A lad reported that they had brought the
 scripture-reading person.
 King Yama decreed that she be invited
 into his presence,
 And Woman Huang kowtowed to him beneath
 the golden steps,
 Unable to do anything other than to
 genuflect before him.
 King Yama asked, "How many years ago did you
 start to recite the *Diamond Sutra*?
 And on what day, month, and year did you move
 Kuan-yin to appear before you?"
 Woman Huang folded her hands in front of her
 and related the preceding events.
 "Ever since I was six, I have eaten vegetarian
 fare and worshipped Her Holiness.
 I hope that Your Highness will consent to
 believe me when I state that,
 Since becoming married, my zeal for reciting
 the sutra has not diminished."

RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:

King Yama, upon hearing this, hastened to
 transmit an injunction,
 Saying, "Good-hearted woman, pay heed to
 what I have to ask you.
 How many characters are contained in the
 text of the *Diamond Sutra*?
 And how many strokes are required to render
 its esoteric profundities?
 With what character does it begin, and with
 what character does it end?

And what two characters are found to be
 situated at its midpoint?
 If you prove capable of reciting the sutra
 without making any errors,
 Your soul will be released in order to return
 to the world of the living.”
 Woman Huang, at this juncture, stood beneath
 the steps and replied, saying,
 “I hope that Your Majesty will listen to my
 report on the *Diamond Sutra*.
 The text consists of exactly five thousand
 and forty-nine characters,
 Which are written with eighty-four thousand
 dots and strokes of the brush.
 It commences with the character *ju*, and it
 ends with the character *hsing*.
 The two characters *ho-tan* are found to be
 situated at its midpoint.”
 Before Woman Huang had even finished her
 explication of the sutra,
 In his palace, King Yama emitted rays of
 light between his eyebrows.
 Raising his hand, and evincing pleasure
 on his dragon countenance,
 He stated, “Your soul is hereby released
 to return to the human world.”
 Upon taking in these words, Woman Huang
 hastened to respond, saying,
 “I hope that Your Majesty will condescend
 to pay heed to my requests.
 Firstly, I do not wish to be reincarnated
 in the home of a butcher.
 Secondly, I do not wish to be reincarnated
 in the household of a dyer.
 My only desire is to be reincarnated into
 the home of a good family,
 Where I can spend my time reading sutras
 and reciting Buddha’s name.”
 King Yama thereupon took up his brush and
 promptly issued a decision,
 “You will be reborn as a male child in the
 Chang family of Ts’ao-chou.
 That household has accumulated a fortune
 of considerable proportions,
 But lacks a filial son to offer sacrifices
 at the family burial ground.
 The householder and his spouse are equally
 devoted to cultivating virtue,
 And their reputation for so doing is widely
 known within the four seas.”
 No sooner did Woman Huang swallow a cup of
 a soul-disorienting drug,⁹⁰
 Than the wife of householder Chang conceived
 a male child in her belly.
 Once the ten months of her pregnancy were
 fulfilled, she bore a son,
 On whose left rib cage were inscribed two
 lines of characters in red,
 Reading, “This is a reincarnation of Woman
 Huang who recited the sutras,
 And was formerly married to Chao Ling-fang,
 who is a native of Kuan-shui.
 This reincarnation is the karmic result of
 her dedication to the sutras,
 Which has enabled her to become a man who
 is fated to live a long life.”
 When householder Chang had finished reading
 this text with his own eyes,
 He cherished his child as a precious jewel,⁹¹
 showing his joy on his face.

TO THE TUNE “BLACK SILK ROBE”:

Woman Huang was reincarnated in the home
 of householder Chang,
 Her transformation into a male having
 occurred without a hitch.
 When householder Chang beheld his son,
 his pleasure was enhanced.
 After his first three years, it became
 clear he would grow up.
 By the time he was six years old, his
 intelligence was obvious.
 He assiduously studied his lessons and
 practiced his characters,

And took the name Chün-ta, or “Clever One.”
At the age of seventeen, he earned first
place in the examinations.

PROSE:

To resume our story, when Chang Chün-ta was in his seventeenth year, he was successful in passing the examinations and was appointed magistrate of Nan-hua district in Ts'ao-chou prefecture. Suddenly, he recalled that this had been his native place during his former incarnation. After going to the district to take up his office, he first saw to the payment of the taxes owed to the government and then took his place in the courtroom in order to preside over his jurisdiction. As his first order of business, he dispatched two runners to summon Chao Ling-fang on the grounds that he had something to say to him. The two runners did not dare to be remiss but went immediately to the home of Chao Ling-fang in order to summon him to court.

RECITATION IN DECASYLLABIC VERSE:

Chao Ling-fang, in his home, was reading
sutras and reciting Buddha's name.
The two runners, greeting him with a bow,
hastened to explain their mission.
In no time at all, he adjusted his attire,
and accompanied them to the yamen.
Once in the courtroom, he performed a bow,
and proceeded to identify himself.
Magistrate Chang rose and returned his bow,
directing him to take a seat.
Exchanging amenities, they sat down as guest
and host, while tea was served.
“You really are,” he declared, “my husband,
whose name is Chao Ling-fang;
While I am none other than your former wife,
known by the name Woman Huang.
If you doubt me, in a quiet room, I'll undress
so you can see for yourself.
On my left rib cage, in cinnabar characters,
is an explanatory inscription.
Our eldest daughter, whose name is Chiao-ku,
has already found a married home.
Our second daughter, whose name is Pan-chiao,
is wed to a man called Ts'ao Chen.
Our son Ch'ang-shou was so concerned for me,
that he kept vigil by my grave.
Let the two of us ride our horses together,
to visit our ancestral tombs.”

PROSE:

Magistrate Chang, together with Chao Ling-fang and their children, five persons in all, proceeded to the grave of Woman Huang, where, upon opening her coffin and examining her corpse, they found that her countenance remained unaltered. After going home, they conducted a religious service for seven days, and Chao Ling-fang declaimed the *Diamond Sutra*, whereupon, in a flutter of propitious snow,⁹² all five of them, men and women, ascended to Heaven on an auspicious cloud. There is a lyric to the tune “Immortal at the River” that testifies to this:

Woman Huang read the *Diamond Sutra* and
reaped the true fruit.
That same day, mounting to paradise,
All five of them ascended to Heaven.
Good people, pray to Kuan-yin,
“Bodhisattva come and save us.”

PROSE:

Now that the recitation of the precious scroll is finished, the Buddhas and holy saints are aware of it. Since the dharma realm is responsive,⁹³ may it enable us all to ascend to the celestial assembly. Homage to the infinite significance of the Mahāyāna school of the One Vehicle, as embodied in the truly empty yet marvelously existing truth of the *Diamond Sutra*.⁹⁴ May the Buddhas in their vast assembly heed our invocation from afar, that they may enable all of us, in our multitudes as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, to proceed to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. It is our humble wish that the sound of the recitation of the sutra and the names of the Buddhas should penetrate the halls of Heaven above and the courts of the Underworld below, with the result that those who recite the Buddha's name may be delivered from the Sea of Bitterness;⁹⁵ those who commit evil deeds may be eternally immersed in samsara; those who achieve enlightenment may be conducted on the way toward salvation by the host of Buddhas, whose rays of glory illuminate the ten directions,⁹⁶ so that, to both east and west, the fading light may return to illuminate their path.⁹⁷ to both north and south, they may be able to find their way to their true home, and attain nirvana, as their drifting boats reach the shore.⁹⁸ Like little children, they may be reunited with their mother. Upon reentering their mother's womb, they will no longer have to fear the three calamities.⁹⁹ For a myriad kalpas, they may attain eternal peace.¹⁰⁰

Gatha:

The karmic encumbrances that have been
produced by living beings,
From their very nonbeginning, on down
until the present time,
Have isolated them from the Sacred Peak,¹⁰¹
obscuring their true natures,¹⁰²
But, a single ray of numinous light¹⁰³ can
deliver all forms of life.

Firstly, we must repay the kindness of Heaven
and Earth for supporting us;
Secondly, we must repay the kindness of the
sun and moon for shining on us;
Thirdly, we must repay the kindness of our
ruler for governing our land;
Fourthly, we must repay the kindness of our
parents for nurturing us;
Fifthly, we must repay the kindness of our
mentors for teaching the dharma;
Sixthly, we must pray that the ten classes of
homeless souls may all be reborn,
And attain the perfection of wisdom, enabling

them to reach the other shore. ¹⁰⁴

By the time Nun Hsüeh finished reciting the precious scroll, it was already the second watch. Even before she was done, Yüan-hsiao from Li Chiao-erh's quarters had brought out some tea and served it to the company. After it was over, Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters brought out a selection of exquisitely prepared appetizers, a jug of wine, and a large container of fine tea and served them to Sister-in-law Wu, Big Sister Tuan, Li Kuei-chieh, and the rest of the company. Yüeh-niang also directed Yü-hsiao to bring out four boxes of fine pastries and sweets to go with the tea for the three nuns.

Li Kuei-chieh ventured to say, "Since our three preceptors have entertained us by reciting a precious scroll, I ought to show my gratitude by singing a song for you."

"Kuei-chieh," said Yüeh-niang, "it would be an imposition to ask you to sing once again."

Big Sister Yü said, "Let me sing something for you first."

"All right," said Yüeh-niang, "let Big Sister Yü be the first to sing."

Second Sister Shen said, "After my elder sister has sung her piece, I will also sing a song for you."

Li Kuei-chieh, however, insisted on being the first to sing and asked Yüeh-niang, "What would you like to hear?"

Yüeh-niang responded, "Sing us that set of songs that begins with the words:

Late at night, all is silent."

Thereupon, Li Kuei-chieh, after serving the company with wine, took up her balloon guitar:

Defly extended her slender fingers,

Gently strummed the silken strings,

Opened her ruby lips,

Exposed her white teeth,

and proceeded to sing to the tune "Flowers in the Moonlight":

Late at night, all is silent.

I have fumigated my bedclothes,

And waited until the moon has risen above
the flowering branches.

It is as quiet as can be, and I have not
heard any news at all.

Only after the watch-drums have finished
beating does he appear.

Upon seeing this face of mine, he pays it
no attention whatever,

But kneels down at my side to make his plea.

I deliberately pretend to be angry;

He surreptitiously gives me a look;

But before I can even clench my teeth,

I simply can't help starting to smile.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

That profligate is hard at work,

Like a moth darting into the flame.

He does his best to keep me in the dark
about his intentions,

But, for my part, it costs me no effort
to figure them out.

Recently, however, I've had some trouble
holding onto the rudder.

He's gone to such pains to manipulate me
that my heart is touched,

Turning it into a honey-filled pastry.

Whoever it might be,

To say nothing of me,

Though I were made out of iron,

I might find it hard to resist.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

He is altogether too untrustworthy,

My fickle lover leaves me helpless.

For two or three nights, he has failed
to come back to me;

Yet, when questioned, he makes excuses
and pays no attention.

I can't help thinking that, maybe, I should
simply put up with it.

With an ingratiating smile, he proceeds to
turn down the bedclothes,

Waiting for me, half-exposed under the covers.

I pretend to be sewing a shoe, and ignore him.

That he is so exasperated with me,

Only causes me to be angry at him.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

He visits the flower lanes and willow markets, ¹⁰⁵

The bee go-betweens and butterfly ambassadors.¹⁰⁶

While I remain here, as pure as jade and
immaculate as ice,¹⁰⁷

He is there, enjoying the sweet melons
and honeyed apricots.

Upon returning, though sober, he pretends
to be under the influence,

And devotes himself to beating the bushes
to scare off the snakes.¹⁰⁸

He engages in such egregious nitpicking,

That I am tempted to scratch his cheeks,
But I fear it might destroy our intimacy.

Though I may want to let him have his way,

I'm too angry to let him get away with it.¹⁰⁹

When Li Kuei-chieh had finished singing, Big Sister Yü was about to take over the balloon guitar, but Second Sister Shen grabbed it away from her, hung it over her arm, and said, "I'll entertain Sister-in-law Wu and the rest of you by singing a song from a sequence on the twelve monthly festivals, to the tune "The Hanging Portrait." She then proceeded to sing the song suite that begins with the lines:

On the fifteenth day of the first month we

celebrate the Lantern Festival,¹¹⁰

Burning so much incense that both Heaven
and Earth seem to be on fire.

When she had finished singing, Yüeh-niang smiled and said, "We can continue to chat at our leisure. After all, the night is long enough for us to go on as long as we like."

At the time, Sister-in-law Wu was feeling fatigued by the lateness of the hour and retired without waiting to hear Big Sister Yü's performance. At this, after drinking a round of tea, the party broke up, and they all went back to their rooms to sleep. Li Kuei-chieh went back to Li Chiao-erh's quarters, Big Sister Tuan went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and the three nuns went to Sun Hsüeh-ho's quarters in the rear compound to spend the night. Big Sister Yü and Second Sister Shen went to bed with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü in the room with the k'ang, while Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu spent the night in the bedroom of the master suite. But no more of this. Truly:

Orion is sinking, the Dipper is turning,¹¹¹

it is after the third watch;

The solitary hook of the waning moon¹¹²

appears in the gauze window.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 75

CH'UN-MEI VILELY ABUSES SECOND SISTER SHEN; YÜ-HSIAO SPILLS THE BEANS TO P'AN CHIN-LIEN

The newly dug graves throughout the realm
are all those of the young;
One should start to cultivate one's virtue
before one's hair turns gray.
The fact that death and life are important
matters¹ must be understood;
The length of time one may suffer in Hell
is no trivial consideration.
If one's good karma has not been built up,
on what can one hope to rely?
Once one loses the status of a human being,²
when can it ever be recovered?
The path ahead of one is cloaked in darkness,
the thoroughfare is dangerous;
Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day
one should bear this in mind.³

THESE EIGHT LINES of verse merely reiterate the message that:

Good will be rewarded with good,
Evil will be rewarded with evil,⁴
Just as shadow follows shape,⁵
Or as valleys return an echo.

You may think that only those who:

Assume the lotus position to practice meditation,⁶
Will all be successful in reaping the true fruit.⁷

But even:

Simple men and simple women,⁸
Who cultivate piety at home,
are not precluded from achieving the Way.
Those who worship the Buddha,
Will benefit from his virtue;
Those who recite Buddha's name,
Will benefit from his kindness;
Those who consider the sutras,
Will grasp the Buddha's truth;
Those who practice meditation,
Will tread the Buddha's realm;
Those who achieve enlightenment,
Will exhibit the Buddha's truth.⁹

But:

There is nothing easy about it.¹⁰

There are many who:

Commit sin first and practice austerity later,
Or practice austerity first only to sin again.¹¹

To take the case of Wu Yüeh-niang, although she received her just reward for daily:

Honoring goodness and reciting scriptures,

Worshipping Buddha and dispensing charity,
she ought not, on the present occasion, while:

She was pregnant with a child in her womb,¹²

to have listened to the recitation of such a piece of religious literature. Although whether one is fated to be rich or poor, to enjoy a long life or a short, or to be wise or foolish, may all be determined by the endowment one receives from one's parents at the time of conception; nevertheless, these things may also be affected by the environmental influences to which one is exposed during pregnancy.

In olden times, when mothers were pregnant, they did not sit in awkward positions, or lie upon their sides, and did not listen to lascivious sounds, or gaze upon suggestive sights.¹³ They would amuse themselves with the practice of poetry and calligraphy, or the appreciation of exotic objects of gold or jade, and would engage blind musicians to entertain them with ancient lyrics. As a result, when they subsequently gave birth to children of either sex, they would be well-formed and attractive and would grow up to be clever and intelligent. This is the mode of prenatal education prescribed by King Wen of the Chou dynasty.¹⁴

On this occasion, when Wu Yüeh-niang was pregnant, she ought not to have ordered Buddhist nuns to recite precious scrolls that dealt with the revolving wheel of life and death. Later on, this inspired an ancient Buddha to manifest himself by:

Entering her womb and taking an abode,

only to subsequently vanish into thin air, so that she was left without an heir to carry on the family line, which was very much to be regretted. Truly:

The path ahead of one is clothed in darkness,

the thoroughfare is dangerous;

Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day

one should bear this in mind.

But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.

At this point, in the rear compound, once the recitation of the *Precious Scroll on Woman Huang* was finished, everyone went back to their rooms for the night.

Let us now return to the story of P'an Chin-lien, who had been standing for some time beside the postern gate when she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing coming by and, taking him by the hand, conducted him into her quarters.

When she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing simply sat down on her bed, she asked him, "Why aren't you taking your clothes off?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced the woman and proceeded to say with an ingratiating smile, "I came expressly to tell you that I would like to spend the night next door, and to ask you to get out the bag of sexual implements for me."

"You lousy jailbird!" the woman swore at him. "You think you can fool me with your tricks by putting such a good face on things, do you? If I hadn't been standing by the postern gate just now, you'd have been over there already and would hardly have had the patience to come ask me for anything. This is something that you and that splay-legged creature must have agreed on between you this morning, so that the two of you could go at it together. You're merely trying to fool me with a trumped up excuse for coming over here. It's not surprising that, a while ago, rather than sending a maidservant, you sent her to deliver that fur coat to me, and kowtow to me into the bargain. That lousy little splay-legged creature! Who do you take me for, that you should try to play such tricks on me? Back when Li P'ing-erh was still alive, you may have thought you could bury me alive, but:

The sparrow is no longer in that nest.

I'm not jealous of the likes of her."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Nothing of the kind ever happened. If she had not kowtowed to you, you would have been just as critical of her."

The woman thought to herself in silence for some time before saying, "I'll let you go then, but I won't let you take that bag of sexual implements with you. If you go at it with that splay-legged creature they'll get:

Polluted and unclean,

and are likely to remain contaminated when you come to sleep with me in the future."

"If you won't give them to me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've come to depend on them. What am I to do?"

After they had disputed about it for what seemed like half a day, the woman tossed the silver clasp to him, saying, "If you insist, you can take this gadget with you."

"I guess that will have to do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing as he tucked it into his sleeve and started to stagger outside.

"Come back here," the woman said. "I've got something to ask you. No doubt you intend to:

Sleep together all night long,

staying on the same bed the whole time, which would cause even the two maidservants to feel embarrassed. It would be better if you were to sleep together for a while, and then get her to go sleep somewhere else."

"Who intends to sleep with her all that long?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing as he started outside.

The woman called him back again, saying, "Come over here. I've got something else to say to you. What are you in such a hurry about?"

"What else have you got to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Since I'm permitting you to sleep with her," the woman said, "go ahead and sleep with her. But I won't permit you to exchange any idle gossip with her:

Emboldening her to take liberties with me.

If I ever hear anything of that kind, you had better stay away from my place, or I'll bite your balls off."

"You crazy little whore!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're nit-picking me to death."

So saying, he headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door.

Ch'un-mei admonished the woman, saying, "Let him go. What's the point of trying to control him that way?"

The more loquacious a mother-in-law gets,

The less her daughter-in-law will listen.

After all, you don't want to end up:

Feeling resentment and harboring hostility,

toward each other. And besides, it gets in the way of our enjoying a board game together."

On the one hand, she then proceeded to tell Ch'iu-chü to lock the postern gate, while on the other, she set up a table and laid out the pieces for a board game.

"Is my mother asleep yet?" the woman asked.

"No sooner did the party break up in the rear compound," said Ch'un-mei, "than she came back to her room and went to sleep."

There in their room Ch'un-mei and her mistress sat down to their board game. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in Li P'ing-erh's quarters and lifted aside the portiere, he found that Ju-i, together with Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, were sitting on the k'ang eating their supper. On seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, they jumped to their feet in consternation.

"Go ahead and finish your supper," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he went into the parlor and sat down on a folding chair in front of Li P'ing-erh's portrait.

Before long, whom should he see but Ju-i, who came into the parlor with an ingratiating smile and said, "Father, it's cold in here. Why don't you go into the bedroom?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled her onto his lap with one hand, embraced her, and gave her a kiss; after which, he went into the bedroom and sat down on the front of the bed. A pot of tea was brewing on the brazier, and Ying-ch'un promptly poured out a cup for him.

Ju-i stood beside the k'ang warming herself at the brazier, as she said, "Father, you don't seem to have had much wine today. The party in the front compound must have broken up early."

"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I have to get an early start in order to go and pay my respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu on his boat. Were that not the case, I might well have stayed a little longer."

"Father," said Ju-i, "if you'd like some more wine, I can pour some for you. The table of dishes sent out from the rear compound as an offering for my mistress, together with a flask of Chin-hua wine, are still here. We have eaten the soup and rice but did not presume to touch the wine and the other dishes, leaving them for you to enjoy."

"What you've eaten is no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As far as something to eat for me is concerned, I don't need anything else. Just a few saucers of delicacies will do. But I don't want any of the Chin-hua wine."

He then turned to Hsiu-ch'un and said, "You take a lantern and go into the garden, to my studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. There is a jug of grape wine there. Ask Wang Ching to get it out for you. That's the wine I'd like to drink."

Hsiu-ch'un assented, took the lantern, and set out on her errand, while Ying-ch'un hastily set up a table and got out the delicacies he had requested.

"Sister," said Ju-i, "open up the containers and let me select a delicacy or two for Father to consume with his wine."

Thereupon, under the lamplight, she chose a saucer of duck meat, a saucer of squab, a saucer of pickled herring, a saucer of lotus root and bean sprouts, a saucer of jellyfish flavored with chives, a saucer of roast chitterlings and fermented sausage, a saucer of sautéed whitebait, and a saucer of sautéed bamboo shoots flavored with potherb mustard greens. The two square containers, each holding four boxes of delicacies, were laid out on the table, and a goblet and pair of chopsticks that had been wiped clean were placed before Hsi-men Ch'ing. Before long, Hsiu-ch'un came back with the wine. After it had been opened up and heated, Ju-i poured some into a goblet and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to taste. It turned out to be an incomparably fine wine of a dark red color.

Ju-i moved closer and remained standing next to the table in order to pour wine for Hsi-men Ch'ing and also personally peeled roasted chestnuts for him, to go with the wine. Ying-ch'un, who understood the situation, tactfully withdrew and went back to the kitchen, where she sat down with Hsiu-ch'un.

As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that they were alone, he had the woman sit on his knee and embraced her, as the two of them drank wine together, passing the same goblet back and forth between them.

The woman continued to peel chestnuts and put them into his mouth, while Hsi-men Ch'ing unfastened her jade-colored silk jacket that opened down the middle by undoing the buttons, removed her bodice, revealing the creamy texture of her pale and fragrant breasts, and proceeded to fondle her nipples with his hand, as he exclaimed, "My child, the one thing your daddy loves more than anything else about you is the pure whiteness of your flesh, which is just like your mistress's. When I embrace you, it feels just as though I were embracing her."

"Needless to say," Ju-i responded with a laugh, "my mistress's body was whiter than mine. It seems to me that although the Fifth Lady looks good enough, her appearance is only mediocre, her flesh displaying tints of both red and white. The color of her flesh is not as white as that of the First Lady or the Third Lady in the rear compound, though the Third Lady's skin is marred by a few pockmarks. Sun Hsüeh-o, on the other hand, is not only naturally attractive but has pure white skin and is petite in stature."

She then went on to say, "There's something else I want to bring up with you. Sister Ying-ch'un has a pin for the front of the coiffure in the shape of a Taoist goddess that she is prepared to give to me, but she would like to ask you for the gold tiger-shaped tiara

that our mistress used to wear, so that she can wear it during the New Year's celebrations next month. Are you willing to let her have it?"

"If you don't have anything for the front of your coiffure," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have a silversmith make something out of gold for you. Your mistress's jewelry box has been taken back to the master suite by the First Lady, and I would hardly feel comfortable asking for it."

"All right," the woman said, "have another tiger-shaped tiara made for me then."

So saying, she moved in front of him and kowtowed in thanks.

After the two of them had been drinking for what seemed like half a day, Ju-i said, "Father, why not ask my sister to come share a cup of wine with us, lest she feel resentful at being left out."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Ying-ch'un, but there was no response.

The woman then went back to the kitchen herself and said, "Sister, Father is calling for you."

Ying-ch'un, accordingly, went back into his presence, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ju-i, "Pour her a cup of wine, and pick out a few chopsticks' worth of delicacies and put them on a tray for her."

Ying-ch'un stood beside them while she consumed what had been offered to her.

"Why don't you call Sister Hsiu-ch'un to come in and have something as well," the woman said.

Ying-ch'un went off on this errand but came back and said, "She doesn't want anything to eat."

After some time, she picked up her bedding from the k'ang and headed to the kitchen to sleep, saying, "If I don't go back there, but try to sleep on the bench in the parlor, I'll freeze to death. I'm going to the kitchen to sleep on the k'ang with Hsiu-ch'un. Father's tea is on the brazier. You can pour it for him yourself."

"Sister," said Ju-i, "close the back door on your way out, so I can put the latch on it."

Ying-ch'un, carrying her bundle of bedding, then went straight back to the rear.

Meanwhile, the woman, after continuing to drink wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing for a while, put the utensils away, poured out some tea for Hsi-men Ch'ing, and put the latch on the back door.

It so happens that she had prepared a separate set of bedding for Hsi-men Ch'ing to sleep on, replete with satin and chiffon, and a pillow with an embroidered pattern, all of which had been heating on the k'ang until it was nice and warm.

The woman then asked him, "Father, do you want to sleep on the k'ang, or on the bed?"

"I'd prefer to sleep on the bed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ju-i then proceeded to bundle up the bedding and take it over to put in place on the bed. Telling Hsi-men Ch'ing that he should get into bed and take off his clothes, she helped him off with his boots. She then fetched some water, took it into the parlor, and washed her private parts, closed the door to the bedroom, and put the lampstand on a small table beside the bed, after which she took off her drawers, climbed onto the bed, and bored her way under the covers, where she and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to hug and embrace each other, as they:

Lay down head to head on the same pillow.

When the woman manipulated his organ with her hand, she found that the clasp was already in place:

It was aroused and its head sprang up;

So that she was both happy and fearful.

The two of them:

Stuck out their clove-shaped tongues,

and proceeded to engage each other. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was reclining face-up on the bedding:

Without a stitch of clothing on her,¹⁵

he was afraid that she would be cold and, reaching for her bodice, placed it over her chest, after which, he took her pair of feet in his two hands and started thrusting and retracting for all he was worth.

The woman was reduced to:

Panting and puffing,

as he plunged away at her until:

Her face was fiery red.

"This bodice was given to me by my mistress while she was still alive," she explained.

"My own darling!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That's not a problem. Tomorrow, I'll get half a bolt of red chiffon from the shop, which you can use to make underwear for yourself. You can also make a pair of red chiffon sleeping shoes to wear on your feet when you're indulging me."

"That would be fine," the woman said. "After you've given it to me, I'll make them up as soon as I have the time to do so."

"I happen to have forgotten," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how old you are this year, as well as your maiden name, and your position among your siblings. All I can remember is that your husband is surnamed Hsiung."

"His surname is Hsiung, and his full name is Hsiung Wang," the woman said. "My maiden name is Chang, and I am the fourth sibling in my generation. This year I am thirty-one years old."

"It turns out then that I am one year older than you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

On the one hand, he continued to couple with her, while on the other, he called out to her, "Chang the Fourth, my child, if you will

devote yourself wholeheartedly to serving me, when the First Lady gives birth to her child, you can be responsible for breast-feeding it. And if you are fortunate enough yourself to come up with so much as:

A single boy or half a girl,

I'll raise your status to that of one of my concubines, so you can take over your mistress's place in the nest. What do you think of that?"

"My husband is already dead," the woman said, "and I have no relatives left on my side of the family. I will be more than happy to devote myself single-mindedly to you, Father. I am not of two minds about it, having no wish to leave your home before I die. If you deign to take pity on me, that would be wonderful."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that her response was just what he fancied, he was more delighted than ever. Grasping her two snow-white legs, which were adorned with a pair of green silk shoes with an embroidered pattern, he continued to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans. The two of them rammed away at each other, thrusting and retracting, to such effect that the woman, in her abject position, left nothing unsaid as she gave vent to her feelings:

Groaning in a quavery voice,

As her starry eyes grew dim.

After some time, he told her to get down on all fours and stick her two feet straight back, while he put the red satin bedspread over him and proceeded to straddle her body, as he stuck his organ into her orifice.

Under the lamplight, he took hold of her snow-white bottom and began banging away at it, as he called out, "Chang the Fourth, if you keep on crying, 'My own daddy,' without stopping, I'll come for you."

The woman, in her abject position, proceeded to raise her haunches in response to him, while:

In a trembling voice and faint tones,

She called out, "Daddy!" unceasingly.

They continued to play with each other for a full two-hour period before Hsi-men Ch'ing finally ejaculated. Sometime later, he pulled out his chowrie handle, and the woman took a handkerchief and wiped it off for him, after which they fell asleep in each other's arms and did not wake up until the cock crowed during the fifth watch.

The woman then began to suck him off, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to her, "The Fifth Lady once sucked away at me for half the night, and, fearing lest I get cold, wouldn't even let me get out of bed to urinate, but swallowed it for me."

"That's no problem," the woman said. "I'll swallow it for you too, if you like."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then actually pissed a whole bladderful of his urine into the woman's mouth. The two of them continued their:

Impassioned love-making,

In all its myriad forms,

as they went at it together all night long.

The next day, the woman got up first, opened the door, and fetched a basin and towel for him, as Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his clothes and performed his ablutions. Upon leaving, he headed for the front compound, where he told Tai-an to dispatch two orderlies to take the gilded Eight Immortals tripod from its place of honor in the summerhouse, have a note written to accompany it, and carry it to Sung Ch'iao-nien at the office of the regional investigating censor of Shantung, where, after it had been duly delivered, he was to solicit a written reply. He also told Ch'en Ching-chi to seal up a bolt of satin brocade, and a bolt of variegated satin, and have Ch'in-t'ung stow them in a felt bag and saddle his horse for him, so he could make an early departure to go pay his respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu at the port on the New Canal.

He was engaged in eating his breakfast congee in Yüeh-niang's room, when she asked him, "Are all of us expected to go to Brother Ying the Second's place today? We had better leave someone behind to look after the place. One of us sisters should remain at home to keep company with Sister-in-law Wu."

"I've already prepared five sets of presents for the occasion," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Yours includes a waistband, a gold pendant, and five mace of silver; while those for the other four of you consist of two mace of silver and a handkerchief apiece. All of you ought to go together. After all, my daughter Ta-chieh will be here to keep Sister-in-law Wu company. That will do just as well. I have already promised Ying the Second that all of you would come to his place for the occasion."

Yüeh-niang, upon hearing this, did not have another word to say on the subject.

Li Kuei-chieh, then, proposed to take her leave, saying, "Mother, I'm going to go home today."

"What's your hurry?" responded Yüeh-niang. "Why don't you stay over another day?"

"I have no reason to deceive you, Mother," said Li Kuei-chieh, "but my mother is not feeling well, and my elder sister is not at home, so there's no one to look after the place. Someday soon, during the first month of the coming year, I'll come and stay for a couple of days."

She then said her farewells to Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Yüeh-niang filled two food boxes with delicacies for her and presented her with a tael of silver, after which, having drunk a serving of tea, she was sent on her way.

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his formal clothes and go out to the front compound.

Unexpectedly, P'ing-an came in and reported, "His Honor, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, has come to pay you his respects."

Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went out to welcome him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities.

Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, who was attired in a round-collared robe with a mandarin square, a pair of earmuffs, and a girdle with a plaque of gold around his waist, after making his obeisance in the reception hall, said, "Not having seen you for a long

time, I have been negligent in paying my respects. I have failed, thus far, to congratulate you on your lofty promotion.”

“I am much obliged for your magnanimity,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “I, too, have not yet been able to offer you my congratulations.”

When they had finished expressing:

The sentiments they had felt while apart,
they sat down in the positions of guest and host, and an attendant provided a serving of tea.

Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung then said, “I see your fine steed is waiting for you. Where are you going?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing explained, “The prefect of Chiu-chiang, Ts’ai Hsiu, who is the ninth son of His Honor Grand Preceptor Ts’ai Ching in the capital, is passing by on his way to court. Yesterday, the regional investigating censor of Shantung, Sung Ch’iao-nien, along with Secretary An Ch’en of the Ministry of Works, Secretary Ch’ien Lung-yeh of the Ministry of Revenue, and Huang Pao-kuang from the Imperial Brickyard, borrowed my place in order to host a banquet in his honor. Since he took the trouble to present me with a calling card upon his arrival yesterday, I could hardly fail to return the courtesy by paying a call upon him. I am concerned lest he depart before I am able to do so.”

“There is a request that I have come to trouble you with,” said Ching Chung. “Censor Sung Ch’iao-nien’s term of office will expire at the end of the year next month, and he will submit a report evaluating the performance of the local officials in his jurisdiction. I hope that I can prevail upon you to put in a good word with him on my behalf. Upon learning that he was entertained at your place yesterday, I have screwed up the courage to presume on your goodwill in this matter.

Should I advance but an inch in my career,

I will never dare to forget it.”

“This is a good deed,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Since you and I are on the best of terms, how could I fail to comply with your command? You should write out an explanatory note for me. Fortunately, he will be attending another banquet at my place the day after tomorrow, so I can speak to him in person. That would be even better.”

Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung promptly got up from his place and bowed to Hsi-men Ch’ing, saying, “I am deeply moved by your lavish generosity, I will:

Carry rings and knot grass,¹⁶ and never forget it.”

He then went on to say, “I have already prepared a copy of my curriculum vitae for you.”

So saying, he called in his clerk to get it out and presented it for Hsi-men Ch’ing’s perusal with his own hands. It read as follows:

The military director-in-chief from Shantung, and assistant commander of the left battalion of the Ch’ing-ho Guard, Ching Chung, who is thirty-one years of age, is a native of the ultramontane prefecture of T’an-chou. Owing to the military accomplishments of his ancestors, he was promoted to the post of commander of the left battalion of the said guard. Having passed the military examinations in such-and such a year, he was successively promoted to his present post as military director-in-chief of Chi-chou.

The years in which these successive promotions took place were duly enumerated.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing had finished reading this document, Ching Chung also pulled out of his sleeve a card describing the gift he proposed to give him and presented it to him, saying, “This meager gift is offered in the hope that you will consent to accept it with a smile.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw that the words “Two hundred piculs of white rice”¹⁷ were written on it, he said, “Whoever heard of such a thing? This is something that I absolutely cannot accept. To do so would make a mockery of the relationship between friends.”

“That is not so,” responded Ching Chung. “If you refuse to accept it, Ssu-ch’üan, you can pass it on to Sung Ch’iao-nien if you like. It amounts to the same thing. How can you be so adamant in refusing to take it? If you won’t accept it, I will not presume to trouble you any further.”

After objecting repeatedly, Hsi-men Ch’ing finally consented to take it, saying as he did so, “I will accept it provisionally. When I have spoken to him day after tomorrow, I’ll send someone to report back to you.”

After the tea had been twice replenished, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung expressed his gratitude with a bow, got up, and departed.

When Hsi-men Ch’ing had seen him off, he instructed P’ing-an, saying, “If anyone comes to see me, simply accept their calling cards, and if you have to vacate your post at the gate for any reason, depute four orderlies to guard the gate on your behalf.”

When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and, accompanied by Ch’in-t’ung, set off to pay his respects to Prefect Ts’ai Hsiu.

To resume our story, after Yü-hsiao had seen Hsi-men Ch’ing on his way that morning, she went over to P’an Chin-lien’s quarters and said, “Fifth Lady, why did you not remain in the rear compound yesterday? Last night, the ladies all gathered there to hear Nun Hsüeh recite the *Precious Scroll on Woman Huang*, which went on until late in the evening. After it was over, the Second Lady provided the company with tea, and a maidservant from the Third Lady’s quarters also served wine and appetizers, after which they listened to Li Kuei-chieh and Second Sister Shen compete in singing songs for them. It was the third watch before we were able to go to sleep.

“My mistress was really critical of you, Fifth Lady. She said that when you heard that Father’s party in the front compound had broken up, you couldn’t wait to head off to your own quarters; that yesterday was the eve of the Third Lady’s birthday, but that you wouldn’t even let him visit her quarters, you were so anxious to monopolize his favors. The Third Lady responded by saying, ‘How embarrassing can you get? Who has the patience to contend for him? After all, since he has all these quarters to choose from, let him go wherever he chooses.’”

“I can hardly respond to that without resorting to obscenity!” exclaimed Chin-lien. “Has she been fucked so blind she doesn’t have an aperture left to see out of? Does she really suppose that it was my quarters he slept in last night?”

"He generally does choose to frequent your quarters in the front compound," said Yü-hsiao. "Since the death of the Sixth Lady, who else's quarters should Father prefer to frequent?"

Chin-lien said:

"Though chickens may not piddle,

People all have to go somewhere.

When somebody dies, there's always someone to take their place."

Yü-hsiao went on to say, "My mistress is really annoyed at you for asking Father for that fur coat without consulting her. Later on, when Father went back to the master suite in order to return the keys, my mistress really gave him a hard time about it. She said, 'When Li P'ing-erh died, you were angry that anyone would even consider reassigning the maidservants in her quarters, but now, you're taking the fur coat she was so fond of, and giving it away to someone else to wear, without saying so much as a word about it.' Father protested, 'But she doesn't have a fur coat of her own to wear right now.' To which my mistress responded, 'How can you say she doesn't have a fur coat to wear? There is a fur coat available for her, but she refuses to wear it and adamantly insists on having this particular fur coat to wear. It's lucky for her that Li P'ing-erh is dead, so she can hanker after her things. If she were not dead, she could hardly presume to covet them.'"

"She should stop talking through her cunt!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "A husband has the right to do as he sees fit. Are you my mother-in-law, seeking to exert control over me? I'm monopolizing him, am I? No doubt I've managed to tie him up by the legs with a length of rope, the better to monopolize him for a while. You're just shooting off your cunt as usual."

"What I'm here to tell you," said Yü-hsiao, "you must keep to yourself. Don't let anyone else know I told you about it. Today, Li Kuei-chieh has already left for home, and my mistress is putting on her jewelry. She wanted to leave Sun Hsüeh-o at home today, to keep Sister-in-law Wu company, but Father wouldn't agree to it. He has already prepared gifts to present for the occasion and wants all five of you to go together. You ought to start getting ready to go yourself."

When she had finished speaking, Yü-hsiao headed back to the rear compound.

Chin-lien, accordingly, sat down before the mirror:

Putting on makeup and applying powder,¹⁸

Sticking flowery trinkets in her hair,

while sending Ch'un-mei to ask Meng Yü-lou, "What color of clothing are you planning to wear today?"

"Father will be annoyed if we change out of mourning garb," said Meng Yü-lou. "He wants us all to wear pale-colored clothing."

The five ladies agreed that they would wear white frets over their chignons, with pearl headbands, covered with kingfisher-blue kerchiefs of gold lamé damask. On their heads:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles,

while below, they wore pink silk brocade jackets that opened down the middle, over blue silk skirts. Wu Yüeh-niang alone donned a white crepe gilt-ridged cap under a sealskin toque, with a pearl headband and pearl earrings, while below, she wore an aloeswood-colored jacket of figured silk brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square, over a sand-green brocade skirt. When they were ready to set out in one large sedan chair and four small sedan chairs, which had been furnished with brass foot-warmers, accompanied by Wang Ching, Ch'i-t'ung, and Lai-an, and with orderlies shouting to clear the way, they said goodbye to Sister-in-law Wu, the three nuns, and Old Mrs. P'an and headed for Ying Po-chüeh's house to attend the full-month celebration for the birth of his son. But no more of this.

To resume our story, in Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound, Ju-i and Ying-ch'un refurbished the table of delicacies that had been left over from Hsi-men Ch'ing's wine drinking the night before. They had the flask of Chin-hua wine and poured out a flask of the grape wine as well. That noon, they invited Old Mrs. P'an and Ch'un-mei to join them, as well as Big Sister Yü in order to play and sing for their entertainment. The four or five of them had forgathered there and were in the midst of enjoying their repast, but this was one of those occasions on which:

Something was bound to happen.

Ch'un-mei happened to remark, "Second Sister Shen is said to be adept at singing songs to the tune 'The Hanging Portrait.' Why don't we send someone to the rear compound and get her to come here so we can induce her to sing a song to that tune for us?"

Ying-ch'un was about to send Hsiu-ch'un on this errand, when who should appear but Ch'un-hung, who came in and started to warm himself at the brazier.

"You lousy little jailbird of a southerner!" Ch'un-mei said to him. "How come you didn't go to accompany the sedan chairs today?"

"Father deputed Wang Ching to accompany them," said Ch'un-hung, "and told me to stay home and look after the house."

"You lousy little jailbird of a southerner!" resumed Ch'un-mei. "You must be frozen, or you wouldn't have barged in here to warm yourself at the fire."

She then said to Ying-ch'un, "Pour out half a cup of wine for him to drink."

Turning back to Ch'un-hung, she went on, "When you've finished drinking it, go back to the rear compound on my behalf, and ask Second Sister Shen to come here. Tell her that I want her to sing a song for Old Mrs. P'an."

Ch'un-hung promptly finished off the wine and headed back to the rear compound. Who could have anticipated that Second Sister Shen was sitting in the master suite, together with Sister-in-law Wu, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, the three nuns, and Yü-hsiao, engaged in drinking a serving of tea flavored with coriander and sesame seeds?

Unexpectedly, they saw Ch'un-hung lift aside the portiere and come in, saying, "Second Sister Shen, the young lady in the front compound wants you to come sing a song for their entertainment."

"The young lady of the household is right here," responded Second Sister Shen. "Do you mean to say that another young lady has

appeared?"

"It is Ch'un-mei from the front compound who is calling for you," said Ch'un-hung.

"What's so special about Ch'un-mei," responded Second Sister Shen, "that gives her the right to order me about? Big Sister Yü is there, who can do just as well as I can. I am singing here in order to entertain Sister-in-law Wu."

"That's all right," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Second Sister Shen, you might as well go ahead, and come back later."

Second Sister Shen simply remained sitting where she was, without making a move.

Ch'un-hung went straight back to the front compound and said to Ch'un-mei, "I summoned her, but she wouldn't come. They are all sitting there together in the master suite."

"Tell her that I'm the one calling for her," said Ch'un-mei, "then she'll come."

"I told her that it was you," said Ch'un-hung. "I said, 'It is the young lady in the front compound who is calling for you.' But she was not affected by that, saying, 'The young lady of the household is right here. Do you mean to say that another young lady has emerged out of nowhere?' I said, 'It is Ch'un-mei,' and she said, 'Since when has Ch'un-mei had the status to order me around? I'm too busy right now, singing for Sister-in-law Wu.' Sister-in-law Wu actually said, 'You might as well go ahead, and come back later,' but she refused to come."

If Ch'un-mei had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:

The spirits of her Three Corpses became agitated;

The breaths of her Five Viscera ascended to Heaven.¹⁹

A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and

In an instant her cheeks turned purple.

Before anyone could stop her, like a whirlwind, she swept into the master suite, pointed her finger at Second Sister Shen, and began a tirade against her, saying, "How dare you say of me to a page boy that 'another young lady has emerged out of nowhere,' or express amazement that I should have the nerve to order you around? Are you the wife of some regional commander, that I would not dare send for? Whose cunt do you suppose I was squeezed out of, only to be sized up by the likes of you, who pronounce that I've emerged out of nowhere? As for you, you're nothing but a lousy dog-fucked blind whore, who frequents:

The doors of a thousand households,

The gates of ten thousand families.

How long have you been coming to this household, that you have the audacity to evaluate its members? And what kind of presentable song suites are you able to perform? You merely cast about with your:

Oily mouth and canine tongue,

Plowing the eastern ditch, and

Harrowing the western ditch,

in search of:

Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,

Not worth committing to writing,

and then start:

Assuming attitudes and putting on airs.

I don't know how many professional singing girls from the licensed quarter have performed here. What makes you so special? That whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo, may hold you in high regard, but we here do nothing of the kind. You can repeat what I say to that whore if you like. I'm not afraid of you. You would do well to get out of here as quick as you can. Or else, like a dishonest nanny, I'll have you:

Driven away from this door for good."

Sister-in-law Wu tried to intervene, saying, "You should stop bandying words that way immediately."

Second Sister Shen was reduced by this tirade to staring with wide-open eyes, but:

Though she dared to be angry,

She dared not speak.

"Ai-ya-ya!" she exclaimed in due course. "How can this young lady be so crude? I didn't say anything wrong to the servant just now that would justify such a spate of uninhibited abuse.

If there is no room for me here,

There are other places I can go."²⁰

This only made Ch'un-mei angrier than ever, and she continued to curse her, saying, "You lousy blind whore! You're ready to be:

Laid by every man in the street, and

Fucked by every guy in the alley.

Since your family has been blessed with such a fine young lady as yourself, who is possessed of such a temperament, you ought hardly to spend your time begging for food and clothing in other peoples' homes, and singing for their amusement. You'd better get out of here immediately, and never come back again."

"I'm no dependent of your household," protested Second Sister Shen.

"If you were a dependent of this household," responded Ch'un-mei, "I'd have the page boys pluck the hair off your head."

Sister-in-law Wu intervened, saying, "My child. Why are you acting up this way today? You had better go back to the front compound."

Ch'un-mei simply remained where she was, without making a move.

Second Sister Shen then got down off the k'ang, weeping and wailing, said goodbye to Sister-in-law Wu, and collected her bag of clothing. She was unwilling to wait for a sedan chair, but asked Sister-in-law Wu to send P'ing-an across the street to summon Hua-t'ung, so he could escort her back to the home of Han Tao-kuo.

Ch'un-mei, having vented her spleen, then made her way back to the front compound.

After she had left, Sister-in-law Wu turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yü-hsiao and said, "She must have been drinking wine up front before coming back here. Otherwise, how could she have resorted to such offensive language? It was an embarrassment to me the way she carried on. She could just as well have allowed her to take her time in getting her things together, rather than driving her out so precipitously, and without even arranging for a page boy to escort her.

If the water is too deep, no one can cross it.

What did she expect her to do? It is really upsetting."

"They probably had been drinking up front," agreed Yü-hsiao.

To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei returned to the front compound, she was still in a fit of high dudgeon and, turning to the company assembled there, said, "I gave that lousy blind whore a piece of my mind and saw to it that she was driven out of the house forthwith. If it hadn't been for the intervention of Sister-in-law Wu, I would have given that lousy blind whore a couple of good slaps in the face. She still doesn't seem to know who I am. When I called for her, she had the nerve to put on quite a scene:

Assuming attitudes and putting on airs."

Ying-ch'un admonished her, saying:

"For every branch you chop down,

A hundred trees are threatened.

You ought to be a little more tactful. Big Sister Yü is here, and you keep ranting about blind whores."

"That's not it at all," said Ch'un-mei. "Big Sister Yü has been performing in this household for lo these many years, and all that time she has never spoken ill of anyone of whatever status, high or low. When called upon to sing, she has sung. Since when has she exhibited the nerve of this lousy blind whore, who can only perform such a limited selection of tunes? What presentable song suites does that whore know? And yet she continues to put on such outlandish airs.

Trying first this and then that,

all she can come up with are the vulgar suggestive words of tunes such as 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope' and 'Shrouding the Southern Branch,' that are scarcely fit to be performed in the best company. I no sooner heard her propose to sing such songs here than I sensed that she was trying to push Big Sister Yü aside so she could take her place."

"Something like that did happen," said Big Sister Yü. "Last night, the First Lady asked me to sing some songs, but she promptly grabbed the balloon guitar away from me and said that she would sing first. After which, the First Lady said, 'Big Sister Yü, let her sing first, and you can sing afterwards.'"

Big Sister Yü then went on to say, "Young lady, you ought not to hold it against her. After all, she was not familiar with the relative standings of the people in this household and didn't know how it was appropriate to respond to you. Such things are not easy to understand."

"I pointed that out to her just now," said Ch'un-mei. "I told her she could report back to that lousy whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo. 'You can repeat my words to her if you like,' I said. 'I'm not afraid of her.'"

"My child," protested Old Mrs. P'an, "you have no reason to get so worked up about it."

"Let me pour out a cup of wine for my elder sister, in order to assuage her anger," said Ju-i.

"This daughter of mine," joshed Ying-ch'un, "is prone to vent her anger whenever she is annoyed."

She then went on to say, "Big Sister Yü, why don't you choose a set of good songs and perform them in order to propitiate her?"

Big Sister Yü, accordingly, picked up the balloon guitar and said, "Let me sing a set of songs for Old Mrs. P'an and the young lady to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope' on the topic 'Ts'ui Ying-ying Makes a Fuss in Her Boudoir.'"²¹

"You concentrate on your singing," said Ju-i, "while I pour out some wine."

Ying-ch'un then picked up the cup of wine and offered it to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Enough! Enough! My elder sister, although you've been angered and annoyed, be good enough to down this cup of wine offered you by your mother."

Ch'un-mei couldn't help laughing, as she chided Ying-ch'un, saying, "You crazy little whore! You're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"

"Big Sister Yü," she went on to say, "don't sing those songs to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope.' Sing that set of songs to the tune 'River Water, with Two Variations' for us."

Big Sister Yü stood up beside them and strummed her balloon guitar, as she sang:

My flowerlike countenance and moonlike allure
have faded completely away.
The double gates are always closed.
It is just the time when the east wind is chilly,
Fine rain sprinkles continuously, and
Fallen red petals by the thousands dot the ground.
I am too indolent to burn another coil of incense,

And reluctant to pick up my needle.
My emaciated body is cadaverous,
Beset as it is by spectral visitations.
When I reexamine the old feelings that
we had for each other,
Sorrow weighs down the turquoise peaks
of my painted eyebrows;
Which only serves to arouse the distaste
of my young lover,
So that, for some time, despite the orioles and the flowers,
I have not bothered to roll up my curtain.²²

TO THE SAME TUNE:

The courtyard, shaded by its locust trees,²³
is as tranquil as can be.
The plantain flowers have just opened.
I can see the orioles flying in pairs,
And the fluttering of the butterflies,
But my lover is as distant as the heavens.
Atop the tall willows cicadas are murmuring,²⁴
In the limpid waves the mandarin ducks play.
As I pass before the railing,
And sit down by the poolside,
All I can hear is someone singing a
lotus-gathering song,
Which so affects me that a myriad
sorrows invade my breast.²⁵
I pick up the handle of my delicate fan
fashioned of fragrant silk,
On which is written half a lyric to the
tune "The Lover's Return."

TO THE SAME TUNE:

As for the steaming hot weather of the summer,
I have managed to endure it.
A new coolness has invaded my brocade curtains.
Though lighted by flaring lantern-wicks,
And followed by the glimmer of the moon,
My shadow is all alone, with no one to address.
The migrating geese are flying toward the South;
The geese return, but my lover has not returned.²⁶
Envisioning the girth of his waist, I have
made up his winter clothing;
But I don't know where he is dallying, and
have no reliable news of him.
I've entrusted his garments to a traveler
to deliver to him;
But the distance is great, and the clothes
may arrive too late.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

More than once, I have ventured to ask
the plum blossoms,
"How emaciated have I recently become?"
They say my face has lost its fragrance,
And my emotions their jadelike quality.
I have withered before the flowering branches.
Reluctantly, I heat the kingfisher-hued quilt,
And light the incense burner night after night,
In the expectation of finding loving comfort,²⁷
But my dreams are broken and my spirits upset.²⁸
All night long, I am unable to sleep,
and can find no rest;
My pillow is cold, and on top of that,
my lamp sputters out.
All by myself, there is no one with whom
to discuss my plight;
No matter how I try, I can't ever forget
the love of my heart.²⁹

The singing continued for the entertainment of the company. But no more of this.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had paid his respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu at the port on the New Canal, he returned home.

No sooner did he dismount at the gate than P'ing-an reported, "Today, His Honor Ho Yung-shou from the yamen sent a retainer to ask you to come there first thing in the morning. Some robbers have been arrested, and the case is scheduled for trial. Also, His Honor Hu Shih-wen, the prefect of Tung-p'ing, has sent you the gift of a hundred copies of the calendar for the coming year, and His Honor, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, has sent you the gift of a freshly slaughtered pig, a jug of mung bean wine, and four packets of silver. Your son-in-law has taken charge of these things but has not ventured to write a thank-you note for them, since he is waiting for a decision from you. The messenger who brought the latter gifts is going to return this evening in order to speak to you. A return note was written for His Honor Hu Shih-wen, however, and the messenger was rewarded with a mace of silver. In addition, your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has sent you a card inviting you for a drink at his place tomorrow."

Tai-an also brought him the reply he had received from Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, saying, "I delivered the tripod to the office of the regional investigating censor, and His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien said that he would come to repay you for it tomorrow. He rewarded me and the two orderlies who carried it with five mace of silver and also sent you a hundred copies of the new calendar."

Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned Ch'en Ching-chi to ask what had been done with the four packets of silver and was told that they had already been delivered to the master suite.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded into the reception hall, and Ch'un-hung promptly reported his return to Ch'un-mei and company, saying, "Father has arrived home. Are you going to continue your drinking here?"

"You crazy little jailbird of a southerner!" responded Ch'un-mei. "So Father has come home. Let him do as he pleases. What's it got to do with us? Since the ladies of the household are not at home, there's no reason for him to come here."

The group of them, consequently, continued drinking and joking with each other, without venturing to make a move.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite, Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns all got out of the way and went to sit down in another room. Yü-hsiao came forward to relieve him of his outer garments and, after he had taken a seat, set up a table in order to feed him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then summoned Lai-hsing and told him to order table settings, saying, "On the thirtieth, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is going to host a party here to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng. On the first, we will need to sacrifice a pig and a sheep here at home in order to fulfill the vow I made after encountering the storm on my way back from the capital. And on the third, I have invited the two eunuch directors Liu and Hsüeh, along with Chou Hsiu and the others from the Regional Military Command, to attend a party in celebration of my official promotion."

When he had finished issuing these instructions, Yü-hsiao, who was standing beside him, asked, "Father, when I have set up the table for you, what kind of wine should I pour for you to drink?"

"You can serve whatever dishes you have at hand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There is that mung bean wine that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung sent me just now. Why don't you bring it here and open it so I can see what it tastes like."

Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who had come back from escorting the ladies to Ying Po-chüeh's place.

Yü-hsiao promptly brought in the wine, broke open the clay stopper, poured some of it into a goblet, and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to taste. After swallowing a mouthful, he found that it was pure green in color and possessed a:

Robust and lingering flavor.³⁰

"Pour some more of it for me to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

In no time at all, a repast was set out for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to consume it there in the master suite.

To resume our story, Lai-an, together with an orderly, took two lanterns with them and set out that evening to escort Yüeh-niang and the other ladies back home. Yüeh-niang was wearing a fur coat of white ermine over a lavender silk jacket and a kingfisher-blue skirt. Li Chiao-erh and the others wore sable coats over white satin jackets and lilac-colored brocaded skirts. It happens that when Yüeh-niang saw that Chin-lien was wearing Li P'ing-erh's fur coat, she had given Chin-lien's old coat to Sun Hsüeh-o to wear.

Upon arriving in the master suite, they all bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Sun Hsüeh-o, alone, kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and, after getting to her feet, also kowtowed to Yüeh-niang. They then went into the adjacent room and paid their respects to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns.

Yüeh-niang then went back and sat down to chat with Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "When Ying the Second's wife saw that all of us had come for the occasion, she was as happy as can be. Their next-door neighbor Mrs. Ma was there, together with Ying the Elder's wife, his cousin Tu the Third's wife, and ten or so other female guests. They had engaged two singing girls for our entertainment. The baby whose birth was being celebrated has a flat head and a chubby face. The mother of the child, his concubine Ch'un-hua, looks somewhat darker and thinner than she did before. She wore a long face, like a donkey's, indicating that she is not very happy. The tension between his wife and concubine has disturbed the household, and there are not enough people to take care of it. When we were on the point of leaving, Ying the Second kowtowed to us and expressed his gratitude again and again, asking us to convey his thanks to you for your lavish gifts."

"Ch'un-hua, that preternatural slave!" scoffed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So she actually got dressed up and came out to meet the company, did she?"

"She's got a nose and eyes like everyone else," responded Yüeh-niang. "She's not a ghost. Why shouldn't she come out to meet people?"

"As for that slave," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she's just like a handful of black beans, fit only to feed to a pig."

"I've had enough of that bad-mouthing of yours," said Yüeh-niang. "You act as though only concubines of yours are presentable enough to be seen in public."

Wang Ching, who was standing to one side, said, "When Master Ying the Second saw that the ladies from our household had arrived, he did not initially venture to come out and meet them but hid himself in an adjacent room and spied on them through an aperture in the window. I happened to catch him in the act and taunted him, saying, 'How shameless can you get? What are you spying at, for no good reason?' At which he chased me out, threatening me with his fist."

This induced Hsi-men Ch'ing to:

Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,

saying, "That lousy beggar! The next time he shows up, I'll really powder his face white for him."³¹

"I'll be looking out for it," laughed Wang Ching.

Yüeh-niang reprimanded him, saying, "This page boy is talking nonsense. Since when did he ever spy on us? This servant is just

indulging his penchant for being:

Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,

for no good reason. Throughout the day, none of us saw so much as his shadow. It was only when we were about to leave that he came out and kowtowed to us."

After having stood around for a while, Wang Ching finally took himself off. Yüeh-niang then went over to the adjacent room in order to pay her respects to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, along with Yü-hsiao and the other maids and servants' wives, proceeded to kowtow to her.

Yüeh-niang then asked, "How is it that I don't see Second Sister Shen?"

The company remained silent until Yü-hsiao spoke up, saying, "Second Sister Shen has gone home."

"Why is it," asked Yüeh-niang, "that she failed to wait for my return, but went home before I arrived?"

Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, Sister-in-law Wu told her about the episode in which Ch'un-mei had so abused her that she felt compelled to leave.

Yüeh-niang was annoyed at this and said, "What did it matter that she refused to sing? That maidservant has been indulged to the point that:

All the rules of propriety are turned upside down.

Why did she feel justified in abusing her, for no good reason? No wonder that in this household of ours:

When the master is not a proper master,

The slaves ignore the rules of conduct.

What kind of sense does that make?"

Turning to Chin-lien, she went on to say, "You really ought to exercise some control over her. You've indulged her to the point that she's lost all sense of decorum."

Chin-lien, who was standing by her side, laughed at this and said, "Whoever saw such a blind millstone-turning donkey?

If the wind does not blow,

The tree will not tremble.³²

Since you frequent:

The doors of a thousand households,

The gates of ten thousand families,

the only reason you are privileged to be there is to sing. For someone to ask you to sing is no breach of etiquette. Who entitled her to start:

Assuming attitudes and putting on airs?

Not to have taken her to task would only have enhanced the stink of her pretensions."

"You certainly can talk a good line," said Yüeh-niang. "But, according to your logic, she should be allowed to abuse both the good and the bad at will, and drive them out of the household, since you choose not to exercise any control over her."

"No doubt you would have me give her a few strokes of the cane on behalf of that blind whore," retorted Chin-lien.

When Yüeh-niang heard these words, her face turned bright red with anger, and she said, "If you continue to indulge her this way, in the future she'll end up alienating every one of our neighbors and relatives."

Thereupon, she got up and went to join Hsi-men Ch'ing in the other room.

"What's going on?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"You know perfectly well who it's about," replied Yüeh-niang, "since you insist on retaining such an unmannerly young lady in your household."

And she went on, thus and so, to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing all about how Ch'un-mei had abused Second Sister Shen and driven her out of the house.

Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed at this, saying, "Whoever told her not to sing for her? It doesn't matter though. Tomorrow, I'll just send a page boy to give her two taels of silver. That ought to placate her."

"Second Sister Shen's box is still here," said Yü-hsiao. "She didn't take it with her."

When Yüeh-niang saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing only laughed at the matter, she said, "So, you're not even going to call her on the carpet and give her a talking to, are you? It's just like you to moon around with your mouth open that way. I don't know what you find so funny about it."

When Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh saw how angry Yüeh-niang had become, they took themselves off to their own quarters, but Hsi-men Ch'ing merely continued to drink his wine.

After some time, when Yüeh-niang had gone into the inner room to change her clothes and take down her hair, she asked Yü-hsiao, "Where did these four packets of silver on top of the trunk come from?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded, saying, "They are the two hundred taels of silver that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung gave me to conduct some business for him. He wants me to employ them in approaching Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien day after tomorrow, in the hope of securing a promotion for him."

"Your son-in-law brought them in a while ago," explained Yü-hsiao, "and I put them on top of the trunk but forgot to tell you about them."

"Since they belong to someone else," said Yüeh-niang, "they should have been put away in the cabinet immediately."

Yü-hsiao, accordingly, proceeded to put them safely away in the cabinet. But no more of this.

Meanwhile, Chin-lien remained sitting in the other room, in the expectation that Hsi-men Ch'ing would rejoin her so they could go back to the front compound together. That evening, she intended to take the fertility potion that Nun Hsüeh had provided her with, and engage in intercourse with Hsi-men Ch'ing, since it was a *jen-tzu* day, which would be conducive to the conception of a male child.

When she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing showed no sign of moving, she lifted aside the portiere and called to him, saying, "Aren't you going out to the front compound? I can't wait for you any longer, so I'll go back before you."

"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can go a step ahead of me. I'll come as soon as I've finished this wine."

Chin-lien then went straight back to the front compound.

"I really don't want you to go there," said Yüeh-niang. "I've got something to say to you on the subject. The two of you seem to be as close as though you were:

Both wearing the same pair of pants.³³

She must think she's entitled to:

Lord it over the world,³⁴

the way she insisted on barging into my room and calling for you, the shameless good-for-nothing. As though you were his only wife, and the rest of us were not wives of his."

She then went on to rebuke Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "You lousy thick-skinned good-for-nothing! No wonder people find fault with you. You ought to:

Treat everyone with the same regard.³⁵

We are all your wives, after all. You ought not to favor any one of us over the others. Yet you have allowed her to monopolize you there in the front compound. Ever since you returned from the Eastern Capital, not even your shadow has chosen to spend the night with anyone in the rear compound. How can any of us help being annoyed with you? It's always wise to:

Add a stick of fuel to the cold stove,

As well as a stick of fuel to the hot;

but you've allowed her to completely monopolize you. As far as I'm concerned, I can make allowances for you; but it's doubtful if the others are ready to let you off the hook. Though they may not give voice to their feelings, no matter how well disposed they may seem to be, they will harbor resentment in their hearts. Today, while we were at Sister-in-law Ying the Second's place, Sister Meng the Third was unable to eat anything at all. I don't know whether she has caught a chill of some kind, or what, but she is suffering from depression and nausea. When we were about to come home, Sister-in-law Ying the Second offered her two cups of wine, but they only caused her to vomit. You really ought to go pay a visit to her quarters and see how she is."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he remarked, "Can she really be so unhappy at heart?"

He then ordered that the utensils be cleared away and said, "I won't drink any more wine."

Thereupon, he went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, where he found that she had already shed her outer garments and taken off her head ornaments and was lying with her clothes on sprawled over the side of the k'ang, in the process of vomiting, while Lan-hsiang was lighting the charcoal brazier on the floor.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was groaning incessantly, he said, "My child, how are you feeling inside? Tell me all about it, and, tomorrow, I'll send for someone to examine you."

The woman said not a word in response but merely continued to vomit; at which, Hsi-men Ch'ing helped her into an upright position and sat down beside her.

Upon seeing that she was massaging her breast with both hands, he said, "My own darling, what's going on in your heart? Tell me about it."

"I'm as depressed as can be," said the woman. "Why do you bother to ask? You might as well go on about your business."

"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The First Lady told me about it just now, which was the first I knew of it."

"No wonder you didn't know about it," the woman said. "You hardly treat me as a wife of yours, after all. Why don't you go make love to the one you care about?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, putting an arm around her powdered neck, gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! You're just making fun of me."

He then called to Lan-hsiang, saying, "Quickly, boil up some extra strong tea for your mistress to drink."

"I've already prepared tea for her," responded Lan-hsiang, and she proceeded to bring it in.

Hsi-men Ch'ing personally held a cup of it up to her mouth for her to drink, but she responded, "Let me drink it myself. There's no need for you to put yourself out that way:

Reheating your cakes and selling them hot.

There's no one competing for your services here.

The sun must have risen in the West today,

it's such a rare event for you to visit these quarters of mine. The First Lady must have put you up to it, for no good reason, and you've forced yourself to comply, no matter how bilious it makes you feel."

"You don't know," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how busy I've been the last few days. What with:

Seven of this and eight of that,

I haven't had a moment of free time."

"No wonder you haven't had a moment of free time," the woman responded. "It's obvious that the one you care about has got such a hold on you that such outmoded goods as the rest of us have all been:

Relegated to the realm of the superfluous,
merely waiting to be called up. Perhaps ten years from now you may recollect something about us."

Upon becoming aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing had started to nuzzle her fragrant cheek, she protested, "You're simply reeking of stale wine. Keep your distance from me. For someone who hasn't been able to keep down so much as a taste of:

Saffron soup or flavored water,
all day long, you can hardly expect me to be in the mood to fool around with you."

"If you haven't had anything to eat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why don't you get your maidservant to bring us something to eat. I haven't had anything to eat either."

"Needless to say," the woman responded, "while I'm here in such pain that I can hardly stand it, you propose that we have something to eat. If you want something to eat, you can go eat it somewhere else."

"Since you don't want to eat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't venture to eat anything either. The two of us might as well get ready to go to bed together. Early tomorrow morning, I'll send a page boy to ask Dr. Jen to come and examine you."

"You can forget about summoning any Dr. Jen, or Dr. Li," the woman said. "If I send for Dame Liu and take whatever medicine she prescribes, I'll be all right."

"If you lie down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and let me massage your chest for you, I'm sure you'll feel better. You may not know it, but I'm rather good at diagnosing ailments by feel and can:

Dispel an illness with a touch of the hand."³⁶

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you!" exclaimed the woman. "Since when could you diagnose anything?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly remembered something and explained, "Yesterday, School Official Liu gave me a gift of ten wax-encased bovine bezoar heart-clearing pills from Kuang-tung. If you take one of them, and wash it down with some medicinal wine, you should feel better."

He then said to Lan-hsiang, "Go ask the First Lady for some of them. They're in a porcelain jar in the master suite. And bring a flagon of wine as well."

"There's no need to bring any wine," said Meng Yü-lou. "I have wine here in my quarters."

Before long, Lan-hsiang came back from the master suite with two of the pills. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to the heating of the wine, broke off the wax coating, revealing the gold leaf on the pills inside, and looked on as Meng Yü-lou swallowed them.

He then said to Lan-hsiang, "Pour out a goblet of wine for me, and I'll take some medicine of my own."

Meng Yü-lou gave him a look, saying, "Don't be so delirious! If you want to use that medicine of yours, go to someone else's quarters to take it. What do you think you're doing here, acting up that way? No doubt, on observing that I'm not dead yet, you're bent on helping me onto the road to that destination. Despite the fact that I'm in enough pain to drive me out of my mind, you want to pester me that way. It's just like you to see fit to do so, but who has the patience to carry on with you that way?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Enough! Enough! My child, I won't take any medicine then. But let the two of us go to bed together."

The woman, on the one hand, finished taking her medicine and then took off her clothes and got into bed in order to sleep with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, once underneath the quilt, proceeded to massage her creamy breasts with his hand and fondle her fragrant nipples.

Putting an arm around her powdered neck, he said, "My darling, are you feeling any better inside since taking the medicine?"

"The pain has stopped," said the woman, "but my stomach is still somewhat unsettled."

"That doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you give it a little while to digest, it should get better."

He then went on to say, "While you were not at home today, I weighed out fifty taels of silver and gave them to Lai-hsing. Day after tomorrow, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is hosting a banquet here. On the first, we will need to burn paper money in order to fulfill the vow I made after encountering the storm on my way back from the capital. And on the third, we must dedicate a couple of days to entertaining people. We have received an abundance of good wishes and presents, and it would not do were we to fail to reciprocate."

"Whether you invite people or not," the woman said, "is not up to me. Day after tomorrow, on the thirtieth, I'll reckon up the accounts and have a page boy present them to you. You can then turn them over to Sister Six to take care of, if you like. It's high time for her to take a turn being responsible for them. As she herself said just the other day, 'What's the big deal? If I had to:

Carve the eyes of a Buddhist idol,
that would be difficult. Just leave it to me.'"

"Do you actually take that little whore seriously?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She may assume that she can handle it, but when she gets right down to it, she's likely to become flustered. It would be better if you waited until after these events are over, before turning the accounts over to her."

"Brother," responded Meng Yü-lou, "whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? And you claim not to be favoring her. This proposal of yours merely shows where your heart really lies. Waiting until these coming affairs are finished with before turning things over to her would be the death of me. I'd hardly have time to comb my hair first thing in the morning before the page boys would begin:

Coming and going, one after the other,³⁷
requiring me to weigh out silver and make change for them, wearing me out completely in the process. And no matter how much trouble I took, who would even bother to commend me for it?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her, saying, "As the saying goes:

If you manage a household for three years,
even the dog will resent you."

As he spoke, he lifted up one of her legs and hung it over his arm, cuddling her against his breast, while he grasped the calf of her fresh, white leg, which was enhanced with an embroidered shoe of scarlet damask.

"My child," he said, "your daddy doesn't love anything else about you as much as your white legs. There isn't another woman in the entire world with such a soft, lovable pair of legs."

"What a glib-tongued good-for-nothing you are!" exclaimed the woman. "Who can take seriously that cottony mouth of yours? You claim that there isn't another woman in the entire world with legs like mine, do you? I don't doubt that there are thousands, if not ten thousands, of them. Rather than complaining that my flesh is coarse, you resort to:

Misstating wrong as right."

"My darling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if I have said anything untrue, may I die for it."

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" responded the woman. "Why swear oaths over such a trivial matter?"

As Hsi-men Ch'ing talked with her, he proceeded to fasten the silver clasp on his organ and insert it into her vagina.

"Just as I thought!" remarked the woman. "Your every move is directed toward this unseemly end."

She then went on to say, "Hold on a minute. I don't know if that lousy little piece of mine took care of things, or not."

So saying, she reached under the mattress with one hand and groped out a handkerchief with which to wipe herself.

In the process of doing so, she felt the silver clasp and said, "Whenever did you fasten on this thing of yours, without anyone being aware of it? Take it off immediately."

Hsi-men Ch'ing not only refused to comply but, embracing her leg, proceeded to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts. It was not long before her vaginal secretions began to flow,³⁸ and his movements back and forth produced a sound like that of a dog slurping up slops.



Feeling Indisposed Meng Yü-lou Harbors Jealous Sentiments

The woman, for her part, wiped herself with the handkerchief, though her secretions flowed again after every wipe, while in her mouth she gave vent to incessant mutterings in a trembling voice, saying, "Daddy, don't try to penetrate any further. These last few days, the lumbar region of my lower back has been aching, and I've been producing a white discharge below."

"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to prescribe a dose of a warming medication for you. You should feel better after taking it."

We will say no more for the moment about how the two of them indulged in amorous sport together, but return to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang, who continued to chat with Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns in the master suite that evening.

The subject of how Ch'un-mei had abused Second Sister Shen came up, and Yüeh-niang was told how she had been reduced to tears, how Ch'un-mei had refused to let her wait for a sedan chair, and how she had been forced to ask Sister-in-law Wu to summon Hua-t'ung from the house across the street in order to escort her back to Han Tao-kuo's place.

"The fact is," reported Sister-in-law Wu, "that the language Ch'un-mei came out with was coarse. No matter what I said to deter her, she insisted on continuing to revile her in the most abusive language. Under the circumstances, how could she help being upset? I had not previously known that Ch'un-mei was capable of resorting to such uninhibited abuse. As I said at the time, she must have been drinking."

"The five of them had been drinking wine together in the front compound," reported Hsiao-yü.

"What an unreasonable good-for-nothing!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "She has clearly indulged that maidservant of hers until she is:

Oblivious to distinctions of status,

Assuming privileges above her station.
And yet she objects if anyone criticizes her for it. In the days to come:
Regardless of the outcome for good or ill,
she'll end up driving everyone out of our household. What will anyone want to do with the likes of us in that case? That female singer frequents:

The doors of a thousand households,
The gates of ten thousand families.

The stories she has to tell about us will hardly redound to our credit. People will say that the legitimate wife in that household of Hsi-men Ch'ing's presides over a chaotic world, in which no one knows who is a master, and who is a slave. They won't assume that it's our servants who have been indulged till they lack all sense of decorum, but that it is we ourselves who are hopelessly at sea. What sort of sense does that make?"

"Let it go," suggested Sister-in-law Wu. "If my brother-in-law has nothing to say about it, what's the point of stirring up any further trouble?"

Of the events of that night there is no more to tell, as they all proceeded to return to their quarters.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early in the morning and went to the yamen.

P'an Chin-lien, on seeing that Yüeh-niang had prevented Hsi-men Ch'ing from spending the night with her, and that she had been unable to have intercourse with him on a *jen-tzu* day, was extremely unhappy about it. Early the next day, she had Lai-an go summon a sedan chair for her and sent Old Mrs. P'an home in it.

When Wu Yüeh-niang got up the next morning, the three nuns expressed a wish to go home, and Yüeh-niang presented each of them with a box of delicacies and five mace of silver. In addition, she promised Nun Hsüeh that she would commission her to preside over a service at her nunnery during the first month of the coming year and gave her a tael of silver in advance, asking her to purchase incense, candles, and paper money for the occasion. She also said that during the twelfth month she would send her sesame oil, white flour, polished rice, and vegetarian fare with which to feed the nuns and make offerings to Buddha.

She then served tea to them in the master suite, together with Sister-in-law Wu, and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, whom she had previously invited.

When they were all seated, she asked Meng Yü-lou, "After you took those wax-encased pills, did your heartburn get any better?"

"This morning," replied Meng Yü-lou, "it was only after I spit up a few mouthfuls of sour-tasting fluid that I felt better."

Yüeh-niang then called for Hsiao-yü, saying that she would send her to the front compound to invite Old Mrs. P'an and the Fifth Lady to come share some pastries with them.

"Hsiao-yü is back in the kitchen, seeing to the steaming of the pastries," reported Yü-hsiao. "I'll go and invite them."

Thereupon, she went straight to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound, where she inquired, "Why do I not see Old Mrs. P'an? The two of you are invited back to the rear compound for tea."

"I sent her home early this morning," replied Chin-lien.

"Why didn't you say anything," asked Yü-hsiao, "rather than sending her off that way without anyone being aware of it?"

"She has overstayed her welcome," said Chin-lien. "Why should she have remained any longer? She has already been here for some days, leaving that adopted niece of hers at home, without anyone to look after her. It was my idea to send her home."

"I brought a chunk of cured pork and some eggplant julienne in a sweet sauce to give her," said Yü-hsiao, "not knowing that she had already left. Fifth Lady, you can keep them for her."

So saying, she handed them over to Ch'iu-chü, who put them away in a drawer.

Yü-hsiao then went on to say to Chin-lien, "Yesterday evening, after you came back to your quarters, my mistress spoke to Father, accusing you, thus and so, of trying to:

Lord it over the world,
and saying that you and he were as close as though you were:

Both wearing the same pair of pants;
and that the way in which you monopolized Father by keeping him in the front compound, and not letting him spend any time in the rear compound, was utterly shameless. Afterwards, she sent Father to the Third Lady's quarters to spend the night. On top of that, she accused you to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns, of indulging Ch'un-mei to the point where she was unmannerly enough to vilely abuse Second Sister Shen. Father said that tomorrow he would send a tael of silver to Second Sister Shen to compensate her for her embarrassment."

Word for word, she recounted the entire episode to Chin-lien, and, when Chin-lien heard it, she took it to heart.

Yü-hsiao then went back to report to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Old Mrs. P'an got up early this morning and went home, but the Fifth Lady will be here shortly."

Yüeh-niang then said to Sister-in-law Wu, "You see, yesterday I directed a few words of criticism to her, and today, in a fit of temper, without saying a word to me, she has responded by sending her mother packing. My guess would be that this sister of mine is surely harboring the intention of stirring up some kind of waves over it."

At the time, Yüeh-niang thought that she was speaking in the privacy of her room, not realizing that Chin-lien had silently made her way up to the portiere leading into the parlor and had been eavesdropping there for some time.

All of a sudden, she opened her mouth and spoke, saying, "First Lady, are you saying that I sent my mother packing, and that I have

been monopolizing our husband?"

"That's right," replied Yüeh-niang. "I have said that. Now, what are you going to do about it? The fact is that ever since our husband returned from the Eastern Capital, you've been monopolizing him all day long up there in the front compound, so that here in the rear compound we haven't been given so much as a glimpse of his shadow. As though you were his only wife, and the rest of us were not wives of his. When anything he does comes up for discussion, you claim that nobody else knows about it, but that you do. When Li Kuei-chieh went home yesterday, for example, Sister-in-law Wu asked, 'Why has Li Kuei-chieh left for home after staying here for only one day? Why is my brother-in-law upset with her?' To which I responded, 'Who knows what he's upset with her about?' You then stuck your neck out and insisted on saying, 'Nobody else knows about it. I'm the only one who does.' Since you attach yourself to him all day long, how could you help being better informed than the rest of us?"

"If he didn't come to my quarters of his own volition," said Chin-lien, "are you suggesting that I keep him tied up there all day long with a length of hog-bristle rope? As though I were as wanton as all that."

"If you're not as wanton as all that," said Yüeh-niang, "how is it that yesterday, when he was sitting quietly in my room, you had the nerve to lift aside the portiere and barge into the room, telling him to accompany you to your place in the front compound, just as though you had the right to:

Lord it over the world?

How can you justify that? Our husband is the sort of man who:

Stands erect between Heaven and Earth,

Bearing hardship and enduring travail.³⁹

What crime has he committed that entitles you to tie him up with a length of hog-bristle rope? You don't know your place, you lousy baggage, but at least I keep quiet about it; while you don't seem to know that:

In pressing people you should not press them too far.⁴⁰

You surreptitiously asked our husband for Li P'ing-erh's fur coat to wear but kept it to yourself, without even coming back to the rear compound and mentioning it to me. If everyone were to treat me that way, I might as well be raising ducks in this position of mine. After all:

Even in an old-folks' home,

There is someone in charge.

But you are so close to that maidservant of yours that it is like:

A cat and a mouse sleeping together.⁴¹

You've indulged her to the point where she has lost all sense of decorum and continues to abuse people:

Regardless of the outcome for good or ill;

while you insist on shooting your mouth off:

Refusing to acknowledge any responsibility.⁴²

"So she is a maidservant of mine," said Chin-lien. "What of it? You can beat her if you like. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is. I did ask him for that fur coat; but it wasn't because I wanted the fur coat that he unlocked the door and took a number of articles of clothing to give to someone else. Why are you not criticizing her? So you would accuse me of indulging a maidservant and being wanton, would you? But, since you have gone to such lengths to please our husband, which of us is the more wanton?"

These few words struck Yüeh-niang where it hurt, and her two cheeks turned purple, as she retorted, "So I am the one who is wanton, am I? But, no matter how you put it, I was originally a virgin when I was formally married to him and was not just some woman that he had picked up. It is the shameless man-hunter who is wanton. I am the genuine article, and not the wanton one."

Sister-in-law Wu attempted to intervene, saying, "Sister-in law, what's going on with you? There's no need for you to bandy words that way."

But no matter how hard she tried to dissuade her, the words continued to pour out of Yüeh-niang's mouth, as she said, "You've already done away with one of us, and I guess I'm next."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "First Lady, how is it that you're getting so carried away with your annoyance today? You're implicating the rest of us in what you say:

Hitting a number of us with one swipe of the stick.

And whoever saw the likes of you, Sister Six? You really ought to show a little deference to the First Lady, rather than bandying words with her that way."

"As the saying goes," said Sister-in-law Wu:

"No good blows are struck when people fight;

No good words are spoken when people quarrel.⁴³

When you sisters engage in these altercations, we relatives who stay with you are embarrassed. Sister-in-law, if you don't agree to desist, I will leave. If my presence means so little to you, I'll call for my sedan chair and go home."

At this, Li Chiao-erh took hold of Sister-in-law Wu in order to prevent her from leaving.

When P'an Chin-lien heard the words with which Yüeh-niang berated her, she sat down on the floor and started to roll around, giving herself a series of slaps on the face, and knocking off the fret on her head, which fell to one side.

Commencing to weep out loud, she cried, "I'm as good as dead. What good is this life of mine? Our husband may have legally:

Named articles and cited clauses,

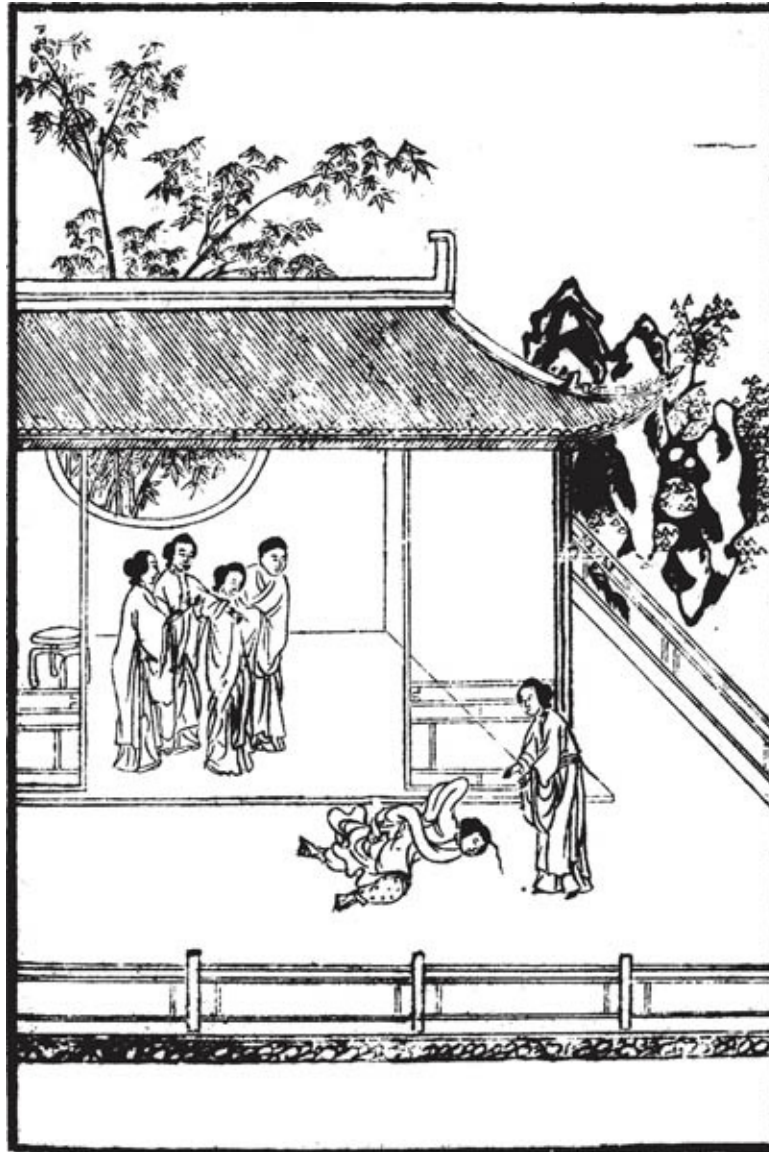
in marrying you; but if, as you claim, I was just some woman he picked up, it would have been an easy enough matter to settle at the time. If you had waited until your husband came home and persuaded him to give me a writ of divorce, I would have had to leave, and that would have been the end of it.

In pressing people you should not press them too far."

"Just look at this trashy creature," exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Before anyone else can even get a word out:

Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate.

And she rolls around on the floor, trying to shift the blame onto someone else. No doubt you'll wait until our husband comes home, good wife that you are, and get him to give me a hard time. You've got just such a knack for knavery, but who's afraid of you?"



In Defense of Her Shortcomings Chin-lien Throws a Tantrum

"Since you claim to be the genuine article," retorted Chin-lien, "who would dare give you a hard time?"

Yüeh-niang became even more enraged at this and said, "If you would have it that I'm not the genuine article, are you suggesting that I've been harboring a lover in this room of mine?"

"If you haven't been harboring a lover," Chin-lien retorted, "who has been harboring a lover? You'd better produce him for me."

When Meng Yü-lou saw that the altercation between them was going from bad to worse, she endeavored to pull Chin-lien to her feet, saying, "You'd better get back to the front compound."

She then continued, "Things have gotten out of hand. The two of you had better both curtail your tongues. When you wrangle with each other this way, engaging in such mutual vituperation, you make yourselves a laughingstock in the eyes of these three nuns here."

Turning to Chin-lien, she went on to say, "You get up, and I'll escort you back to the front compound."

Chin-lien, however, refused to get up until Meng Yü-lou and Yü-hsiao joined forces in dragging her to her feet and escorting her to the front compound.

Sister-in-law Wu then admonished Yüeh-niang, saying, "Sister-in-law, while you're feeling poorly in your present condition, you ought not to let yourself get so upset over things like this that are clearly of no importance. When you and your sister wives are getting along with each other:

Happily and cheerfully,⁴⁴

those of us who are staying over with you are able to share in your pleasure. But when you get into altercations like this and ignore our admonishments, what are we to do?"

The three nuns, seeing that things were getting out of hand, told their young disciples to finish what they were eating, wrapped up their boxes, and took their leave of Yüeh-niang, placing their palms together and saluting the company in the Buddhist fashion.

"I hope," said Yüeh-niang, "that you three reverends will not laugh at us."

"Bodhisattva," responded Nun Hsüeh, "needless to say:

Who is there without smoke in his stove?⁴⁵

The fire of ignorance that resides

in one's heart,⁴⁶

Has only to be touched in order to

give off smoke.

It would be better if everyone were a little more accommodating. As the Buddhist Dharma expresses it:

You must strive to maintain a cool heart,

like a solitary boat;

Sweep clear the spirit tower of your mind,

and control yourself.

If you allow the ropes to slacken and the

knots to grow loose;

Even a myriad guardian deities could not

reduce you to order.⁴⁷

If you can only:

Keep the monkey of your mind and the horse

of your will under control,⁴⁸

it is possible to become a Buddha or a patriarch. In taking leave of you, Bodhisattva, I would like to thank you for all the trouble I have put you to. It is time for me to return home."

So saying, she put her palms together and saluted her twice in the Buddhist fashion.

Yüeh-niang hurriedly bowed in return, saying, "I fear you have fared none too well. I have been rather remiss in entertaining you. On another day, I will send someone to deliver the supplies for the religious observances I have commissioned."

She then turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "Would you and the Second Lady escort our three preceptors to the gate, and look out for the dog?"

Thereupon, the three nuns were sent on their way.

Yüeh-niang then sat down to keep Sister-in-law Wu and the rest company, saying, "This has gotten me so angry that my two arms have gone soft on me, and my hands have turned ice-cold. All I've had to drink this morning is a mouthful of plain tea, but it's still troubling my stomach."

"Sister-in-law," said Sister-in-law Wu, "I tried to dissuade you from letting yourself get so worked up, but you rejected my advice. For someone in the final month of her pregnancy, what's the point of getting so upset over a trivial matter?"

"Sister-in-law," responded Yüeh-niang, "fortunately you have been staying here and have seen for yourself what's been going on. Since when have I picked a quarrel with her? This is a case of:

The curfew violator arresting the watchman.⁴⁹

I have been all too willing to accommodate her, but she has refused to accommodate me. There is only one husband for all of us, but she has attempted to completely monopolize him for herself, while:

Colluding in chicanery,⁵⁰

with that maidservant of hers. As for her doings up front there:

There's nothing she won't do.

Things no one else would do,

She can bring herself to do.

Her conduct as a wife is utterly shameless. Though:

Her lampstand casts no light upon herself,

she's always opening her mouth to accuse others of wantonness. It seems that whatever rival may be in her way, she will pick quarrels

with all day long, accusing her to me of being at fault, thousands of times, if not more, while acting as though she herself is:

An immaculate nun.

She is a double-dealing:

Crooked-hearted false-bellied,⁵¹

person, with a:

Human face but a bestial heart,⁵²

who refuses to accept responsibility for what she says and does. The oaths that she takes are truly frightful. I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where she's concerned. Who knows what sort of a bad end she'll come to in the future? Fortunately, all of you here saw what she did just now with your own eyes. I had prepared to serve tea and was waiting with the best of intentions for her mother to come share it with us, when she sent her packing, without anybody being aware of it, and then, with quarrelsome intent, snuck in here to eavesdrop on me. What did she need to eavesdrop for? Does she think I'm afraid of her, or what? No doubt she'll just wait until she sees that husband of ours and then engage in:

Telling tales and embroidering on the facts,
in order to persuade him to divorce me."

"We were all in your room together," said Hsiao-yü, "standing around the brazier. 'Who knows when the Fifth Lady came into the parlor and sat down to eavesdrop on us? None of us even heard the sound of her footsteps.'"

"She's always up to mischief of some kind," said Sun Hsüeh-o. "She wears shoes with felt soles, in order to make sure that the sound of her footsteps will not be heard. I remember, when she first entered the household, how frequently she picked quarrels with me, and bad-mouthed me to others behind my back, inciting Father to beat me those two times. And you even criticized me at the time, Mother, for being too disputatious."

"She's a past master at burying people alive," said Yüeh-niang, "and today she's doing her best to bury me alive. Didn't you see, just now, how she threw a tantrum:

Banging her head on the floor and rolling around?

Her one hope is that when Father comes back and hears about it, he'll debase me beneath her."

Li Chiao-erh laughed at this, saying, "First Lady, needless to say, that would be to turn the world upside down."

"You don't understand," said Yüeh-niang. "She is an avatar of the nine-tailed fox fairy,⁵³ who has already done innocent people to death. Why should she balk at doing the same to me? Do I have the physical stamina to withstand her? You have been a member of this household for all these years, but despite the fact that you were once a denizen of the licensed quarter, you have never conducted yourself like the hardened offender that she is. Just look at the way she insisted on barging into my room yesterday and calling for our husband, saying, 'Aren't you going out to the front compound? I can't wait for you any longer, so I'll go back before you.' She acted just as though our husband belonged to her alone, and that she had the right to monopolize him. I wouldn't be so upset were it not for the fact that ever since he returned from the Eastern Capital she wouldn't let him spend even a single night in the rear compound. And even when it was someone's birthday, she didn't want to let him visit her quarters. She wants to put all ten fingers into her own mouth, that's all."

"Sister-in-law," admonished Sister-in-law Wu, "try to be more patient. Since you are so frequently indisposed or in pain, this matter is not so important for you. Let him do as he pleases. It would be better for all of us if you would refrain from:

Feeling resentment and harboring hostility."

She continued admonishing her for a while, and Yü-hsiao set out some food for her, but Yüeh-niang refused to eat, saying, "I've had a headache for some time, and my stomach is feeling queasy."

She then said to Yü-hsiao, "Put out a pillow on the k'ang over there, and let me lie down for a bit."

Addressing herself to Li Chiao-erh, she went on to say, "The rest of you can keep Sister-in-law Wu company in having something to eat."

That day, Big Sister Yü also expressed a desire to go home, and Yüeh-niang directed that a gift box be filled with delicacies for her, and that she be given five mace of silver, and sent on her way.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to the yamen that morning to preside over the trial of a criminal case, and it was not until noon that he returned home. His arrival coincided with that of the retainer from Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, who had come to solicit a reply for the gifts he had sent.

"Tell your master that I appreciate his lavish gifts," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but there is no need for him to trouble himself about it. I would like you to carry the gifts back to him until after I have succeeded in doing what he asks of me tomorrow, after which you can deliver them again."

"As long as my master has not directed me to do so," said the retainer, "I can hardly presume to take them back. If they are left here at Your Honor's place until then, it will do just as well."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "express my thanks to him, and tell him that I understand the situation."

He then provided him with a reply and proposed to reward the retainer with a tael of silver.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing, subsequently, made his way back to the master suite, he found Yüeh-niang lying on the k'ang, and though he called to her for what seemed like half a day, she did not respond. When he asked the maidservants what was going on, they did not dare to tell him. He then went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound, where he found the woman, with her hairdo in disarray, lying down and hugging a pillow. When he asked her what was the matter, she also refused to reply.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up the silver he had promised to the retainer from Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung's place and sent

him on his way, after which he went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters and asked her what had happened.

Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, Meng Yü-lou told him all about the angry altercation between Yüeh-niang and Chin-lien that had occurred earlier that morning.

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he went straight back to the master suite, pulled Yüeh-niang up from her reclining position with one hand, and said to her, "At a time like this, while you're feeling poorly in your present condition, why should you pay any attention to that little whore? What's the idea of quarreling with her for no good reason?"

"Whose words have you been listening to?" demanded Yüeh-niang. "Do you believe that it was I who picked a quarrel with her, or that I am the one who is disputatious and sought her out to pick a fight with? It was she who chose to pick a fight with me. You can ask the others if you don't believe me. This morning, with the best of intentions, I had prepared tea, and invited her mother to come share it with us; only to have her send her mother packing in a fit of temper and come barging in here, sticking her neck out in order to quarrel with me:

Rolling around and banging her head on the floor,
knocking the fret on her head to one side, and screaming like the crowd at an emperor's coronation ceremony. She did everything short of striking me in the face. If the others present had not intervened to restrain her, we might well have ended up:

Beating each other into an undifferentiated lump.⁵⁴

She is so accustomed to taking advantage of other people for no good reason, that she expects to be able to force me to submit to her. She constantly says, 'Since you claim that your husband legally:

Named articles and cited clauses,

in marrying you, while I am just some woman he picked up, you might as well just get rid of me, so I won't be in your way any longer.' For every sentence I get out, she comes back with ten. There's no way of stopping her.

Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate.

I hardly have the physical stamina to bandy words with her. In no time at all, that:

Rascally double-crossing creature,⁵⁵

made me so angry that my body became flaccid and feverish. As for the fetus I am carrying, whether it be a child, or a plum, or even a crown prince, it will never survive. At present, it's been so affected that it's:

Neither dead nor alive.⁵⁶

My abdomen feels distended, and the downward pressure in my stomach is painful. My head aches, and my two arms have turned numb. I sat down on the commode for quite a while just now, but the fetus did not come out. If it had, it would have been a good thing, as I might have avoided dying with a spectral fetus in me. Tonight, I'll take a length of rope and hang myself, so you can carry on with her as you like. That way, in the future, I'll avoid the fate of Li P'ing-erh, who was done to death by her. I'm well aware that if you don't lose a wife every three years, you consider it a great misfortune."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, the more he listened the more perturbed he became.

Cuddling Yüeh-niang against his breast, he said to her, "My good sister! You've got to make allowances for that little whore. She doesn't even know the rudiments about keeping to her place. Allowing yourself to become so incensed about her isn't worth the risk. I'll go out to the front compound and give the lousy little whore a piece of my mind."

"You wouldn't dare give her a hard time," retorted Yüeh-niang, "or she'll tie you up with a length of hog-bristle rope."

"You can tell her from me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that if she provokes me, I'll give her a good kicking."

He then went on to ask Yüeh-niang, "How are you feeling inside right now? Have you had anything to eat, or not?"

"Who's had anything to eat?" replied Yüeh-niang. "Early this morning, I had just prepared tea and was waiting for her mother to come share it with us, when she barged in here and started a fight with me. Right now, my abdomen feels distended, I'm suffering from downward pressure in my stomach, my head aches, and my two arms are numb. If you don't believe me, just feel my hands. I haven't even been able to flex them for what seems like half a day."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, all he could do was stamp his feet in consternation, saying, "What are we to do? I'd better send a page boy immediately to summon Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i and have him examine you and prescribe the necessary medication. But it's late, and he won't be able to get inside the city gate before it's closed for the night."

"What's the point of summoning the likes of Dr. Jen for no good reason?" said Yüeh-niang. "Let matters take their course. If the fetus is fated to live, so be it. If it is not fated to live, let it die, which will satisfy her wishes. What good is a wife after all? She's no more than:

A layer of plaster on a wall:⁵⁷

If you peel off one layer, there will be
another beneath it.

Once I am dead, you can raise her to the status of your legitimate wife. She's certainly intelligent enough to manage the household."

"You must be more forbearing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That little whore is as expendable as a piece of stinking shit.⁵⁸ What can she do to you? Right now, if we don't invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to examine you, your anger will continue to envelop the fetus, without being able to escape, either above or below. What then?"

"In that case," said Yüeh-niang, "I'll call in Dame Liu, have her examine me, and take whatever medication she prescribes. Or else, I'll get her to probe my head with two acupuncture needles, and see if that will take care of things."

"That's ridiculous," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What does that old whore Dame Liu know about obstetrics? I'll send a servant right away to go on horseback and invite Dr. Jen to come examine you."

"You may insist on inviting him," said Yüeh-niang. "But, even if you get him to come, I won't allow him to examine me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to disregard this statement and went out to the front compound, where he summoned Ch'in-t'ung and told him, "Take a horse and proceed immediately to the home of His Honor Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i outside the city gate; and wait for him, if necessary, so that you can accompany him on the way back."

Ch'in-t'ung assented to this and, mounting a horse, took off on his errand like a cloud scudding before the wind.

Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to her room in order to look after Yüeh-niang and directed the maidservants to quickly heat some congee and serve it to her, but, though he urged her to eat the congee, she refused to eat it.

He waited there until the afternoon, when Ch'in-t'ung finally came back empty-handed and said, "His Honor Dr. Jen is currently on duty in the prefectural yamen and has not come home yet. His household is informed that we have called for him, so there is no need for us to send anyone after him tomorrow. His Honor Dr. Jen will come on his own in the morning."

Yüeh-niang, on observing that Ch'iao Hung had sent someone again and again to remind Hsi-men Ch'ing of his invitation, said to him, "Since the doctor is coming tomorrow, you might as well go ahead over to our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place. It's late in the day already, and if you refuse to go, you can't help annoying our kinsman."

"If I go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will look after you?"

Yüeh-niang laughed at this, saying, "Just look at the state you're in! If you go, I'll be all right. In a little while, I'll pull myself together and sit down to a meal with Sister-in-law Wu. What are you so concerned about?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Yü-hsiao, "Quickly, go and invite Sister-in-law Wu to come and sit down with your mistress."

He then went on to ask, "Where is Big Sister Yü? You can get her to sing something for your mistress."

"Big Sister Yü has gone home," responded Yü-hsiao. "She ran out of patience some time ago."

"Who told her to go home?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It would have been better for her to stick around for another day or two."

So saying, he chased after Yü-hsiao and gave her a couple of kicks.

"When she saw the way you have managed to:

Turn the whole household upside down,"

pronounced Yüeh-niang, "she wanted to go. What's that got to do with her?"

"The one who actually abused Second Sister Shen," complained Yü-hsiao, "is not the one you've chosen to kick."

Hsi-men Ch'ing pretended not to hear this and proceeded to get dressed and set out to attend the drinking party he had been invited to at Ch'iao Hung's place.

Before the first watch had begun, he returned home and went into the master suite, where he found Yüeh-niang, together with Sister-in-law Wu, Meng Yü-lou, and Li Chiao-erh, the four of them, sitting together. When Sister-in-law Wu saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she promptly took herself elsewhere in the rear compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yüeh-niang, "Are you feeling any better by now?"

"Sister-in-law Wu," said Yüeh-niang, "joined me for a couple of mouthfuls of congee, and my abdomen is not feeling as distended as it was before. But I still have a lingering headache, and the lumbar region of my lower back is still aching."

"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i will come to examine you, and if you take a couple of doses of the medication he prescribes, it should dissipate your pent-up anger and tranquilize the fetus in your womb. Then you'll be all right."

"I told you in no uncertain terms not to send for him," said Yüeh-niang, "but you went ahead and sent for him anyway. How can you be so:

Bare-faced and red-eyed,

as to invite a male physician to examine me? Just wait and see whether I'll come out to be examined tomorrow, or not."

She then went on to ask, "What did our kinsman Ch'iao Hung invite you over for anyway?"

"He indicated," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that ever since I came back from the Eastern Capital, he has wanted to have a chance to sit down with me; and today he went out of his way to prepare a variety of delicacies and engaged two singing girls as well. He didn't ask me over to discuss anything in particular. Later on, he also invited Censor Chu from next door to come over and help keep me company. But I was so concerned about you that I was uneasy at heart, so, after downing a few goblets of wine, I came home early."

"What a glib-tongued good-for-nothing you are!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "I've had enough of your:

Clever words and deceptive phrases.

You would have it that you were concerned for me, would you? Even if I were:

A manifestation of a living Buddha,⁵⁹

I would hardly occupy a place in your heart. I can foresee that once I am dead, I will mean no more to you than a shard of broken crockery."

She then went on to ask, "Did our kinsman Ch'iao Hung really have nothing more to say to you?"

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing acknowledge the truth, saying, "At present, our kinsman Ch'iao Hung wishes to take advantage of the new regulations to purchase a position as an honorary official, for which he is prepared to pay thirty taels of silver. The money is already sealed up, and he wants me to speak to Prefect Hu Shih-wen about it. I said to him, 'That's not a problem. Yesterday, Prefect Hu Shih-wen sent me a hundred copies of the calendar for the coming year, and I have not yet sent him a return gift. When I send the

gift, I'll send a card with it, requesting an order of appointment as an honorary official, and then turn it over to you.' He objected to this, saying that payment in silver was the standard procedure, and that if I consented to intervene on his behalf, it would spare him the need to spend additional money high and low, and thus save him ten taels of silver or more."

"Since he has requested you to do so," said Yüeh-niang, "you might as well intervene on his behalf. Have you already accepted his silver?"

"He is going to send the silver over tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He wanted to buy an additional gift for me, but I told him to forget about it. Tomorrow, I'll prepare the carcass of a pig, and a jug of wine, and send them to Prefect Hu Shih-wen. That ought to take care of it."

Once this conversation was concluded, Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night in the master suite.

The next day was the date on which Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had arranged to host a party to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng at Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. The provision of appropriate wines and comestibles for the banquet had already been completed in the rear reception hall. The prefectural yamen had issued summonses for thirty musicians from the two Music Offices, together with two directors and four file leaders, to report for duty at Hsi-men Ch'ing's house early that morning. Hsi-men Ch'ing told them to stand by in an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard inside the ceremonial gate leading to the front reception hall. The troupe of Hai-yen actors were directed to use an anteroom on the western side of the courtyard as their green room.

Who should appear at this juncture but Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who had gotten up early that morning and come on horseback. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly invited him into the reception hall and sat down with him, exchanging remarks on the events that had occurred since they last met.

"Yesterday," said Dr. Jen, "when your esteemed servant came for me, I was on duty at the prefectural yamen. It was only when I arrived home last evening that I was able to read your respected summons. Today, I have made haste to come, without waiting for my carriage. May I presume to ask who it is that is not well?"

"It is my humble principal wife who is unexpectedly feeling somewhat indisposed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I hope that you will be able to diagnose the problem."

In a little while, after tea had been served and they were in the process of drinking it, Dr. Jen said, "The other day, I heard about your promotion from Han Ming-ch'uan. Permit me to proffer my congratulations."

"With my meager talent, I merely occupy the position," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What is there to congratulate me for?"

When they had done with their tea, and Ch'in-t'ung had cleared away the cups with their raised saucers, Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady that His Honor Dr. Jen is here, and that she should prepare to receive him in the parlor."

Ch'in-t'ung assented and headed back to the rear compound, where he found Sister-in-law Wu, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou in the room with Yüeh-niang.

"Dr. Jen is about to come in," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "and Father has instructed me to tell you to prepare to receive him in the parlor."

Yüeh-niang sat where she was, without making a move, and said, "I told him not to summon the doctor, but he has insisted on asking this male figure to open wide his fervid eyes, and proceed to:

Holding hands and squeezing wrists,

with me, for no good reason. Who knows what else he will do. If he had invited Dame Liu instead, and I had taken a dose or two of her medicine, I would have been fine. But by insisting on:

Ringling bells and beating drums,

to expose me in this way, he's merely giving someone else's husband an opportunity to feast his eyes on me."

"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "the doctor he engaged is here already. If you don't go out and see him, what do you propose to do? You can hardly just send him away."

Sister-in-law Wu also admonished her from the side, saying, "Sister-in-law, if you let him take your pulse, he may be able to ascertain the cause of your indisposition, whence it arose, and which conduits may have been affected by your anger. And if you take the medication he prescribes, it may serve to rectify the flow of your vital energy and blood, and tranquilize the fetus in your womb. If you won't let him examine you, and your husband allows you to call in Dame Liu instead, what does she know of pathology or the principles of pulse taking? And who knows what such a delay might portend?"

Only then did Yüeh-niang consent to begin combing her hair and putting on her headgear. Yü-hsiao brought over her mirror, Meng Yü-lou jumped onto the k'ang and proceeded to use a small brush to smooth the hair behind her temples, Li Chiao-erh helped attach her hair ornaments, and Sun Hsüeh-o stood by to fetch her garments. Yüeh-niang's head was adorned with six gold-headed pins and a toque. Without formally making up her face, she:

Scantly applied rouge and powder, and

Lightly painted her moth eyebrows.

From her ears were suspended two gold clove-shaped ear pendants; in front of her coiffure she wore a gold tiara representing the toad in the moon; her body was clad in a white satin jacket that opened down the middle, over a willow-yellow wide-cut drawnwork skirt that served to set off her wave-tripping silk stockings, and the upturned points of her pair of golden lotuses; while beside her skirt there hung a cachet of purple brocade, a yellow brass key, and a pair of embroidered sashes. Truly:

The immortal of Mount Lo-fu has appeared
in the mundane world;⁶⁰

The beauty of the moon palace has emerged
from her painted hall.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 76

MENG YÜ-LOU ASSUAGES YÜEH-NIANG'S WRATH; HSI-MEN CH'ING REPUDIATES LICENTATE WEN

Before deciding upon appropriate action,
one must think thrice;
So as to avoid being the author of one's
own dissatisfactions.
For humans residing in this world the wind
and waves are dangerous;
Wind and waves arise throughout the twenty-four
hours of the day.¹

THE STORY GOES that when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Yüeh-niang had not come out for what seemed like half a day, he went into her bedroom himself and urged her to do so. Upon seeing that she was in the process of getting dressed, he went back out and invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come in and take a seat in the parlor of the master suite. Once there, Dr. Jen observed that the upper end of the room was concealed by a gold-flecked hanging screen, beside which there were arrayed wide benches provided with cushions, while the floor was covered with carpets, and there was a brazier in place.

Before long, Yüeh-niang emerged from her bedroom. Behold:

She is petite in stature,
With a round visage, and
A clear off-white complexion.
Her figure is neither plump nor thin,
Her stature is neither short nor tall.
Her eyebrows are like crescent moons;
Her phoenix eyes are slender and long.
Her graceful fingers reveal the jade of
Consort Chen of the Wei;²
Her ruby lips display the cloves of the
Han dynasty Secretariat.³

When she approached him and bowed in greeting, Dr. Jen was thrown into such consternation that he stepped deferentially aside and bent low in response to her salutation. Yüeh-niang then sat down facing him, while Ch'in-t'ung placed a table with a brocade cushion in front of her, and she:

Stretched out her jade wrist,
Revealed her slender fingers,

and directed Dr. Jen to take her pulse. After an appropriate time, Yüeh-niang withdrew and returned to her room, from which she sent a page boy out with a serving of tea.

When he had finished his tea, Dr. Jen said, "Your venerable lady's symptoms reveal that her vital energy and blood circulation are weak, and the pulse at her wrist is floating and rough. Though she possesses fetal energy, its constructive and defensive elements are imbalanced, which is conducive to anger, and has stirred up the fire in her liver. At present, her head and eyes are unclear, and her abdominal duct is somewhat obstructed, resulting in a state of depression. In her four limbs, there is a deficiency of blood and an excess of energy."

Yüeh-niang sent Ch'in-t'ung out to report, "Right now, Mother is suffering from headache and heart distention. Her arms feel numb, the downward pressure in her abdomen is painful, the lumbar region of her lower back is aching, and:

She cannot taste what she eats and drinks."⁴

"I am already aware of these symptoms," said Dr. Jen, "and have clearly described them."

"I will not conceal from you, Hou-ch'i," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that my wife is currently in the last month of her pregnancy, but because she has gotten so upset, her vital energy has difficulty circulating, being trapped below her diaphragm. I beseech you, venerable sir, to take care in determining whether to increase or decrease the dosage of the medications you prescribe. To do so would be a manifestation of your magnanimity."

"There is no need for you to instruct me," responded Dr. Jen. "I will, of course, do my best. Once I get home, I will prepare medications for her that should protect her fetus, repair her vital energy, settle her stomach, improve her resilience, and alleviate her pain. Once your venerable lady has taken them, she would do well to avoid occasions for anger, and reduce her consumption of rich foods."

"I beseech you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to do whatever you can to tranquilize her fetus."

"Of course," responded Dr. Jen, "I will endeavor as best I can to tranquilize her fetus, repair her vital energy, and nourish the constructive and defensive elements in her constitution. There is no need for you to enjoin me any further. I will give it my most careful consideration."

"My Third Lady," Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "is suffering from a chill in the stomach. I hope that you will be able to come up with some womb-warming pills to alleviate her condition."

"Your pupil will respectfully comply with your command," said Dr. Jen. "I will seal them up for you immediately."

So saying, he got up and went out to the front reception hall, where he noticed that there were a considerable number of musicians from the Music Office waiting in the courtyard.

"Venerable sir," he asked, "what sort of event are you putting on in your residence today?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by explaining, "His Honor Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, together with the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, have invited the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, to a banquet to be held here today."

Upon hearing this, Dr. Jen was astonished at heart and felt more respect than ever for Hsi-men Ch'ing. He bowed and scraped before mounting his horse outside the front gate, showing greater deference than ever before, and double his previous regard. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from seeing him off, he immediately sealed up a tael of silver and two handkerchiefs and sent Ch'in-t'ung off with them in a gift box, to go on horseback in order to pick up the medicines.

Meanwhile, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and the rest were all in Yüeh-niang's room, engaged in preparing boxes of candied fruit, and polishing the silver utensils.

"First Lady," they asked, "how is it that, though you hadn't originally wanted to go out and be seen, no sooner did the doctor examine you than he was able to tell, thus and so, exactly what you were suffering from?"

"What sort of a wife does he take me for?" said Yüeh-niang. "Let me die if I must, for all he cares. Who knows what that whore is up to? She constantly tries to exert control over me, while claiming that I treat her as though I were her mother-in-law. The only difference between us is one of relative age, and I happen to be eight months older than she is. She maintains that since our husband loves her, it is only appropriate that he should treat us as equals. If she had not made sure of his backing, how would she have dared engage me in such:

A vituperative altercation?

If the rest of you had not urged me so strongly to go out and see the doctor, I wouldn't have gone out for ten years. Let me die if I must. As the saying goes:

If one cock dies, another will crow in its stead.⁵

Is not the crowing of the new cock great to hear?

Once I'm dead, he can raise her to my position, and thus eliminate all this quarreling and wrangling.

When you weed out the turnips, there is
room for other things."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "First Lady, how can you say such things? I am prepared to swear an oath on her behalf. This Sister Six, and I don't say this judgmentally, is indeed prone to act as though she:

Didn't know any better,

and is given to throwing her weight around, engaging in backbiting, and acting officiously. She's just a baggage, for whom, all too often:

The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it.

First Lady, to allow yourself to get so worked up over her is a mistake."

"Do you really think that she is more thoughtless than you?" responded Yüeh-niang. "On the contrary, she knows exactly what she's doing. How is it that she is so prone to surreptitiously eavesdropping on people, and then using their words to reflect satirically on them?"

"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou:

"The head of a household is a receptacle
for catching dirty water.

If you lack the capacity to take it, what are you to do? As the saying goes:

A single gentleman can accommodate
ten petty persons.

If you raise your hand,

She will venture to get by,

but if you refuse to make allowances for her,

She'll be unable to get by."

"The fact is," said Yüeh-niang, "that, as long as our husband stands up for her this way, his legitimate wife will be relegated to the

rear.”

“Who are you fooling?” said Meng Yü-lou. “Right now, while you are in the unhealthy condition that you are, would Father have the gall to visit her quarters?”

“Why wouldn’t he?” said Yüeh-niang. “Didn’t she suggest that she could keep him tied up there with a length of hog-bristle rope? A man’s heart is just like a horse without a bridle. Whomever he chooses to favor, he will favor. And anyone who presumes to try and restrain him, she will accuse of being wanton.”

“That’s enough, First Lady,” objected Meng Yü-lou. “You’ve already had your say. Try to restrain your anger somewhat. Let me go get her to come and kowtow to you, and offer an apology for her misconduct. If we avail ourselves of the presence of Sister-in-law Wu, maybe the two of you can be induced to make it up somehow. If not, Father will be left in a very awkward position:

Damned if he does, and damned if he doesn’t,

so that his every move will be problematical. If he wants to go to her quarters, he’ll be afraid of your anger; and if he fails to do so, she won’t venture to come out. Today, a banquet is being held in the front compound, and we are here, busy as can be, preparing boxes of candied fruit. If she is allowed to skulk by herself in her own quarters, the rest of us will find it hard to forgive her. Sister-in-law Wu, is what I say right, or isn’t it?”

“Sister-in-law,” responded Sister-in-law Wu, “what the Third Lady says is right. If the two of you continue to be at odds, and persist in refusing to see each other, it will make things hard for my brother-in-law, who will find it awkward to approach either of you.”

Yüeh-niang did not say so much as a word in response to this, and Meng Yü-lou started to leave, and go toward the front compound.

“Meng the Third,” objected Yüeh-niang, “don’t you go after her. Let her come, or not, as she pleases.”

“She won’t dare not to come,” said Meng Yü-lou. “If she won’t come, I’ll simply tie her up with a length of hog-bristle rope and drag her here.”

With that, she made her way straight to Chin-lien’s quarters, where she found her, with disheveled hair and a sallow complexion, sitting on the k’ang.

“Sister Six,” said Meng Yü-lou, “why are you playing the fool? Do up your hair. Today, a banquet is being held up front, and we are as busy as can be preparing for it in the rear compound. You ought to come back and join us. What’s the point of merely venting your spleen this way? Just now, thus and so, I’ve been arguing with the First Lady, urging her to relent, for quite a while. You ought to come back to the rear compound, keep your bad temper to yourself, while displaying your good temper, and see if you can’t bring yourself to kowtow to her, and offer her an apology for your misconduct. Both you and I are in a position in which:

When confronted with low eaves,

How can we not lower our heads?⁶

As the saying goes:

Honeyed words and plausible speeches

can make the twelfth month warm;

Cruel words that are hurtful to others

can turn the sixth month cold.

The two of you have already had your exchange of words. How long are you going to persist in venting your spleen?

Men are as fond of expressing their anger,

As Buddhas are of receiving burnt incense.

If you will only go and offer her an apology for your misconduct, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to an end. If you refuse, however, you will put Father in an awkward position with regard to both of you, and if he wants to come to your place, she is certain to be annoyed.”

“Ai-ya! Ai-ya!” exclaimed Chin-lien. “There’s no comparison between us. As she has declared, she is the genuine article, the legitimate wife, while you and I are merely women he has picked up after cohabiting with us amid the dewdrops.⁷ What sort of standing do we possess? We’re not to be compared to the toes on her feet.”

“Let her say what she likes,” responded Meng Yü-lou. “As I said to her yesterday, ‘You’re:

Hitting three or four of us with one swipe of the stick.

When I married your husband, I was not just someone he picked up along the way but was duly married, with the help of the standard:

Three matchmakers and six witnesses,⁸

before consenting to enter your household.

For every branch you chop down,

A hundred trees are threatened.

When the hare dies, the fox is sad;

Creatures grieve for their fellows.

Even if Sister Six has exasperated you, there are others of us who have not.

Though one may possess the authority, one

should not use it completely;

Though one may have something to say, one

should not say it completely.⁹

In all things, it is best to:

Look up to those above and regard those below,
in order to provide against future developments. How can you ignore the fact that:
The locust and the grasshopper,
Are maligned in the same breath,
here in the presence of the three nuns and Big Sister Yü?

Every person has a face;
Every tree has its bark,¹⁰
but our faces are being drained of blood, and our intercourse will come to an end.'

"Now, if you refuse to go see her, what do you propose to do? There is no avoiding the fact that, day after day, the two of you will be in close proximity to each other:
As inseparable as the lip and the cheek.
You ought to fix your hair right away, so the two of us can go back to the rear compound together."

When P'an Chin-lien heard what she had to say, she could only ponder it for what seemed like half a day;
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,
before picking up the dressing mirror in front of her mirror stand, brushing her hair, putting on her fret, getting into appropriate clothes, and accompanying Meng Yü-lou back to the master suite in the rear compound.

Meng Yü-lou lifted aside the portiere and went inside before her, saying, "First Lady, I went there as I said I would do and have managed to drag her back with me. She dared not refuse to come."

Then, turning to Chin-lien, she said, "My child, why haven't you come over and kowtowed to your mother?"

Standing to one side, she continued, "Kinswoman, my child is young, and is still so:
Unconscious of right and wrong,
that she has offended you. If you will only:
Lift high your gracious hand,
make allowances for her, and forgive her this once; should she ever be rude to you again in the future, you may punish her as you see fit. I will not have a word to say about it."

Then P'an Chin-lien:
Just as if inserting a taper in its holder,
proceeded to kowtow four times to Yüeh-niang.

After which, she jumped up and hit Meng Yü-lou a blow, saying, "You're delirious, you insensate whore! You're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"

Everyone laughed at this, and even Yüeh-niang herself couldn't help laughing.

Meng Yü-lou carried on, saying, "You lousy slave! On seeing your mistress show you a favorable countenance, you ruffle up your feathers and strike your own mother."

"It is such a relief to see you sisters making it up with each other so light-heartedly," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Even though this sister-in-law of mine may sometimes be guilty of saying:
A word or half a word,¹¹
that grates on your ears, if you will only agree to:
Support and respect each other,¹²
and be sparing in your responses, all will be well. As the saying goes:
Although the peony blossom may be lovely,
It requires verdant leaves to set it off."¹³

"If she had not said what she did," responded Yüeh-niang, "who would have chosen to criticize her?"

"You are Heaven, while we are the Earth," said Chin-lien. "If you see fit to grant us your accommodation, we will venerate it as though it were engraved in our minds."

At this, Meng Yü-lou gave her a smack on the shoulder, saying, "My child:
You've only endured a slap with a flour sack."¹⁴

She then continued, "Don't you say anything more. We've been working away here all day long. It's high time for you to lend us a hand."

Chin-lien, thereupon, proceeded to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before getting onto the k'ang and joining Meng Yü-lou in preparing boxes of candied fruit. But no more of this.

Sun Hsüeh-o was engaged in directing the group of servants' wives in preparing dishes at the stove in the kitchen. The hired chefs were also working in the large kitchen in the front compound, frying and roasting, steaming and boiling, as they roasted brocade-wrapped mutton and carved flowered pork.

When Ch'in-t'ung returned with the medicines he had been sent to fetch, Hsi-men Ch'ing read the labels and had the pills sent to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and the ingredients for a decoction turned over to Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang then said to Meng Yü-lou, "So you've sent for a prescription too, have you?"

"It's for that problem I had the other day," said Meng Yü-lou. "I was feeling considerable pain in my lower regions, and I asked Father to tell Dr. Jen about it, and get him to prescribe a couple of doses of pills for me."

"It was because you hadn't been able to eat anything that day that you caught a chill," said Yüeh-niang. "It's only right that you should take a chill in the abdomen seriously."

But let us put aside the events in the rear compound for the moment.

To resume our story, in the front reception hall Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was the first to arrive, in order to look over the arrangements for the banquet. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse, where they sat down together.

Sung Ch'iao-nien thanked him profoundly for his gift of the incense-burning tripod, saying, "Your pupil really ought to repay you for it."

"The fact is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that, from the beginning, I would have liked to present it to Your Excellency but feared that you might not accept it. How can you speak of repayment?"

"In that case," said Sung Ch'iao-nien:

"What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"

So saying, he made a bow in order to express his gratitude.

When they had finished their tea, he started to interrogate Hsi-men Ch'ing about his assessment of the condition of the people and public morality in the district, and Hsi-men Ch'ing responded to his questions with perfunctory affirmatives and negatives.

He then went on to ask his opinion of the local officials, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Your humble subordinate is only aware that, as for Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing prefecture:

His reputation among the people is long established;¹⁵

and the magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district, Li Ta-t'ien, is:

Conscientious in performing his official duties.

As for the rest:

I am not familiar with all the relevant details;¹⁶

and would not presume to speak irresponsibly."

Sung Ch'iao-nien went on to ask, "Commandant Chou Hsiu is an associate of yours. How would you assess his character?"

"Although Commandant Chou is:

Both experienced and reliable,"¹⁷

replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is not a match for Military Director-in-Chief Ching of Chi-chou, who passed the military examinations in his youth and is:

Both talented and courageous.

Your Excellency ought to take him into consideration."

"You must be referring to Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "How do you happen to be familiar with him?"

"He and I have a nodding acquaintance with each other," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day he presented me with a copy of his curriculum vitae and asked me to show it to you, in the hope that you might be induced to:

Look favorably upon it."

"I have also heard long since that he is an excellent military officer," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "Is there anyone else whom you would recommend?"

"There is one Wu K'ai," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who is the elder brother of your humble subordinate's wife. He currently holds the position of battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard and has recently been deputed to repair the local Charity Granary. According to precedent, he is eligible to be promoted to the rank of a commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard. If Your Excellency should see fit to put in a good word on his behalf, your humble subordinate would feel much indebted to your kindness."

"Since he is a relative of yours," said Sung Ch'iao-nien, "in the future, when I submit my report, I will not only recommend him for promotion, but also guarantee that he will continue to hold his current substantive position."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly bowed to him as an expression of his gratitude and presented him with the curriculum vitae of Ching Chung and Wu K'ai.

After Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had finished perusing them, he turned them over to his clerical docket officer, saying, "When the time comes for me to draft my report, show them to me again."

The docket officer, accordingly, took charge of them, and Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for one of his attendants to surreptitiously present him with three taels of silver, in return for which the docket officer assured him that the charge would be engraved upon his heart. But no more of this.

As they were speaking, they heard the sound of drum music from the front reception hall, and an attendant came in to announce that the officials from the Two Provincial Offices had arrived. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he immediately went out to the reception hall to receive them and exchange formal greetings, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took his time as he slowly made his way out the postern gate from the garden.

When the crowd of officials had finished with the customary exchange of greetings and observed that in the center of the room there stood a large portable table, on which were displayed candied effigies of the Five Ancients, ingot-shaped cakes, square-shaped confectionery, a high-stacked pyramid of fruits, the flesh of the five sacrificial animals, and an array of other comestibles fit for a major banquet, all of which were neatly arranged and surrounded by a cluster of lavishly furnished table settings:

Their hearts were filled with great joy, and they all thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "We have put you to a lot of trouble. Allow us to supplement our prior contributions to the expenses."

"It is true that our contributions have been inadequate," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, "but, if you will do so for my sake, Ssueh-ch'uan, let us spare these gentlemen the need to make any further contributions."

"Whoever heard of such a thing," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

They all then proceeded to sit down in order of precedence, while the attendants served them with tea.

The group of officials then explained, "As for the venerable gentleman Hou Meng, all of us have sent subordinates to remind him of the invitation, but he is still at the yamen of the Regional Military Command and has not set out yet."

The file leaders and musicians lined up to either side inside the second gate, as closely as though they were:

Locked tight in an iron bucket, with their drums, flutes, pipes, and metallophones, in expectation of his arrival. They remained on the lookout for him until the early afternoon, when a messenger on horseback arrived and reported that His Honor Hou Meng was on his way. The musicians to either side began to play their instruments, and the crowd of officials all went outside the main gate to receive him, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien stood in waiting inside the second gate.

Before long, after a squad of soldiers bearing blue flags had preceded him to clear the way, Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, wearing a gown emblazoned with a scarlet peacock, sable earmuffs, and a gold-buckled girdle, and riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, arrived at the gate and descended from his sedan chair. The crowd of officials welcomed him inside, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, who had changed into a round-collared scarlet robe, emblazoned with a motif of golden clouds and a white *hsieh-chih*, a mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, and a girdle with a plaque of rhinoceros horn, ushered him deferentially into the great reception hall. Only after the two of them had exchanged the customary greetings, and the various officials had individually paid their respects, did the time come for him to be presented to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"This is our host, Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien. "He is currently serving as judicial commissioner in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and is also a protégé of the venerable Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching."

Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, thereupon, directed one of his clerical attendants to present Hsi-men Ch'ing with a red accordion-bound calling card, which read, "Your devoted friend Hou Meng pays his respects."

Hsi-men Ch'ing respectfully received it with both hands and turned it over to a servant for safekeeping.

When they had finished paying their mutual respects, they all loosened their clothing and assumed their seats. The various officials were seated to either side, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien occupied the position of host. After tea had been served, the musicians struck up their music beneath the steps, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took up a cup and proffered wine to Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, stuck flower ornaments in his cap, and presented him with a bolt of fabric. Immediately afterwards, the guest of honor's table setting was carried downstairs, the comestibles displayed thereon were packed in boxes, and personnel were dispatched to deliver them to his official residence. After this, they resumed their seats, a repast with soup and rice was duly presented, and the chef came out to carve the entrée of flowered pork, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

By this time, the musicians from the Music Offices had put on a number of ensemble dance pieces in which the performers were all clad in officially supplied brand new embroidered costumes, and a medley of vaudeville acts had been performed, all of which were superbly presented. Only after that did the troupe of Hai-yen actors come forward, kowtow to the company, and present the program of pieces they were prepared to perform. His Honor Hou Meng told them to perform something from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *P'ei Chin-kung huan-tai chi*.¹⁸ When they had finished performing one scene, they withdrew, and the chef proceeded to carve the entrée of brocade-wrapped mutton. Truly:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Wind and string instruments, song, and dance,
Classical melodies saturate the ears, and
Gold and sable finery fill the banquet chamber.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The auspicious aura filling the ornate hall
is neither fog, nor is it mist;
The singing diverts the moving clouds, and
the tables are laden with wine.
Not only are the beauties, like red moths,
dangling their jade pendants;
But the black locks at their temples are
studded with golden cicadas.

Grand Coordinator Hou Meng remained in his place only until the sun began to sink in the West. After:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Two dramatic episodes had been performed,

he got up to go and directed his attendants to take five taels of silver and distribute it among the cooks, waiters, musicians, and servants. He then put on his outdoor clothes and took his leave, while the assembled officials escorted him to the front gate and looked on as he got into his sedan chair and departed. When they came back inside, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and the other officials also thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, took their leave, and departed.

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen them off and come back inside, he dismissed the musicians and, seeing that it was still rather early, directed that the tables should be left in place, and that the caterers should set what remained of the various dishes and delicacies in order. He then sent page boys to go and invite Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh, his managers, Fu Ming and Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ch'en Ching-chi to come join him and enjoy a dramatic performance. He also had two table settings of wine and savories provided for the troupe of Hai-yen actors to eat while he waited for the guests to arrive, after which, he told them to be ready to perform the winter scene entitled *Han Hsi-tsai yeh-yen* (Han Hsi-tsai's nocturnal banquet), from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *Ssu-chieh chi* (The four seasons).¹⁹ In addition, he had pots of plum blossoms brought out and displayed on the tables to either side, so they could enjoy the plum blossoms while consuming their wine.

It so happens that, on that day, Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing had been in charge of the kitchen, Ch'en Ching-chi had been in charge of the wine, and the managers Fu Ming and Kan Jun had been in charge of the utensils for the banquet. When they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited them to join him, they all came and sat down in his presence. Before long, Licentiate Wen came from across the street, made a bow, and sat down, after which Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, and Ying Po-chüeh also arrived.

Ying Po-chüeh greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, saying, "I fear I provided but scant entertainment for my sisters-in-law the other day, and I am grateful for your lavish gifts."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and upbraided him, saying, "Why you lousy god-damned dog! You got a real eyeful spying on your mothers through an aperture in the window, didn't you?"

"You shouldn't believe the nonsense people talk," protested Ying Po-chüeh. "Whoever heard of such a thing. It can't be anyone else, now I think about it."

Pointing at Wang Ching, he then accused him, saying, "So it was you, you lousy dog-bone! You actually came home and told him such a tale, did you? When I get the chance, I'll take a bite out of your flesh, you little dog-bone!"

After this exchange of words was over, and they had consumed their tea, Wu K'ai expressed a wish to go back to the rear compound, and Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to accompany him.

As they went along, Hsi-men Ch'ing explained to his brother-in-law, thus and so, "I spoke to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien about that matter of yours, and he looked over your curriculum vitae and then entrusted it to a clerk, to whom I also gave three taels of silver. He accepted it along with the curriculum vitae of His Honor Ching Chung and promised that when the time came for him to draft his report, he would give it his special attention."

Upon hearing this, Wu K'ai was utterly delighted and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I am much beholden to you, Brother-in-law, for your efforts on my behalf."

"I just told him that you were my wife's elder brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and he replied, saying, 'Since he is a relative of yours, I will be sure to take care of it for your sake.'"

Thereupon, they went into the master suite together in order to see Yüeh-niang.

After Yüeh-niang had greeted her elder brother with a bow, Wu K'ai turned to his wife and said, "Hadh't you better go home? There's no one there to look after the house. Why are you so reluctant to leave?"

"My sister-in-law wanted me to stay," said Sister-in-law Wu. "She has invited me to remain through the third day of the coming month, and return home on the fourth."

"Since it is my sister who is keeping you," said Wu K'ai, "you might just as well come home on the fourth, then,"

When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang suggested that he stay for a visit, but he chose not to sit down and went back to the front compound, where the wine had already been provided, and he could have a drink.

At this juncture, Wu K'ai, together with Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, took their places as guests, while Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the host's position, and managers Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ch'en Ching-chi took their places to either side, making a total of five tables in all; while below, the troupe of actors began to play their gongs and drums and then proceeded to perform the scene from the *Ssu-chieh chi* entitled *Han Hsi-tsai yeh-yen yu-t'ing chia-yü* (Han Hsi-tsai's nocturnal banquet exposes the tryst in the relay station).

Just as the merrymaking was at its height, Tai-an suddenly came in and said, "Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung's household has sent Ch'iao T'ung here, and he is waiting down below to have a word with Father."

Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately got up from his place and went to the postern gate on the east to see Ch'iao T'ung, who had been sent by his kinsman Ch'iao Hung.

"Father says to apologize to you for the scant entertainment he provided the other day," said Ch'iao T'ung. "He has sent me today to deliver the customary fee of thirty taels of silver for the purchase of a position as an honorary official, which he has sealed up here, together with an additional sum of five taels, to be distributed to the staff of the personnel office."

"I will turn it over to Prefect Hu Shih-wen tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and he will supply the order of appointment in return. 'What need is there to spend any silver on the staff of the personnel office? You can take it back with you.'"

He then directed Tai-an to tell the kitchen to take care of providing wine and something to eat for Ch'iao T'ung in the studio in the summerhouse, and then send him on his way.

To make a long story short, that day, by the time the actors had performed two scenes from the play about the tryst in the relay station, it was already the first watch, and the party for Hsi-men Ch'ing and his guests in the front compound broke up.

Once the utensils had been cleared away, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room, where she was sitting on the k'ang with Sister-in-law Wu. When Sister-in-law Wu saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she promptly got up and moved into an adjacent room.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Yüeh-niang, "Today, I spoke, thus and so, on behalf of your elder brother, to Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and he promised not only to see that he is promoted one class in rank, but also that he will continue to hold his current substantive position, so he will become the assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard. I told your elder brother about it just now, and he is as pleased as can be. After the censor's report is submitted at the end of the year, the imperial rescript confirming his appointment will come down."

"Needless to say," responded Yüeh-niang, "as a poor officer of the guard, he can hardly come up with the two or three hundred taels of silver he will need to expend."

"Who is asking him for even so much as a hundred cash?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I simply said to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien that he was my wife's elder brother, and he personally promised that he would not fail to take care of it as a favor to me."

"You can do as you like in dealing with him," said Yüeh-niang. "I won't interfere with you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yü-hsiao, "Have you decocted that medicine for your mistress? Bring it here so I can see that your mistress takes it."

"You can go about your business," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't worry about it. I'll take it when I'm ready to go to bed."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to go outside, but Yüeh-niang called him back, saying, "Just where are you headed? If you are headed for the front compound, you'd better not go there. She came back here and apologized to me for her misconduct a while ago. All that she needs is for you to go and apologize to her."

"I'm not going to her quarters," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If you're not going to her quarters," responded Yüeh-niang, "whose quarters are you going to? You ought not to have anything to do with that wet nurse in the front compound either. The other day, in front of Sister-in-law Wu, the Fifth Lady belittled me by saying that I allowed you to carry on with her in order to curry favor with you. But you continue to be as shameless as ever."

"Why do you pay any attention to that little whore?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Just do as I say," responded Yüeh-niang. "I don't want you to go to the front compound today. And I don't want you to stay here either. Why don't you go and spend the night in Li Chiao-erh's quarters? You can go wherever you want tomorrow, and I won't interfere with you."

On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:

At a loss for what to do next,

felt compelled to go spend the night in Li Chiao-erh's quarters.

The next day was the first day of the twelfth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early in the morning and joined Ho Yung-shou in issuing directives; after which, he took his place on the bench, held roll call, and dealt with the accumulated paperwork. The morning was over by the time he returned home.

He then took care of preparing gifts of a newly slaughtered pig and a jug of wine, along with the thirty taels of silver, and sent Tai-an to deliver them to Hu Shih-wen, the prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture. Prefect Hu Shih-wen accepted the gifts and immediately proceeded to seal up the order of appointment for Ch'iao Hung.

Meanwhile, at home, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Yin-yang Master Hsü to set up an altar in the reception hall and make an offering of a pig and a sheep, wine and fruit, and burn paper money, in order to fulfill the vow he had made after encountering the storm on his way back from the capital. When the ceremony was finished, he sent Yin-yang Master Hsü on his way.

Thereupon, seeing that Tai-an had returned, he examined the reply from Prefect Hu Shih-wen and saw that he had provided the order of appointment, that it was duly stamped with numerous seals, and that it read: "Ch'iao Hung is hereby appointed as an honorary official of this prefecture." He then sent Tai-an to deliver two boxes of the meat from the foregoing sacrificial offering to the household of Ch'iao Hung, and invite him to come over for a drink, so he could show him the order of appointment. He also had boxes of the sacrificial meat delivered to Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and his managers, Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ts'ui Pen, one box for each of them. But no more of this.

In addition, he sent invitations for a party on the third day of the month to Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Eunuch Directors Liu and Hsüeh, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, and Wang the Third, ten persons in all. He also engaged troupes of vaudeville performers and musicians, as well as four singing girls, for the occasion.

On that day, Meng Yü-lou went to Yüeh-niang's room to hand over the household accounts, which she had finished reckoning, to Hsi-men Ch'ing, in the expectation that he would turn them over to Chin-lien, so that she would no longer be responsible for handling the household expenses.

While there, she enquired of Yüeh-niang, "First Lady, after taking that medicine yesterday, are you feeling any better?"

"No wonder people say that all a wanton woman needs is to have a man fondle her wrist," remarked Yüeh-niang. "Today I'm feeling fine. I no longer have a headache, and my abdomen no longer feels distended."

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "First Lady, it would seem that all you needed was that touch."

Sister-in-law Wu also laughed at this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing came in at this juncture to ask Yüeh-niang's opinion on the managing of the accounts, and Yüeh-niang said, "Hand them over to whoever's turn it is, that's all. Why are you asking me about it? Who cares who they are turned over to?"

Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing weigh out thirty taels of silver and thirty strings of cash and turn them over to Chin-lien to manage.

But no more of this.

After some time, Ch'iao Hung arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him in the reception hall and explained, thus and so, what had happened, showing him the order of appointment he had obtained from Prefect Hu Shih-wen, which confirmed that he had been appointed as an honorary prefectural official, in return for the customary donation of "thirty piculs of white rice," to be used for the logistic needs of border defense.

He was utterly delighted by this and promptly bowed in thanks to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I am much beholden to you, Kinsman, for your efforts on my behalf.

Permit me to offer you an obeisance in gratitude."²⁰

He then called in Ch'iao T'ung and told him to take the order of appointment home for him, after which, he turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "In the future, should you invite me to a formal engagement, I will be entitled to wear the cap and girdle of an official and can thus presume to keep your other guests company."

"On the third, Kinsman" said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I hope that, whatever you do, you will deign to come by early."

When they had finished their tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'in-t'ung to set up a table in his studio in the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard and invited Ch'iao Hung to accompany him there, where it was somewhat warmer, and they could also take advantage of a recessed brazier.

Once Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung were seated there, face to face, Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Yesterday, Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, hosted a banquet here, to which they invited His Honor Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, who turned out to be highly gratified. Tomorrow, he is leaving for the capital, and my colleagues and I will have to go out to the suburbs to see him off before returning home."

The table had just been wiped off, and an assortment of dishes was about to be served, when who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, who had collected some contributions and had Ying Pao bring them in a box to present to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"These are the congratulatory contributions from the gentlemen concerned," he explained.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the box to have a look and saw that the first name was that of the Taoist Abbot Wu Tsung-che, followed by the names of Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T'ien-hua, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Pai Lai-ch'iang, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, and Tu the Third, ten contributors in all.

"For my part," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I am also inviting my kinsmen Wu the Second, and Brother-in-law Shen, as well as Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i and Hua Tzu-yu, who live outside the city gate, my three managers, and Licentiate Wen. There will be twenty or more of us altogether, and you are all invited to come here on the fourth."

He then directed an attendant to take the contributions back to the rear compound and sent Ch'in-t'ung to take a horse and go invite Wu K'ai to join them in order to keep Ch'iao Hung company.

He went on to ask, "Is Master Wen Pi-ku at home or not?"

"Master Wen is not at home," responded Lai-an. "Early this morning, he went out to visit a friend."

Before long, Wu K'ai arrived, and they were joined by Ch'en Ching-chi, so there were five of them sitting down together to have a drink. A variety of hot dishes to go with the wine, and bowls of soup, were arrayed upon the table, including, as might be expected, pig's feet and sheep's head; roasted, stewed, boiled, and sautéed chicken, fish, goose, and duck; and other supplementary dishes.

While they were enjoying their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Wu K'ai about Ch'iao Hung's occasion for congratulation, saying, "Today, he has received his order of appointment as an honorary prefectural official. Someday soon, we should prepare gifts, and inscribe a scroll, in order to express our felicitations over his ascension to the prefectural bureaucracy."

"You embarrass me," protested Ch'iao Hung. "What sort of appointment is this, that I should presume to put you gentlemen to so much trouble?"

At this juncture, there suddenly arrived a messenger from the district yamen, who had been deputed to deliver copies of the new calendar for the coming year, a total of 250 copies in all. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent a note in reply, tipped the messenger, and sent him on his way.

"We haven't yet seen the new calendar," said Ying Po-chüeh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing broke open a package of fifty calendars and divided them up between Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Ch'iao Hung. Ying Po-chüeh, on taking a look at one of them, saw that the new year had been designated as the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period, and that the first month was to be an intercalary month. But we will say no more about how they enjoyed themselves at the party that day:

Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.

They continued drinking until the evening, when Ch'iao Hung was the first to get up and go home. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Wu K'ai company until the first watch before the party broke up.

Hsi-men Ch'ing issued orders to his attendants, saying, "Stand by with my horse early in the morning, and go and invite His Honor Ho Yung-shou to join me here, so we can proceed together to the suburbs to see off His Excellency Hou Meng. Also, designate four orderlies, along with Lai-an and Ch'un Hung, to accompany the sedan chair of the First Lady on her visit to the Hsia household."

When he had finished speaking, he went to the quarters of P'an Chin-lien. Before he entered her room, the woman had:

Removed her headdress,

Carelessly coiled her raven locks,

Left her flowery countenance in disarray,

And neglected to apply rouge and powder.

She was lying with her clothes on, sprawled on the surface of the bed, and had not lit any lamps in the room, so everything was very still. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came into the room, he first called for Ch'un-mei, but there was no response. Upon seeing the woman lying on the bed, he called to her, but she did not make a sound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on the bed and said, "You crazy oily mouth! Why are you carrying on this way, refusing to answer?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled her up from her reclining position with one hand and said, "What are you so resentful about?"

The woman, putting on a succession of deliberate acts, twisted her face into a grimace and allowed an endless cascade of tears to roll down her fragrant cheeks.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, even though he had been forged out of iron or stone, could not help feeling his heart soften.

Embracing her by the neck with one hand, he enquired of her, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! You're perfectly fine. Why did the two of you get into such an altercation for no good reason?"

The woman refused to reply for what seemed like half a day before saying, "Who began any altercation with her? It was she who came up with an excuse for finding fault with me, accusing me, in front of other people, of being an inveterate husband-monopolizer and man-hunter, whom you had picked up somewhere; whereas she is the genuine article, and your legitimate wife. Who told you to come to my room, and for what purpose? You should stick to her, that's all. That way, I won't be able to monopolize you. She claims that whenever you come home, you insist on coming to pester me in this room of mine. Luckily, I heard her say that with my own ears. Have you really been spending the last few nights in this room of mine? How can anyone be so:

Barefaced and red-eyed,

as to engage in such backbiting? And as for that fur coat, she is critical of me for asking you for it on my own initiative, without mentioning it to her beforehand. Am I a slave or a maidservant of yours, that I should have to go to your room and kowtow to you when I want something? And as for that little piece of mine, who abused that lousy blind whore, she criticizes me for not disciplining her. Why should she insist on making such a fuss about it? If you were a real man, and wanted to do so, you could settle the matter with a single blow of your fist, and thereby dispense with all this:

Idle chatter and superfluous talk.²¹

No doubt I ought to be:

Content to abide by my humble lot.

As the saying goes:

What is cheaply purchased

is cheap when sold;

What is easily acquired is

easily relinquished.

Since I was taken into your household merely to be your concubine, my status is unpropitious. It has always been true that:

Good people are subject to being gulled;²²

Good horses are subject to being ridden.²³

That's just the way it is. If you take a look at the facts of the situation, who was it who, for fear of offending her, spent the night in someone else's quarters? Who was it who, on her behalf, sent for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i? Who was it who allowed himself to be persuaded to do everything she asked? Meanwhile, it was I who was left to suffer in my room here:

On the far side of the mountains of Hell,

where I might just as well have died, for all anyone else cared. All this simply reveals what kind of a heart she possesses. On top of which, I was forced to hold back my tears, go back to the rear compound, and offer her an apology for my misconduct."

As she spoke, an incessant flow of pearly tears rolled down her peach-flower cheeks, and she fell into Hsi-men Ch'ing's arms:

Sobbing and wailing,

as she wiped the mucus from her nose and tried to dry her tears.

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her on the one hand, and admonished her on the other, saying, "That's enough, my child. I've had too many things on my mind the last few days. The two of you ought to be more circumspect in what you say to each other. You can hardly expect me to say which of you is in the right. Last night I wanted to come see you, but she said I was going to apologize to you and wouldn't let me come, so I spent the night in Li Chiao-erh's place. Although I was sleeping with somebody else, I was only thinking of you."

"That's enough," the woman said. "I can see into that heart of yours. You consistently lavish your:

False affection and phony consideration,²⁴

on me; while, all the time, it is really that legitimate wife of yours whom you love. And right now, she is bearing your child. I'm nothing but a stalk of straw. There's no comparison between us."

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! Don't talk such nonsense."

Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'iu-chü, who brought in a serving of tea.

"That lousy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She's hardly sanitary. How come you have her serving the tea?"

He then went on to ask, "Why is Ch'un-mei nowhere to be seen?"

"You still want to ask after Ch'un-mei, do you?" the woman replied. "She's so starved she hardly has a breath of life left in her. She's lying prostrate in the other room. Including today, she's gone three or four days without so much as a sip of soup or water. All she wants to do in there is to die. She says that the way the First Lady abused her as a slave in front of other people has made her:

So angry she scarcely cares whether she is
dead or alive.

She has done nothing but cry for the last three or four days.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he asked, “Is that true?”

“Do you think I'm trying to fool you?” the woman said. “Why don't you go see for yourself?”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, in a state of consternation, went into the adjacent room, where he found Ch'un-mei lying on the k'ang with:

Her fair countenance in disarray, and

Her cloud-shaped chignon all awry.

“You crazy little oily mouth!” Hsi-men Ch'ing called to her. “Why don't you get up?”

Though he called out to her, she did not make a sound and pretended to be asleep. Hsi-men Ch'ing then embraced her with both arms and lifted her up; but Ch'un-mei, stretching her torso while still in a seeming stupor, like:

A carp flexing its tail,

nearly swept Hsi-men Ch'ing off his feet. Fortunately, he had embraced her firmly and was able to prevent himself from falling by leaning against the bedrail.

“Daddy, take your hands off me,” responded Ch'un-mei. “What do you think you're doing coming here to bother with a slave like myself? You'll only soil those two hands of yours.”

“You little oily mouth!” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “So what if the First Lady told you off with a word or two. It's hardly worth your getting so worked up about. I'm told that you haven't had a thing to eat for the last few days.”

“What's it to you whether I eat or not?” retorted Ch'un-mei. “After all, I'm no more than a good-for-nothing slave, whom you might as well let die if she chooses to. Ever since I've been a slave in your household, what business of yours have I ever ruined? I've never given my mistress any reason to rebuke me with so much as a word, or to give me so much as a slap. Merely on behalf of that lousy blind whore, who has been:



Ch'un-mei Manages Coquettishly to Resist Hsi-men Ch'ing

Laid by every man in the street, and
 Fucked by every guy in the alley,
 why should I deserve to be so reviled by the First Lady? She is critical of my mistress for failing to discipline me. No doubt she would have me dragged down and given five strokes with the bamboo on behalf of that blind whore. In the future, if that wife of Han Tao-kuo's fails to come here, so be it. But if she should come, just see what sort of a talking to I'll give her. It was she who sent that blind whore here, so she is the root of the problem."

"Even if it was she who sent her here," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was with the best of intentions. Who could have known that she would be the cause of such a quarrel?"

"If she had only been a little more accommodating," said Ch'un-mei. "I rebuked her with the best of intentions, but she was too narrow-minded to take it."

"When I came in, just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't you pour out a cup of tea for me? That slave's hands are unclean. I wouldn't drink any tea that she poured."

Ch'un-mei responded by saying:

"Since Butcher Wang is dead and gone,
 One must eat pork with the bristles.

Right now, while I am in here, so weak I can hardly walk, you would have me pour your tea, would you?"

"You crazy little oily mouth!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who told you not to eat anything anyway?"

He then went on to say, "Let's move into the other room. I haven't had anything to eat yet either. I'll have Ch'iu-chü go back to the kitchen in the rear compound and bring us some food. They can pour us some wine, bake some stuffed pastries, and heat some soup flavored with pickled fish for us to eat." Thereupon:

Without permitting any further argument,²⁵

he took hold of Ch'un-mei's hand and dragged her into Chin-lien's room next door, where he ordered Ch'iu-chü to take a box back to the rear compound and bring them some dishes of food to go with their rice.

Before long, she came back with a square box of delicacies, containing a bowl of braised pig's head, a bowl of slow-boiled mutton, a bowl of blanched chicken, and a bowl of sautéed fresh fish, along with a supply of white rice. There were also four bowls of side dishes to go with the wine, consisting of jellyfish, bean sprouts, potted pork, dried shrimp, and the like. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to sprinkle some euryale seeds²⁶ over the potted pork, add some marinated bamboo shoots and leeks, and mix these ingredients into a large bowl of savory wonton soup. A table was set up, the dishes were placed upon it, the bowls were filled with rice, and a box of baked stuffed pastries was provided.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chin-lien:

Sat down shoulder to shoulder,

while Ch'un-mei placed herself to one side and proceeded to share their repast. The three of them fell to drinking together:

First a cup for you,

Then a cup for me,

until the first watch, before the party broke up and they went to bed.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early. As prearranged, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came to join him, and they enjoyed a pick-me-up, before setting out for the suburbs together in order to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng.

Back at home, Wu Yüeh-ning first sent a present ahead and then dressed herself up, seated herself in a large sedan chair, and set out, with orderlies shouting to clear the way, and accompanied by Lai-an and Ch'un-hung, for the home of Hsia Yen-ling, in order to attend a party, and pay a visit to his wife. But no more of this.

Tai-an and Wang Ching were left at home to look after the place. Whom should they see that afternoon but Dame Wang, the proprietress of the teahouse in front of the district yamen, who brought with her Ho the Ninth.

When they arrived at the front gate, she asked Tai-an, "Is His Honor at home or not?"

"Dame Wang and the venerable Ho the Ninth, what a surprise!" exclaimed Tai-an. "What wind has blown you this way today?"

"Without a reason for doing so," responded Dame Wang, "we would scarcely have ventured to:

Dawdle at your door or loiter at your gate.

I would not have come today were it not for a problem that has arisen for Ho the Ninth's younger brother, for whose sake I have ventured to seek a favor from His Honor."

"His Honor has gone to see off His Excellency Hou Meng today," explained Tai-an, "and the First Lady is also not at home. If you will wait here a minute, I will go inside and speak to the Fifth Lady about it."

It was not long after he went inside before he came out again and said, "The Fifth Lady invites you to come in."

"How would I dare go in by myself?" said Dame Wang. "You had better escort me. I am afraid of the dog."

Tai-an escorted her into the garden and right up to the door of Chin-lien's quarters, where he lifted aside the portiere for her. When Dame Wang went inside, she found the woman wearing her usual toque on her head, and dressed in clothing of brocaded silk. She was made up so that she looked to be:

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,

and was in her room, sitting on the k'ang, with her feet propped on the rim of the brazier, cracking melon seeds in her mouth. Within the room:

The drapes are made of embroidered brocade,

The bed is incised with gold ornamentation,

Rare antiques vie with each other in beauty,

Vanity cases gleam brightly in the sunlight.

Upon entering the room, Dame Wang felt obliged to make an obeisance to her, which threw the woman into such consternation that she returned the salutation, saying, "My venerable friend, there is no need for that."

When Dame Wang had performed her obeisance, she sat down on the edge of the k'ang, and the woman asked, "How is it that it has been such a long time since I saw you last?"

"I have thought about you, my lady," responded Dame Wang, "but I have not presumed to intrude upon you."

She then went on to ask, "Have you borne a son, or not?"

"It would have been great if I had," the woman said. "I have had two miscarriages, but neither of them survived."

She then went on to ask, "Has your son gotten married?"

"I haven't started looking for a wife for him yet," said Dame Wang. "He was working for a merchant from the Huai River region but has been home now for more than a year. He has, somehow or other, accumulated enough capital for a small business and has bought a donkey, which he uses to grind flour, the sale of which gives him enough to get by on. I'll find a wife for him sooner or later."

She then went on to ask, "Is His Honor not at home?"

"Father has gone outside the city gate today," the woman said, "in order to join his fellow officials in seeing someone off. The First Lady is also not at home. What did you want to talk to him about?"

"The venerable Ho the Ninth has a matter that he asked me to come and speak to His Honor about," said Dame Wang. "His younger brother, Ho the Tenth, has been implicated in a case of thievery and is currently under arrest in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where his case is due to be tried by the commissioner. He is accused of acting as a fence for stolen goods, but he has nothing to do with the matter. He hopes that His Honor will let him off the hook when the matter comes before the bench. If the thieves try to implicate him again, and His Honor rejects the accusation, that will take care of it. If Ho the Tenth is set free, he will purchase gifts and see that His Honor is handsomely rewarded. I have his explanatory note here."

When the woman had read the explanatory note, she said, "Leave it with me. When Father comes home, I'll show it to him."

"The venerable Ho the Ninth is waiting out front," said Dame Wang. "Tomorrow, I'll have him come to seek an answer."

The woman told Ch'iu-ch'ü to bring some tea, and before long she brought in a cup of tea and gave it to Dame Wang to drink.

As Dame Wang sat there, she said, "My lady, you're certainly enjoying an ample degree of prosperity."

"What's so ample about it?" the woman responded. "It would be all right if it weren't for all the resentment; but the squabbling goes on all day around here, without ever coming to an end."

"My lady," objected Dame Wang, "you have only to:

Open your mouth when the food is served,²⁷ and

Rinse your hands when the water arrives.

Since you:

Are studded with gold and decked with silver,

and have:

Slaves and maidservants at your beck and call,

what reason do you have to be resentful?"

"As the sayings aptly put it," the woman said, "if there are:

Three nests where there's only room for two,

and they contain:

Both legitimate wives and lowly concubines,²⁸

A pair of serving spoons in the same crock,

Will either bump or rub against each other.

How can there fail to be some friction?"

"My good lady," said Dame Wang, "no one else is as smart as you are. So long as His Honor continues to enjoy such prosperous times, where your personal consumption is concerned, you need only:

Deal with matters as they occur."

She then went on to say, "Tomorrow, I'll have him come to seek an answer."

Thereupon, she said farewell and got up to go.

"My venerable friend," said the woman, "why don't you stay a little longer before you go?"

"That would be an imposition on Ho the Ninth, who is waiting for me," said Dame Wang. "I won't stay any longer but will come and see you another day."

The woman did not endeavor to detain her any further, but let her go.

When she got to the gate, she also reminded Tai-an why she had come, and he reassured her, saying, "You can go on home, venerable dame. When Father comes home, I'll speak to him about it."

"Brother Tai-an," said Ho the Ninth, "I'll come early tomorrow morning to seek an answer."

Thereupon, he went off together with Dame Wang.

That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, Tai-an told him about the matter.

Upon going to Chin-lien's quarters, he read the explanatory note and turned it over to an attendant, saying, "Remind me about this when I get to the yamen tomorrow."

He then instructed Ch'en Ching-chi to take care of sending out the invitations for the following day, the third of the month; and also, without informing Ch'un-mei, sent Ch'in-t'ung to deliver a tael of silver and a box of delicacies to the home of Han Tao-kuo, and explain that they were intended to mollify Second Sister Shen's resentment.

Wang Liu-erh received them with an ingratiating smile and said, "She would not dare to harbor resentment. Tell your master and mistress that she is sorry to have offended the young lady, Ch'un-mei."

But no more of this.

That evening, when Yüeh-niang arrived home, she was wearing a fur coat of white ermine, over a brocaded jacket, and a skirt of blue brocade; and riding in a large sedan chair, accompanied by four orderlies bearing lanterns. Upon arriving home, she first greeted Sister-in-law Wu and the others and then went to salute Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in the master suite drinking wine.

"When Hsia Yen-ling's wife saw that I had come," she reported, "she was as pleased as could be and expressed her thanks for our lavish gifts. There were many female guests, both relatives and neighbors, there today. It so happens that she has received a letter from

Hsia Yen-ling, along with a letter for you, which she will have delivered to you tomorrow. They are scheduled to depart on the sixth or seventh of the month and have already hired carts in which to transport the entire household to the capital. She repeatedly requested that we allow Pen the Fourth to escort them to the capital, from which he would return immediately. Pen the Fourth's daughter, Chang-chieh, kowtowed to me today. She has grown up, and developed quite an attractive figure. It was no wonder that she kept stealing glances at me as she stood to my side to serve the tea. I did not recognize her. It was only when Hsia Yen-ling's wife, who has renamed her as Jui-yün, said to her, 'Come over and kowtow to the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing,' that she put down the tea tray and proceeded to kowtow to me four times. I presented her with two floral ornaments of gold. By this time Hsia Yen-ling's wife has developed a real fondness for her and has raised her status above that of a mere concubine, treating her as though she were her own daughter."

"That child is certainly lucky," Hsi-men Ch'ing remarked sardonically. "She could scarcely have expected to be treated so indulgently at anyone else's hands. Who else would not only have refrained from cursing her as a slave, and peppering her with abuse, but also have been willing to elevate her status?"

Yüeh-niang gave him a look and said, "Why you filthy-mouthed good-for-nothing! No doubt you refer to the fact that I have been known to castigate your favorite concubine."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and then went on to ask, "If she borrows Pen the Fourth to escort the family to the capital, who will take charge of my silk goods store?"

"You might as well close the shop for a few days," said Yüeh-niang.

"Closing the shop for a few days would be bad for business," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As we approach the New Year's festival, silk goods and sewing supplies are selling fast. How can we afford to close the shop? I'll have to decide about it another day."

When they had finished their conversation, Yüeh-niang went into her boudoir, where she doffed her outer clothes and removed her headgear. She then entered the parlor next door and sat down to visit with Sister-in-law Wu and the others, while the members of the household, high and low, all came in to pay their respects and kowtow to her. That evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound.

Early the next morning, he went off to the yamen. Who should appear at this juncture but Ho the Ninth, who came to ask Tai-an about the answer to his request and presented him with a tael of silver.

Tai-an explained the situation to him, thus and so, saying, "Yesterday, when Father came home, I told him about your request; and today he has gone to the yamen, where he will exonerate your brother and set him free. You can go to the gate of the yamen and wait for him there."

Upon hearing this, Ho the Ninth was as pleased as could be and set off immediately for the yamen.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the yamen, he took his place on the bench, ordered the thieves in the case to be haled before him, and had each of them put in the ankle-squeezers and given twenty strokes of the bamboo, so severely that:

Fresh blood flowed down their legs.

After dismissing the accusation against Ho the Tenth and setting him free, he proceeded to arrest a monk from the Hung-hua Temple to take his place, on the trumped up charge that he had sheltered the thieves in his temple overnight. Can there actually be such cases of injustice in this world? Truly:

Mr. Chang drinks wine, but Mr. Li

gets drunk;

The mulberry branch is cut with a knife,

but the willow bark is scarred.²⁹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The destiny of the Sung dynasty was
coming to an end;

The holders of judicial appointments
were so dishonest.

Since the scrutiny of the cosmos can
not to be evaded;

It will ultimately dispel the turbid
and exalt the pure.

For the party that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing engaged the services of four singing girls, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, Hung the Fourth, and Ch'i Hsiang-erh. They arrived before noon, with their costume bags in hand, and trooped into the master suite, where they kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and the others. Yüeh-niang saw that they were provided with a serving of tea, after which, they began to play their instruments and sing for the entertainment of Sister-in-law Wu, Yüeh-niang, and the others. Whom should they see at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who suddenly came into the room after returning from the yamen. The four singing girls all put down their instruments, came forward with ingratiating smiles, and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.

After he had sat down, Yüeh-niang asked, "Why is it that you have only now returned from the yamen?"

"I had to preside over quite a few cases today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then turned to Chin-lien and said, "With regard to that matter of the younger brother of Ho the Ninth that Dame Wang came to intercede for yesterday; I have already exonerated him and set him free today. Those two thieves continued to implicate him, but I had them each given twenty strokes with the bamboo and subjected to the squeezers, and then arrested a monk from a temple outside the city walls to take his place. Tomorrow, I'll fill out the documents in the case, and have them sent to Tung-p'ing prefecture.

"I also had to deal with a case of illicit fornication between a mother-in-law and her son-in-law. The son-in-law is still young, not

more than thirty-odd years of age, and is named Sung Te. He married into his wife's family in order to care for her parents and will not return to his own. Subsequently, his mother-in-law died, and his father-in-law remarried a Ms. Chou, who so exhausted him that he died less than a year later. This Ms. Chou is still young and, finding it difficult to maintain her chastity, resorted to constantly carrying on with her son-in-law so outrageously that the members of the household became aware of it, and she found herself in an untenable position.

"One day, while Sung Te was escorting his mother-in-law into the country to pay a visit to her natal family, Ms. Chou said to him, 'Although you and I are not guilty of any transgression:

We have an unearned reputé for doing so."³⁰

Since we are passing through these deserted hills, why don't the two of us take advantage of the opportunity to:

Consummate a conjugal relationship?"³¹

Sung Te thereupon proceeded to fornicate with her. After returning from this visit to her natal family, the two of them continued to commit fornication with each other on a regular basis. Later on, after she had punished one of her maidservants, the maid told her neighbors what was going on, and they lodged an accusation against them. Today, after obtaining their depositions, I have had them remanded to Tung-p'ing prefecture. Once they get there, since they are guilty of the crime of fornication between a son-in-law and mother-in-law, thus falling within the fifth degree of mourning relationships,³² the penalty for both parties is strangulation."

"If it were up to me," said P'an Chin-lien, "I would not think it excessive to have that tale-bearing maidservant beaten to a pulp and sentenced to death.

If you don the black livery of a servant,

You must cling to even the blackest post.

With a single sentence, she brought ruin upon her employers."

"I did submit that slave to some severe treatment with the squeezers," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Merely on account of a temporary peccadillo on their part, that slave will be responsible for the death of the two of them."

Yüeh-ning responded to this by saying:

"If superiors act improperly, their subordinates

will fail to respect them."³³

If the bitch does not wag her tail,

Dogs will not attempt to mount her."³⁴

Generally speaking, it is the depravity of the woman that is at fault. If they are chaste, who would dare to molest them?"

The four singing girls all laughed at this, saying, "What Mother says is right enough. Even we singing girls inside the quarter must avoid taking on the friends of our patrons. How much the more should this be true for women on the outside."

After this conversational exchange was completed, a meal was provided for Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of drums and music coming from the reception hall in the front compound, indicating that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome him into the reception hall. After exchanging the conventional amenities, he thanked his visitor for his lavish gifts, and they sat down in the positions of guest and host.

After tea had been served, Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, thus and so, "Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien received your explanatory note and immediately agreed to your request. You are to be congratulated, and your promotion should occur in the near future."

Upon hearing this, Ching Chung turned around, got up from his seat, and bowed to express his thanks, saying, "I have put you to a lot of trouble venerable sir. Your efforts on my behalf will be:

Imprinted in my heart, never to be forgotten."

Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "I also put in a word or two on behalf of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is sure to take appropriate action."

As they were talking, it was suddenly announced that Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived, and they were conducted inside to the accompaniment of drums and music. Hsi-men Ch'ing descended the steps to welcome them into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities. The two eunuchs were both dressed in python robes of blue silk with a raised pattern, wore jeweled chatelaines, and proceeded to take their places at the center of the seating arrangement.

After this, Commandant Chou Hsiu arrived and sat down to join in the conversation.

Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung addressed Commandant Chou Hsiu, saying, "Ssu-ch'üan is really magnanimous. The other day, when Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien hosted a farewell banquet for His Excellency Hou Meng at his place here, he took advantage of the occasion to sing your praises to Censor Sung, and he promised to keep you in mind. A lofty promotion for you is imminent."

Commandant Chou also bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and expressed no end of gratitude.

Later on, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou, Wang the Third, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, and Ch'iao Hung all arrived, one after the other.

On coming in the gate, Ch'iao Hung wore his newly acquired official cap and girdle and was accompanied by four attendants in black livery. After greeting the assembled company, he proceeded to bow four times to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was sitting in an oversize chair.

The assembled guests asked about the occasion for celebration, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "In return for the customary donation, my kinsman has just received the gracious distinction of appointment as an honorary prefectural official."

“Since he is a relative of Ssu-ch’üan’s,” said Commandant Chou Hsiu, “the rest of us should all tender our congratulations.”

“I appreciate the good will of you venerable gentlemen,” said Ch’iao Hung, “but I can hardly presume to put you to any trouble.”

When this exchange was completed, they all took their seats in order of precedence, while a round of tea was served, after which, they prepared to take their places at the banquet table.

Before the brocade screens, tortoiseshell
mats are spread;
In the painted chamber, valuable antiques
vie in splendor.
Beneath the steps, the tones of pipes and
voices resound;
Upon the table, platters of exotic fruits
are displayed.

In a while, when the wine was served and everyone had been assigned a seat, the servants of the various households came forward to take charge of the outer garments of their masters, and the guests sat down in their places.

Wang the Third repeatedly expressed his diffidence over taking a seat among them, but Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “It’s just an informal get-together here in my humble abode. It is appropriate for you to keep the other gentlemen company on this occasion.”

Wang the Third felt that he had no alternative but to hang his head and sit down to one side.

Before long, after soup and rice had been served, the chef came out to carve the entrée of roast goose and offer a selection of side dishes. Meanwhile, below the steps, the musicians from the Music Offices presented a number of ensemble dance pieces, followed by tumbling performances, vaudeville acts, and a comic farce, after which the four singing girls sedately appeared and proceeded to pay their respects to the company.

Every one of them is made up to present
a flowery countenance;
Each one sports an immortal’s raiment,
pearls, and trinkets.
With silver psalteries and jade mandolas,
they sing voluptuously;
In their hugging turquoise and clinging red,
they laugh incessantly.

Truly:

Amid dancers’ skirts and singers’ clappers
one is forever seeking novelty;
But when all one’s yellow gold is spent
nothing but one’s body remains.
A word of advice to wealthy young men:
“Don’t spend it all too fast;
The practice of economy is like good medicine,
for it can cure poverty.”³⁵

We will say no more about how, that day, Eunuch Director Liu occupied the seat of honor and distributed extravagant amounts of silver. They continued drinking wine and enjoying themselves until the first watch before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch’ing provided gratuities for the musicians and sent them on their way, while the four singing girls went back to the master suite to play and sing for Yüeh-niang and her female companions. Yüeh-niang invited Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight and sent the other three singing girls home. On their way out, they ran into Hsi-men Ch’ing, who was still in the reception hall, and paid their respects to him.

Hsi-men Ch’ing said to Cheng Ai-yüeh, “Tomorrow, bring Li Kuei-chieh with you, so the two of you can sing for us.”

Cheng Ai-yüeh realized that because Wang the Third had been there that day, Li Kuei-chieh had not been invited to sing, and laughed, saying, “Father, it’s rather late in the game:

The wall of the Warden’s Office³⁶ having collapsed:
the miscreant has escaped.”³⁷

She then went on to ask, “Who have you invited to your party tomorrow?”

“They’re all relatives and friends,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If that beggar Ying the Second is here,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh, “I won’t come. I have no wish to set eyes on that ugly monstrosity of an adversary.”

“He won’t be here tomorrow,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“As long as he isn’t here, it will be all right,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh. “But if that crazy chunk of knife-bait is here, I won’t come.”

Having spoken, she kowtowed to him and went nonchalantly off without more ado.

After Hsi-men Ch’ing had seen to the clearing away of the utensils, he went to Li P’ing-erh’s quarters and went to bed with Ju-i. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

Early the next day, Hsi-men Ch’ing went to the yamen and had the culprits in the two criminal cases he had dealt with the day

before remanded to Tung-p'ing prefecture to stand trial. He then went home to host his party.

Those who were invited included Abbot Wu Tsung-che, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han Ming-ch'uan, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh and the other members of the brotherhood of ten, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Tu the Third, and Hsi-men Ch'ing's three business managers. Twelve tables were set up for the guests, while the three powdered-faces, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh, served the wine, and the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, played and sang for their entertainment.

Just as the wine was being poured, P'ing-an suddenly came in and reported, "Uncle Yün the Second has just succeeded to his elder brother's official position and has come to pay his respects to Father and deliver some gifts."

Upon hearing this news, Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly said, "Invite him to come in."

When Yün Li-shou appeared, he was formally attired in a round-collared robe of black satin with a mandarin square, and a girdle with a plaque of gold around his waist. He was followed by his attendants, bearing the gifts. The first thing he did was to give Hsi-men Ch'ing a card to read, on which was written:

Your protégé Yün Li-shou, who has just succeeded to the post of vice commander of the Left Guard in Ch'ing-ho district of Shantung province, presents his compliments with a hundred salutations, while deferentially proffering the local products, ten sable skins, one saltwater fish, one packet of dried shrimp, four preserved geese, ten preserved ducks, and two sets of oil-paper drapes, as a meager expression of his respect.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to accept the gifts and hastened to express his thanks.

"I only arrived home yesterday," said Yün Li-shou, "and today, I have come especially to pay my respects to Your Honor."

Thereupon, he proceeded to perform:

Four brace makes eight kowtows,

saying:

"My obligation to you could not be greater.

As for these paltry local products:

They are no more than tokens of my esteem."

After this, he proceeded to exchange the customary amenities and pay his respects to the rest of the company. When Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that he now held office as an official, he treated him differently from before, seating him at the same table with Brother-in-law Wu the Second, promptly seeing to it that he was provided with a wine goblet, chopsticks, and servings of soup and rice, and that his attendants were also provided with platters of assorted snacks as well as meat and wine. He then went on to ask him about the funeral arrangements for his elder brother, and his inheritance of his official post.

Yün Li-shou then explained in detail how the minister of war, Yü Shen, had been so affected by the fact that his elder brother had died of illness at his post on the frontier that he had mandated not only that his right to succeed to his elder brother's hereditary post should be honored, but that he also be appointed to the position of vice commander of the local guard.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was pleased at this, saying, "Congratulations! Congratulations! On a day to come, I will be sure to come and offer my felicitations."

That day, each member of the company toasted him with a cup of wine, and the three singing girls kept refilling his goblet, so that it was not long before Yün Li-shou was drunk. Ying Po-chüeh too, at his place at the table, appeared just like a puppet on its strings, constantly jumping up and sitting down, while teasing Li Kuei-chieh and Cheng Ai-yüeh so that their mutual badinage seemed as though it would never come to an end.

One of them ridiculed him, saying, "Your affectation is about as incongruous as a left-hand Gate God masquerading with a white face,³⁸ you profligate good-for-nothing."

While the other one taunted him as an ugly monstrosity of an adversary, as unsightly as:

Chu Pa-chieh, sitting in a homeless shelter.³⁹

To which Ying Po-chüeh retorted in kind, saying, "As for you two sl/imy kn/aves,⁴⁰ your grimy features are utterly repulsive."⁴¹

We will say no more about the fun and laughter at the party that day as they enjoyed themselves:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade, until

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.

It was the second watch that night before the party broke up, the three singing girls went their way, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the master suite to spend the night.

The next day, he got up late, ate some congee in the master suite, got dressed, and prepared to go pay a visit to Yün Li-shou.

Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Pen the Fourth is in the front compound and would like to discuss something with you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that it must be about escorting Hsia Yen-ling's dependents to the capital and went out to meet him in the reception hall.

Pen the Fourth pulled a letter from Commander Hsia Yen-ling out of his sleeve and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling would like to have me escort his dependents to the capital, after which, I could return without delay. I have come to ask Your Honor whether I should go or not."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had glanced at the language in the letter and saw that it merely expressed regret over their separation, thanked him for looking after his dependents, early and late, and asked if he could avail himself of Pen the Fourth's services to escort them to the capital, he said, "Since he has asked you to do so, there is no reason for you not to go."

He then went on to ask, "When do they plan to start out?"

"This morning," responded Pen the Fourth, "a servant from His Honor's household summoned me, and I was told that they had made definite plans to get into their vehicles and start out on the sixth, which means that I should be able to return by mid-month."

When he had finished speaking, he turned over the keys to the shop on Lion Street to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"While you are gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have Brother-in-law Wu the Second take your place in the shop for a couple of days."

Only then did Pen the Fourth bid him farewell, walk out the gate, and go home to pack his luggage.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then donned his formal attire, went out the gate, and set out to call on Commander Yün Li-shou, with a retinue of servants following his horse.

That day it was time for Sister-in-law Wu to return home, and a sedan chair had been engaged to wait for her outside the gate, but this was one of those occasions when:

Something was bound to happen.

Yüeh-niang had filled two gift boxes with a variety of delicacies and was in the master suite preparing to see off Sister-in-law Wu. When she escorted her out the gate to get into her sedan chair, whom should they see but the page boy Hua-t'ung, who was lurking in the saddle room beside the gate, crying his head off. P'ing-an was doing his best to restrain him, but the harder he pulled at the youngster, the louder he cried, and the disturbance was overheard by Yüeh-niang and the others.

After seeing Sister-in-law Wu into her sedan chair and sending her off, Yüeh-niang turned to P'ing-an and demanded, "You lousy jailbird! Why are you pulling at him that way for no good reason? It's only causing him to cry more dementedly than ever."

"Licentiate Wen from across the street has called for him," said P'ing-an, "but he simply refuses to go and is reviling me instead."

"Tell him he must resign himself to going," said Yüeh-niang.

Then, turning to Hua-t'ung, she said, "My child, when Master Wen summons you over there, you simply ought to go. What are you crying about?"

Hua-t'ung continued to protest to P'ing-an, saying, "It's none of your business. I won't go, that's all. What are you tugging me about for?"

"Why won't you go?" asked Yüeh-niang, but the page boy refused to answer.

"This little jailbird," declared Chin-lien, "is nothing but a stiff-necked, sycophantic rascal. When Mother asks you a question, how can you refuse to answer?"

P'ing-an stepped forward at this point and gave him a slap on the face, but the page boy only cried the louder.

"You crazy jailbird!" interjected Yüeh-niang. "Why did you slap him for no good reason? Give him a chance to explain himself. Why do you refuse to go?"

Just as they were interrogating him, who should appear but Tai-an, who came in the gate on horseback.

"Has Father come home?" Yüeh-niang asked him.

"Uncle Yün Li-shou has kept him there for a drink," replied Tai-an. "He sent me home with his formal clothes and wants me to take his felt cap back to him."

When he saw the way that Hua-t'ung was crying, he asked him, "Little gentleman, how can you carry on so frantically, as though your tears would suffice to tear down a wall or fill in a pit?"

"Licentiate Wen from across the street has called for him," explained P'ing-an, "but he refuses to go and has chosen to cry and rail at me instead."

"Brother," said Tai-an, "if Master Wen is calling for you, you'd better be on your guard. His name puns with the words 'warm buttocks,' and he can hardly last a day without enjoying a pair of warm buttocks. But since you've put up with his attentions so far, why are you trying to avoid him today?"

"You crazy jailbird!" protested Yüeh-niang. "What do you mean by all this about warm buttocks?"

"You'd better ask him, Mother," responded Tai-an.

As for P'an Chin-lien:

Before she even got wind of anything,

She was ready for the rain.

Calling Hua-t'ung over to her, she said to him, "Little slave, tell us the truth about it. What does he want with you? If you refuse to tell us, I'll have Mother give you a beating."

She pressed the page boy so hard that he became agitated and said, "All he ever wants from me is to insert that thing of his into my asshole. It's gotten so swollen that it hurts. When I ask him to pull it out as quickly as possible, he refuses to retract it and insists on moving it back and forth. I finally pulled it out myself and ran over here to escape him, but he insists on calling me back."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she shouted at him, "You crazy little louse of a slave! You'd better get out of here. And as for you, Sister Six, your insistence on interrogating him has solicited this unspeakably obscene talk. Not knowing what was coming, and assuming that it would be in acceptable language, I bent my ear to listen to it. This gentleman is really a good-for-nothing, unfit for decent company. When we lend him the services of a page boy, he has the gall to commit such offenses behind our backs."

"First Lady," said Chin-lien, "not only do persons fit for decent company commit such deeds; even beggars in their homeless shelters are known to do such things."

"That southerner has a wife," remarked Meng Yü-lou. "How can he conduct himself so shamelessly?"

"The whole time he's been here," said Chin-lien, "we haven't caught so much as a glimpse of his wife. How can that be?"

"How can that be?" responded Tai-an. "You ladies are unlikely to see her at best. Whenever he goes out, he locks the door behind him. In the last half year, the only time I've seen her is the one time she took a sedan chair to go pay a visit to her mother; and on that occasion, she came back before evening. She practically never ventures outside the gate. At night, she goes out to the gate to empty the commode, that's all."

"That wife of his must be a hopeless wretch," said Chin-lien. "Having married a man like that, I doubt if she ever sees the light of day. I venture to say that, confined to her room that way, it must feel as though she's serving a sentence in the penitentiary."

After discussing it for a while, Yüeh-niang and the rest of them went back to the rear compound.

Upon arriving home around sunset, Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the master suite and sat down.



Hua-t'ung Is Reduced to Tears in Escaping Licentiate Wen

"Did manager Yün Li-shou keep you for a visit?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"When he saw that I had come to call on him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he was so pleased that:

There was nothing he was not prepared to do.⁴²

He set up a table, opened a jug of wine, and invited me to sit down and join him for a drink. At present, since Commander Ching Chung of the local guard has been promoted, he is in line to succeed him as the seal-holding officer. Tomorrow, I am planning to prepare congratulatory gifts for him and Kinsman Ch'iao Hung, and our colleagues have agreed to present them with commemorative scrolls. I'll have to prevail upon Licentiate Wen to draft two appropriate inscriptions and purchase scrolls right away, so he can inscribe

them for us."

"How can you bring yourself to employ any such Licentiate Wen or Licentiate Wu?" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "If you make use of that kind of shameless good-for-nothing, and the word gets out, it will have the effect of showing us in the ugliest possible light."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, it gave him quite a start, and he asked, "What do you mean?"

"There's no need for you to ask me," said Yüeh-niang. "Ask your page boy."

"Which page boy is that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You know perfectly well who it is," said Chin-lien. "It's Hua-t'ung, that lousy little slave. When we went out to see off Sister-in-law Wu, he was crying by the gate and complained, thus and so, about how that southerner, Wen Pi-ku, was abusing him."

On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing remained somewhat incredulous and said, "Call that little slave here so I can interrogate him."

He then sent Tai-an to the front compound to summon Hua-t'ung, who came back to the master suite and knelt down before him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing threatened to subject him to the squeezers and said, "You lousy slave! Tell me the truth. What does he do when he calls for you?"

"He calls for me," said Hua-t'ung, "in order to get me drunk, so he can get down to his dirty business with me. Today, he hurt me so badly that I got away and refused to go back, but he kept sending P'ing-an after me, and P'ing-an was hitting me when Mother came out and saw what was going on. He constantly questions me about the intimate details of what goes on in the private quarters of the ladies of the household, but I refuse to say anything. And yesterday, while Father was hosting a party here, he even tried to induce me to snitch a few silver utensils and give them to him. On another occasion, he went to visit Master Ni P'eng and showed him the text of a letter he had drafted for Father; and Master Ni also showed it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he exclaimed:

"In painting a tiger, you can paint the skin,

but you can't paint the bones;

In knowing people, you can know their faces,

but you can't know their hearts.⁴³

I took him to be a decent human being. Who could have known that he was nothing but:

The skeleton of a dog wrapped in human skin.⁴⁴

What further use do I have for the likes of him?"

He then ordered Hua-t'ung to get up and go, saying, "You don't need to go over there anymore."

Hua-t'ung, accordingly, kowtowed to him and went out to the front compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "It's no wonder that, the other day, our kinsman Chai Ch'ien chided me, saying:

If critical matters are not kept secret

harm will result.

I couldn't think who could have done it at the time, but now it turns out that he was the person guilty of leaking my information to an outsider. How could I have known? What point is there in continuing to keep such a worthless dog-bone of a creature around for no good reason?"

"Who do you think you're telling about it?" said Yüeh-niang. "We don't have any child who requires schooling, so what need is there to maintain someone in the household merely to handle our social correspondence? After all, how much do we have in the way of social correspondence to justify maintaining such a person, only to have him carry on so egregiously, while peddling our secrets to others?"

"Needless to say," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow I'll simply send him packing, that's all."

He then summoned P'ing-an and told him, "Tell the gentleman across the street that your master needs the space he is living in for the storage of merchandise, and that he will have to look for accommodations elsewhere. And if he should come over to see me, stop him at the gate and tell him that I am not at home."

P'ing-an nodded in assent and went back to his post.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Yüeh-niang, "Today, Pen the Fourth came to say goodbye. He is going to leave on the sixth, in order to escort Hsia Yenling's dependents on their way to the Eastern Capital. It occurs to me that, since there won't be anyone in charge of the silk goods store, I might as well ask Brother-in-law Wu the Second to take charge of the store for a few days. One way or the other, he and Lai-chao can take turns, three days at a time, spending the night at the shop, and they can eat together. What do you think?"

"I won't express an opinion," said Yüeh-niang. "It's up to you. You can call on him if you like. I won't interfere, but people may say that I've intervened in favor of my brother."

Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention to this but immediately dispatched Ch'it'ung, telling him, "Go and invite Brother-in-law Wu the Second to come here."

It was not long before Brother-in-law Wu the Second showed up. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him to share a drink in the front reception hall and turned the keys to the shop over to him. The next day, he and Lai-chao proceeded to Lion Street together to open the shop. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Licentiate Wen saw that Hua-t'ung refused all night long to come back and sleep with him, he became apprehensive about the situation.

The next day, P'ing-an came over and said to him, "My master sends his regards to you, but sooner or later he is going to need the space you are occupying to store merchandise and would like you to find accommodations elsewhere."

When Licentiate Wen heard this, he:
Turned pale with consternation,
and realized that Hua-t'ung must have let the cat out of the bag.
Putting on his formal attire, he expressed a desire to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but P'ing-an said, "Father is at the yamen and hasn't come home yet."
When the time he normally came home arrived, Licentiate Wen, garbed in formal attire, came across the street to wait for him and handed a long letter that he had prepared to Ch'in-t'ung, but Ch'in-t'ung refused to accept it, saying, "Father has just returned from the yamen and is tired out. He has gone back to the rear compound to rest, and I would not presume to disturb him."
Only then did Licentiate Wen fully realize that he was being deliberately kept at a distance, and he went to Licentiate Ni P'eng's place to consult about it, after which, he moved his dependents back to his original dwelling place. Truly:

Even if one could draw off all the water
of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away
this day's shame.

No one lacks a beginning, but few
come to a good end;⁴⁵
Friendship as insipid as water is
most likely to last.⁴⁶
From of old, humans do not have a
thousand good days;
Just as flowers do not remain red
after being plucked.⁴⁷

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 77

HSI-MEN CH'ING SLOGS THROUGH THE SNOW TO VISIT CHENG AI-YÜEH; PEN THE FOURTH'S WIFE SITS BY THE WINDOW WAITING FOR A TRYST

Flying oars in their commotion disturb
the early plum blossoms;
Which defy the frigid weather as they
undulate back and forth.
The wind savors their fragile charm,
wafting their fragrance;
The moon enjoys their subtle allure,
enhancing their beauty.
At the Liang court they were portentous
omens for Emperor Hsiao;¹
In the Ch'i palace they were matchmakers
for Consort P'an Yü-nu.²
Unaware of the gut-wrenching heartache
caused by separation;
They only augment one's grief as they
hover above the water.³

THE STORY GOES that when Licentiate Wen realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing would not grant him an interview, he felt ashamed at his own guilt and proceeded forthwith to move his dependents back to his old dwelling place. Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently arranged to have the studio that he had occupied cleaned up and made into a guest room. But no more of this.

One day, Provincial Graduate Shang Hsiao-t'ang came to take his leave before setting out for the capital in order to compete in the *chin-shih* examinations and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing if he could borrow a leather trunk and a felt jacket for the trip. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him while they shared a serving of tea and also presented him with a farewell gift.

He then went on to say, "My kinsman Ch'iao Hung has recently received an appointment as an honorary official, and my associate Yün Li-shou has succeeded to a hereditary post while continuing to hold his current substantive position, and I would like to present them with a pair of commemorative scrolls in celebration of these events. I wonder, venerable sir, if you have any acquaintances whom you might prevail upon to lend a hand for this purpose. Your pupil would see to it that they were appropriately compensated for their efforts."

Shang Hsiao-t'ang laughed, saying, "Venerable sir, what need is there for any compensation? Your pupil's former schoolmate Nieh Liang-hu, who is a degree candidate in the local Military School, is currently living in my humble abode, where he is acting as tutor to my son. He has a knack for literary composition in a variety of modes. Your pupil will speak to him about your request. All you have to do, venerable sir, is to send your esteemed servant to my place with the scrolls."

Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to express his gratitude, and after drinking his tea, Shang Hsiao-t'ang took his leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith sealed up two handkerchiefs and five mace of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung to deliver them, along with the scrolls, the felt jacket, and the leather trunk, to Shang Hsiao-t'ang's place, where they were duly accepted.

In less than two days, the scrolls were inscribed, and when they were delivered, Hsi-men Ch'ing hung them up on the wall of the reception hall. Behold, they were:

Brocade scrolls of green velvet,
With characters of blazing gold,
which had been dashed off:

Without altering a single stroke.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by them.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who came in and asked, "When are you planning to hold the celebrations in honor of Ch'iao Hung and Yün Li-shou; have the inscriptions on the scrolls been completed or not; and why is it that the venerable Licentiate Wen has been nowhere to be seen the last few days?"

"Why refer to the venerable Licentiate Wen?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is nothing but a canine excuse for a human being."

He then proceeded, thus and so, to tell Ying Po-chüeh what had happened.

"Brother," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "I have always said of that person that:

His words overstate the facts,

and:

He is as superficial as can be.

It's a good thing you had the foresight to get rid of him, or he might well have corrupted the other page boys in the household."

He then went on to ask, "As for the commemorative scrolls for the two gentlemen, who did you get to inscribe them?"

"Yesterday, Shang Hsiao-t'ang came to call on me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and mentioned that his friend Nieh Liang-hu was good at literary composition. So I urged him to get Nieh Liang-hu to inscribe them, and the completed scrolls are already here. Let me show them to you."

Thereupon, he led Ying Po-chüeh into the reception hall to take a look at them, and he expressed no end of admiration, saying, "Brother, you have fulfilled our social obligations. You ought to send them off to their recipients as soon as possible, so they can make the necessary preparations."

"Tomorrow is an auspicious day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already prepared the congratulatory gifts of mutton and wine, red banners, and boxes of candied fruit and will have them delivered as early as possible."

As they were speaking, a servant suddenly reported, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's son has come to bid you farewell. Early tomorrow morning, the eighth, he is planning to set out for the capital. When I told him that you were not at home, he said that you ought to let His Honor Ho Yung-shou know, so that he can send someone over to look after the place first thing tomorrow morning."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accordion-bound six-leaved card and saw that the message on it read, "The junior member of your colleague's family, Hsia Ch'eng-en, presents his compliments in order to thank you for your assistance and bid you farewell."

He then remarked, "The departures of Shang Hsiao-t'ang and the dependents of the Hsia household will require the presentation of two lengths of fragrant silk fabric as parting gifts."

Turning to Ch'in-t'ung, he instructed him, "Go quickly to buy these gifts, and then get my son-in-law to seal them up and write cards to deliver with them."

Just as he was settling down in his studio together with Ying Po-chüeh, whom he had invited to share a meal with him, P'ing-an suddenly appeared, in a state of obvious agitation, and presented three calling cards, reporting, "Administration Commissioner Wang, Assistant Commissioner Lei, and Secretary An have come to pay their respects."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon looking at the cards and seeing that they were from Wang Po-yen, Lei Ch'i-yüan, and An Ch'en, hurriedly proceeded to don his formal garb and buckle his girdle.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I can see that you are busy. As soon as I have finished eating, I'd better go."

"I'll get together with you again tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he straightened his clothes and went out to greet his visitors.

The three officials politely deferred to each other as they came in. They wore mandarin squares, one of which was emblazoned with a silver pheasant, one of them with an egret in the clouds, and one of them with a *hsieh-chih*, the mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, and they were attended by a host of subordinate officials. Upon entering the large reception hall, they exchanged the customary amenities and referred gratefully to the trouble they had put him to in the past.

In a little while, after they had consumed a serving of tea and were sitting together in conversation, An Ch'en said, "Lei Ch'i-yüan, Wang Po-yen, and I have come to impose upon you once again. Chao T'ing, the prefect of Hang-chou in Chekiang, has recently been promoted to the post of minister of the Court of Judicial Review, and the three of us would like to borrow the use of your distinguished premises in order to invite him to a party in his honor. We have already sent him an invitation to attend the party on the ninth. Including you as our host, five tables will be required, and your pupil will take care of providing actors for the occasion, but I don't know whether you will consent to this or not."

"In response to your command, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your pupil cannot but:

Sweep the doorway in respectful anticipation."⁴

Secretary An Ch'en ordered one of his clerks to hand over a joint contribution of three taels of silver, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had one of his attendants put it away.

As he was escorting them to the gate, Lei Ch'i-yüan said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The other day, in response to a letter from Ch'ien Lung-yeh stating that Sun Wen-hsiang was one of your employees, your pupil saw to it that both he and his father were released. Have they come to tell you about it or not?"

"Yes they have," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I am much obliged to you for your efforts on my behalf.

Permit me to offer you an obeisance in return."

"You and I are good friends," responded Lei Ch'i-yüan. "There is no need to concern yourself further about it."

When they had finished speaking and bowing in farewell to each other, his guests got into their sedan chairs and departed.

It so happens that, from the time that P'an Chin-lien took over responsibility for the household expenses, she had supplied herself with a new set of scales. Every day, when the page boys came home with the groceries they had bought, she insisted that they bring in their purchases for her to evaluate before she would pay out the money to reimburse them. She had Ch'un-mei pay out the money and take charge of the scales. The page boys were frequently cursed by Ch'un-mei till they looked as though:

Their heads had been sprayed with dog's blood,
and they felt as though they were:

Braving the danger of extinction.⁵

On the slightest pretext, she would tell them off and threaten to have Hsi-men Ch'ing beat them.

For this reason, the page boys all harbored resentment against her and said to each other, "It was much better when the Third Lady was handling the money. As for the Fifth Lady, whatever we do, she:

Rarely says a word without threatening a beating.”⁶

To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early, and when the session was over, he said to Ho Yung-shou, “Hsia Yen-ling's dependents have left by now. Have you delegated someone to go look after the place, and see that the doors are locked or not?”

“Yes I have,” responded Ho Yung-shou. “Yesterday, they sent someone over to speak to me about it, and your pupil has already sent a servant to take care of it.”

“Today,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “I would like to accompany my colleague over there to take a look at the place.”

Thereupon, the two of them left the yamen and rode their horses, side by side, to Hsia Yen-ling's former residence. His dependents had already vacated the premises, and Ho Yung-shou's servant was standing by at the gate. The two officials dismounted and went inside to the reception hall, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing led Ho Yung-shou on a tour of inspection, both front and rear. When they came back to the ornamental pavilion in the front garden, they saw that it was surrounded by a stretch of vacant ground, without anything in the way of grass or vegetation growing on it.

“When my colleague moves in,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “you ought to make a pleasure ground out of this area. You can plant it with ornamental flowers, and make some repairs to this pavilion.”

“I will do that for sure,” said Ho Yung-shou. “This coming spring, I plan to refurbish the place, procure bricks and tiles, lumber and stone, with which to construct three summerhouses, and invite my colleague over to:

Alleviate his ennui and dispel his melancholy.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, “How many dependents from your household will come to reside here?”

“There are only a few members of your pupil's own household,” said Ho Yung-shou, “but there will also be several families of servants and other attendants, something over ten persons in all.”

“In that case,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “you will hardly fill the place. The front and rear compounds of this residence contain more than fifty rooms.”

After they had finished inspecting the place, Ho Yung-shou told his servants to clean it up, sweep it out, and take care of locking the doors.

He then went on to say, “In a few days, I will write to my venerable uncle in the Eastern Capital, and arrange to have my dependents transported here by the year's end.”

That day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had said farewell and returned home, Ho Yung-shou took another look around and then went back to his quarters in the yamen. It was not until the next day that he collected his luggage and moved into his new residence. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had no sooner arrived home and dismounted from his horse than he found that Ho the Ninth had purchased a bolt of fabric, a selection of four delicacies, a chicken and a goose, and a jar of wine and brought them to thank him for his intervention on behalf of his younger brother. In addition, Eunuch Director Liu had sent a servant to deliver a box of delicacies, a selection of large and small pure-red candles decorated with yellow tracery, twenty tablecloths, eighty sticks of government-grade incense, a box of aloeswood incense, a jar of wine he had brewed himself according to a palace recipe, and a freshly slaughtered pig.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing came in the gate, Eunuch Director Liu's servant kowtowed to him and said, “My master wishes to convey his compliments, along with these paltry gifts, for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like.”

“I provided your venerable master with but scant entertainment the other day,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “yet still he sends me these lavish presents.”

He then ordered an attendant to take charge of the gifts and invited the messenger to wait a minute. Before long, Hua-t'ung came in with a cup of tea for him, while Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver as a gratuity and sent him off with a written reply.

When Ho the Ninth was invited to come in, he found Hsi-men Ch'ing standing in the reception hall, having removed his official cap and exchanged it for a “loyal and tranquil hat” of white felt. Upon seeing Ho the Ninth, he took him by the hand and led him into the reception hall.

Ho the Ninth hastened to bend his back and kowtow to him, saying, “In the past, thanks to the way in which Your Honor's:

Celestial grace permitted him to be reborn,
my younger brother's:

Gratitude for your kindness is not shallow.”

He begged Hsi-men Ch'ing to accept his obeisance, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not allow him to kowtow and dragged him to his feet, saying, “Old Ninth, you and I are long-standing friends. There is no need for that sort of thing.”

“Your Honor,” responded Ho the Ninth:

“The present cannot be compared to the past.”⁷

Insignificant as I am, I could hardly presume to sit down in your presence.”

He insisted on standing to one side while Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company for a serving of tea.

“Old Ninth,” Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, “what need was there for you to go to the trouble of presenting these gifts to me? I absolutely refuse to accept them. If anyone should try to take advantage of you, just come tell me about it, and I will see to it that your indignation is assuaged. If the district yamen should assign some onerous task to you, I can intervene on your behalf by sending a card to His Honor Li Ta-t'ien.”

“I am cognizant of Your Honor's consideration,” said Ho the Ninth, “but I am old now, and have already arranged for my son, Ho Ch'in, to take over my duties.”

"That's all right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You should be able to enjoy your greater leisure."

He then went on to say, "Since you refuse to take them back, I will agree to accept your gifts of food and drink, but you must consent to take that bolt of fabric home with you. I won't retain you any longer."

Ho the Ninth then proceeded to bid him farewell with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.

Hsi-men Ch'ing remained sitting in the reception hall, where he supervised the packing of the congratulatory gifts: the boxes of candied fruit, red banners, mutton and wine, inscribed scrolls, and so forth, including the individual contributions of his colleagues. When this was completed, he dispatched Tai-an to deliver the first consignment to the home of Ch'iao Hung and then sent Wang Ching to take the other consignment to the home of Yün Li-shou.

Upon Tai-an's return, he reported that he had been given a gratuity of five mace of silver by the Ch'iao household. When Wang Ching arrived at the home of Yün Li-shou, he was served food and wine and rewarded with a length of pure-black muslin and a pair of loafers. He returned with an accordion-bound thank-you note that read, "Your protégé presents his compliments, and will extend an invitation on another day." Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by this and went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound to have something to eat.

While there, he said to Yüeh-niang, "Since the departure of Pen the Fourth, Brother-in-law Wu the Second has been handling the business at the store on Lion Street. Since I have some free time today, I propose to go there and see how things are going."

"You might as well go ahead," said Yüeh-niang. "If any food and wine is required, send a page boy back here for it."

"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Having issued orders that his horse be prepared, he donned his felt "loyal and tranquil cap," his sable earmuffs, a green woolen tunic emblazoned with a mandarin square, and a pair of white-soled black boots and set out for Lion Street, accompanied by Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an.

When he arrived at the store he found that Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Lai-chao had hung out the flowery braided basket that served as a shop sign and were busily engaged in selling the stock of piece goods, sewing supplies, and silk floss. The store was so crowded with customers that they could hardly handle them all. Hsi-men Ch'ing dismounted, took a look at the situation, and then went back to a heated inner room and sat down.

Brother-in-law Wu the Second came in, bowed to him, and said, "We are currently making a profit of twenty taels of silver a day."

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," saying, "Make sure that Brother-in-law Wu the Second is supplied with tea and food every day, as usual. Don't be remiss about it."

"I personally prepare wine and food for him every day," said Lai-chao's wife.

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the sky was overcast. Behold:

Amid dense masses of dark clouds,
Gusts of cold wind beleaguer one.

It looked as though it were going to snow. Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly thought that he would like to visit Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter.

Thereupon, he ordered Ch'in-t'ung, "Ride my horse back to the house and bring me my fur coat. And tell the First Lady that if she has a serving of wine and food available, to send it in a box for Brother-in-law Wu the Second to consume."

Ch'in-t'ung assented, set off on his errand, and returned before long with Hsi-men Ch'ing's full-length sable coat, followed by an orderly bearing a box of wine and food, which contained four saucers of marinated chicken appetizers and sautéed pigeon, four saucers of seafood to go with the wine, a plate of leek stalks, and a pewter flagon of wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in the room with Brother-in-law Wu the Second and drank three cups of wine, after which he said to him, "Since you are going to remain here overnight, you can enjoy these things at your leisure. I am going to go home."

Thereupon, he put on his eye shades, mounted his horse, and, with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung attending him, headed straight for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. As he passed the corner of East Street, lo and behold:

Fluttering and swirling from on high,
A skyful of auspicious snow came flying down.

Truly:

Large snowflakes, the size of a fist,
danced in the void;
The pedestrians on the road could do
nothing but complain.⁸

Behold:

Silently, a severe cold envelops the ground;
The snowfall creating a truly awesome scene.
Just like tattered floss or shredded cotton,⁹
Each flake seems as large as a flower basket.
In the woods, bamboo huts and thatched sheds,
Are faced with the risk of imminent collapse.

Members of rich houses and powerful families,
 Claim that snow purges pestilence, and
 say there is not enough.
 Huddled beside red braziers with their
 animal-shaped briquettes;¹⁰
 Accoutered in their sable cloaks and
 their embroidered gowns;
 While fingering plum blossoms in their hands,¹¹
 They proclaim it to be an auspicious
 portent for the nation;¹²
 Without caring for the destitution it
 inflicts upon the poor.
 There are even men, living in lofty seclusion,
 Who produce a plethora of poems in its praise.¹³

Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way along the street:
 Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade;
 His sable coat infested with powdery butterflies;
 His horses hoofs disturbing the silvery blossoms;

until he entered the licensed quarter and dismounted at the gate of Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment.

Upon seeing him, a maidservant flew inside and announced, "His Honor has arrived."

Auntie Cheng came outside to receive him, conducted him into the reception hall, and greeted him, saying, "We are most grateful for the lavish gifts you bestowed upon us the other day. Not only did Ai-chieh impose upon your hospitality, but the First Lady and the Third Lady also rewarded her with a gift of costume jewelry and a handkerchief."

"I fear she received but scant entertainment that day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he proceeded to take a seat.

He then instructed Tai-an, saying, "Bring my horse inside. They have a courtyard in which it can be accommodated."

"Would Your Honor please come back into the parlor and take a seat there?" said Auntie Cheng. "Ai-yüeh has just gotten up and is still combing her hair. She thought that Your Honor was going to pay her a visit yesterday and waited for you all day long. As a result, she is somewhat out of sorts today and got up later than usual."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, consequently, went back to the parlor of her living quarters in the rear of the establishment, where he saw that:

 The green gauze window was half open,¹⁴ and
 The felt curtains were suspended low,
 while in the middle of the floor there stood a brazier of yellow brass, filled with burning charcoal.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the place of honor, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came out first to greet him, and offer him a serving of tea. Only after that did Cheng Ai-yüeh appear. She wore a "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, held in place by a plum-blossom-shaped ornament, and studded with combs and hairpins of incised gold, under a sealskin toque. She was made up so that her cloudy locks resembled swirling mist, enhanced with fragrant powder and incised blossoms. Her torso was clad in a white satin jacket and green brocade vest, beneath which she wore a six-pleated beige skirt, under which there peeked out the high pointed tips of her tiny golden lotuses:

Resembling crescent moons,
 Shaped like moth eyebrows.

Truly:

The immortal of Mount Lo-fu has appeared
 in the mundane world;¹⁵
 The Goddess of Witches' Mountain has come
 into the human realm.¹⁶

The painted face came out with an ingratiating smile, bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and said, "Father, I didn't get home until late the other day. Not only did the party in the front compound break up late, but when we returned to the rear compound, the First Lady refused to let us go until we had had something to eat. It was the third watch by the time I got home."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, and said, "Little oily mouth! You and Li Kueichieh, between you, really managed to land a few resounding hits on Beggar Ying."

"Who was it," responded Cheng Ai-yüeh, "who allowed that ugly monstrosity to join the party, only to attack us with his shitty mouth? On that day, Pockmarked Chu also got drunk and speciously offered to escort us home, but I said to him, 'Isn't Father going to send us home with a lantern escort?'"

When Fatty Chiang falls into the sewer,
 The muck may splash on you."

"That day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I heard Hung the Fourth say that Pockmarked Chu has once again conspired with Wang the

Third to patronize Jung Chiao-erh on Main Street.”

“He only spent one night at Jung Chiao-erh’s place,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh. “He burnt moxa on her that once¹⁷ but never went back. At present, he’s still patronizing Ch’in Yü-chih.”

After they had talked for a while, she said, “Father, I fear you may be cold. Why don’t you come into my room and sit there.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then proceeded to move into her room, where he took off his sable cloak and sat down by the painted face next to the brazier. In the room:

A fragrant aroma assailed the senses.¹⁸

What should he see but a maidservant who came in to set up a table, on which she placed four saucers of assorted delicacies, and three dishes of ginger sauce; shortly after which, she came in with three bowls of steamed pork dumplings flavored with celery cabbage and chives, and inch-long boiled dumplings. The two sisters kept Hsi-men Ch’ing company as they each consumed one of the bowls.

Cheng Ai-yüeh even offered to give half the contents of her bowl to Hsi-men Ch’ing, but he said, “I’ve had enough. Just now, in that silk goods store of mine, I was sharing a bite to eat with my brother-in-law Wu the Second when it occurred to me that I would like to come pay you a visit. Unexpectedly, it started to snow, and I sent a page boy home to fetch my fur coat and then proceeded to come over here.”

“The other day,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh, “didn’t you agree to come see me yesterday? I waited for you all day, but you never showed up. How could I have known that you would show up today?”

“Yesterday,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “a couple of gentlemen came to see me, and I was too busy to come.”

“I’d like to ask you, Father,” said Cheng Ai-yüeh, “if you happen to have a sable skin you could give to me, so I can make a muffler out of it to wear?”

“That’s no problem,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “The other day, one of my managers came back from Liao-tung and presented me with ten fine sable skins. None of the ladies of my household have mufflers for themselves, so when I have them made up, I’ll have one made for you as well.”

“Father,” said Cheng Ai-hsiang, “you only care for my sister, without bothering to give me one too.”

“I’ll provide one for each of you sisters,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing.

Thereupon, Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh hastily got to their feet and bowed to him in gratitude.

“If you see Li Kuei-chieh or Wu Yin-erh,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “don’t tell them about it.”

“I understand,” responded Cheng Ai-yüeh.

“The other day,” she went on to say, “when Li Kuei-chieh saw that Wu Yin-erh had been invited to stay overnight, she asked me how long she had been there, and I did not deceive her but said, ‘Yesterday, when His Honor Chou Hsiu was here, the four of us were all present and sang for their entertainment all day. Father said that because Wang the Third was present, he had not invited you. But since today’s party was for his relatives and friends and the members of his brotherhood of ten, he had invited you to come and sing for them.’ She had nothing further to say about it.”

“Your response to her was quite correct,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Previously, I had also ceased to engage the services of Li Ming, but he repeatedly asked Ying the Second to intervene on his behalf; and later, on the occasion of the Third Lady’s birthday, Li Kuei-chieh herself bought presents and came to apologize to me for her misconduct. The ladies of my household spoke up on her behalf, but I did not pay any attention. The other day, I arranged to invite Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight just to show her where things stood.”



Hsi-men Ch'ing Tramples the Snow to Visit Cheng Ai-yüeh

"I didn't know about the Third Lady's birthday," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "so I failed to help celebrate it."

"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor Yün Li-shou is giving a party, and I told him, the other day, that you and Wu Yin-erh might be willing to sing for us on that occasion."

"If that is Father's wish, I will do so," responded Cheng Ai-yüeh.

Before long, a maidservant came in and took away the dinner table; after which, the painted face fetched a catalpa-wood box, from which she dumped out a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes and proceeded to play a game of dominoes with Hsi-men Ch'ing upon a felt strip laid over the k'ang, while Cheng Ai-hsiang sat beside them and looked on.

Meanwhile, within the courtyard, the snow continued to come fluttering and swirling down:

Like wind-blown pear blossoms.

Behold:

Dimly it obscures the ornate well curbs;

At every other moment,

One must brush away the bee's whiskers.

Jade dragon's-scales appear to

pervade the firmament;

White crane's-feathers seem to
settle gently to earth.
It reminds one of crabs moving
across the sand;
It is like shattered alabaster
piled on the pavement.

Truly:

Though everyone calls it an omen of a good harvest,
As an omen of a good harvest, what are its effects?
There are indigent people in the city of Ch'ang-an,
Who think it is propitious, but only in moderation.¹⁹

The three of them continued playing dominoes for some time, without anyone being established as the winner. In a little while, wine was served, and they proceeded to drink it. On the tabletop:

Platters are piled with exotic fruits;
Only the rarest delicacies are arrayed.
Tea is brewed from dragon tablets;
Wine is poured of amber coloration.²⁰
Lyrics are sung to the tune "Golden Threads,"
As, with a smile, they part their ruby lips.

Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh proffered wine to their guest as they stood to either side. Then, with:

The bridges on their psalteries ranged like wild geese,
As they gently strummed the silken strings,

the two sisters entertained him with the song suite that begins with the tune "Green Jacket":

I think of that captivating beauty, with her
striking personality;
I think of that captivating beauty, who was
so indulgent with me.
I recall how we walked together hand in hand,²¹
laughing as we went;
Saluting the breeze and apostrophizing the moon,²²
in lines of poetry.
She was warm and soft; I was handsome and clever;
Both in the springtime of our youth.
Who could have anticipated that these fish who
swim as a pair should be separated?
The vase has fallen, the hairpin is broken,²³
And at this time, the fish are submerged,
the geese are distant.²⁴

TO THE TUNE "CURSING ONE'S LOVER":

Once that captivating beauty was gone,
I have had no further news of her.
In thinking of her, my feelings are like lacquer,
my sentiments like glue.
I constantly remember how we enjoyed each other
on the same pillow.
I think of her flowery loveliness, and
her willowy sinuosity;
A face that could topple kingdoms and cities.²⁵

TO THE TUNE "BEATING THE FESTIVAL DRUM":

She exhibits a thousand graceful charms;²⁶
Romantic and quick-witted;
Her demeanor is alluring.
Her every move marvelous.
Strumming the psaltery, plucking the mandola,
Singing and dancing, or playing on the flute,
Even an expert painter would find
her hard to depict.

TO THE TUNE "MOVED BY IMPERIAL FAVOR":

Ah! It is more than enough to make me
both bored and depressed.²⁷
It racks my brains and disrupts my rest,²⁸
Leaving me too languid to review
Tu Fu's poetry,
Construe Han Yü's compositions,
Or study Liu Tsung-yüan's prose.²⁹
In this state, my sorrowful heart is
only more agitated;

As time goes on, my countenance is
ever more emaciated.
Unable to share our pleasures,
or to become mates,
All we are fated to do is to
suffer in torment.

TO THE TUNE "WEN-CHOU SONG":

As prematurely gray as P'an Yüeh,
As sorely emaciated as Shen Yüeh,³⁰
I regret that, though we met, we did
not follow through.
My heart is distressed, my feelings
are lacerated.

Roaring flames consume the Zoroastrian Temple;³¹
Turbulent waves have engulfed the Blue Bridge.³²
How will I ever escape my lovesickness?

TO THE TUNE "TEA-PICKING SONG":

How will I ever escape my lovesickness?
The sorrow of separation is as difficult to
overcome as a battle formation.
Even someone forged out of iron or stone
would find his spirit disturbed.
His sorrow would rise, layer upon layer, like
the hills of the Southern Mountain;
His despair would swell, wave upon wave, like
the waters of the Eastern Ocean.

TO THE TUNE "TRANSITION":

Who could have anticipated this day?
From of old, students are destined
to be unfortunate.
My feelings are lacerated.
My foolish heart merely evokes the
laughter of others.³³
To whom can I complain?

TO THE TUNE "CROWS CRY AT NIGHT":

I remember the times when I enjoyed cuddling
the red and hugging the turquoise,
Tripping the grass and comparing botanical specimens.³⁴
Upon meeting each other and gazing at the scenery,
we enjoyed it together.
In the springtime, twittering swallows
sought out their nests;
In summertime, the fragrance of lotus
blossoms filled the ponds;
In the autumn, chrysanthemum blossoms
pervaded the empty suburbs;
And in the winter, the auspicious snow
fluttered everywhere.³⁵
I recall those painted chambers, replete with
song and dance, and rare repasts;
But now, I am at loose ends, sleeping upon
a lonely pillow in a wayside inn.
I am beset by spectral visitations,
That are not susceptible to remedy;
Which causes my feelings to be agitated
and my thoughts disturbed.³⁶

The pain of heartache is difficult to dispel.³⁷

TO THE TUNE "HIGHER EVER HIGHER":

I am too depressed to sleep.
I think of that captivating beauty,
Who is conversant with the laws of music
and its various modes.
Everything about her is superb;
Her countenance outshines the moon,
Her face puts the flowers to shame.
Her words are captivating, and
her mind is sharp.
She is like an immortal maiden
come down to earth.
Her golden lotuses traipse gently³⁸
with high phoenix toes;
Her ruby lips and her white teeth
smile enigmatically.

TO THE TUNE "THE QUAILS":

Just look at the daintiness of
her demeanor;³⁹

Enhanced by an outfit of plain
white silk.
Her cosmetics are evenly applied;
Her moth eyebrows lightly painted.⁴⁰
The myriad ways in which she displays
her seductiveness,
Are hard to depict, hard to depict.
The finest Yang-kao vintage is decanted;
Incense burns in the duck-shaped censer;
Candles in silver sconces burn brightly.
Now that we may finally become a loving
husband and wife;
Surely, our hearts will be one till the
end of our lives.⁴¹

CODA:

There is a pathway to the azure clouds
that ensures one's arrival.⁴²
If it is not one's fate to succeed, it
will be difficult to do so.
I admonish you, never fail to recall the
date of this happy event.⁴³

When they had finished singing the song suite, the two sisters brought out a dicebox and proceeded to amuse themselves by playing “Competing for the Red” with Hsi-men Ch’ing. As they:

Passed their wine cups back and forth,
Their faces took on the glint of spring.

Hsi-men Ch’ing noticed that beside the bed in Cheng Ai-yüeh’s room there was a brocaded screen, on which there hung a scroll entitled “Picture of a Moon-loving Beauty,” on which there was inscribed a poem that read:

There is a lovely woman,⁴⁴ who stands
out above the crowd.
A gentle breeze obliquely flutters her
pomegranate skirt.
Blossoms open in Golden Valley in the
third month of spring;
The moon moves the flower shadows in
the depth of the night.
Her jade or snowlike spirit reminds
one of Ts’ai Yen;⁴⁵
Her alabaster features surpass those
of Cho Wen-chün.⁴⁶
One’s youthful dreams are inevitably
attracted to her;
Hoping she will not be as indifferent
as a white cloud.⁴⁷

The signature at the end of the poem read, “Drunkenly inscribed by The Master of the Three Springs.”

When Hsi-men Ch’ing saw this, he asked, “Isn’t The Master of the Three Springs the courtesy name of Wang the Third?”

This threw Cheng Ai-yüeh into such consternation that she hastened to cover up by saying, “This is something that he wrote some time ago. At present, he no longer uses the courtesy name Three Springs but is using the name Hsiao-hsüan, or Little Studio, instead. He says that ever since you told him your courtesy name was Four Springs, he felt he could no longer use the name Three Springs without offending you. That’s why he has changed to using the name Little Studio.”

So saying, she stepped forward, picked up a brush, and crossed out the character for “Three.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing was utterly delighted by this and said, “I didn’t know he had changed his courtesy name.”

“I overheard him explaining it to someone else,” responded the painted face, “or I wouldn’t have known about it either. It seems that his deceased father used the name I-hsüan, or Leisure Studio, so he deferentially switched to using the courtesy name Hsiao-hsüan, or Little Studio, for himself.”

When this exchange was over, Cheng Ai-hsiang went outside, leaving Cheng Ai-yüeh alone to entertain Hsi-men Ch’ing in her room. The two of them continued “Competing for the Red” and drinking wine, while sitting:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.

Hsi-men Ch’ing then brought up the subject of Lady Lin, about whom he said, “She has a great capacity for wine and is devoted to love-making. That day, when I was being entertained by Wang the Third, I was invited into the interior of the residence to pay my respects to her, and she took the initiative in telling Wang the Third to kowtow to me as his adoptive father, and telling me to accept his obeisance, and undertake the task of teaching him how to become a better person.”

Upon hearing this, the painted face clapped her hands and laughed, saying, “You have me to thank for suggesting this scheme to you in the first place. In the future, I have no doubt, even Wang the Third’s wife will fall into your hands.”

“I’ll start out by burning some moxa on Lady Lin,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Then, I’ll invite her to come to my place, and bring Wang the Third’s wife with her, for a lantern-viewing party at New Year’s, and see if she’ll consent to come or not.”

“Father,” said the painted face, “you don’t even comprehend yet what a beauty Wang the Third’s wife is. Not even a figure on a

decorative lantern is as romantic and bewitching as she is. She is just eighteen years old this year, but she might as well be observing her widowhood since Wang the Third spends so little time at home. If you are willing to make a play for her, there is no reason to doubt that she will end up in your hands.”

As they were talking, they moved closer to each other. Who should appear at this juncture but a maidservant who brought in several saucers of delicacies, including baked nut kernels, dried caltrops, fresh tangerines, betel nuts, snow pears, apples, “abalone shell” sweets, candied orange pieces frosted with crystallized sugar, and so forth. The painted face, with her own hand, fed the delicacies to Hsi-men Ch’ing to go with his wine and also employed her tongue to transfer a phoenix-embossed breath-sweetening lozenge from her mouth to his. At the same time, she used her slender hand to lift aside Hsi-men Ch’ing’s lavender silk tunic and expose his white satin trousers. Hsi-men Ch’ing responded by undoing his belt and exposing his organ for her to manipulate. The painted face saw that the silver clasp was already fastened around its root.

It was aroused and its head sprang up,
Becoming both empurpled and shiny.

Hsi-men Ch’ing told her to suck it off for him, and the painted face actually:

Bent low her powdered neck,
Gently parted her ruby lips,
Half swallowing, half disgorging it,⁴⁸
So it moved alternately in and out.
The sound of her sucking was audible.

When she had toyed with it a while:

His “magic rhinoceros horn” was erect,
His libidinous fantasies were on fire,⁴⁹

and he was ready to engage in intercourse. The painted face then went back to the interior, while Hsi-men Ch’ing also left the room to go to the bathroom, where he noticed that the snow was falling thicker than ever.

When he returned to the room, a maidservant was engaged in:

Suspending the brocaded curtains,
Placing the mandarin duck pillow,
Spreading the mermaid silk covers,
Lighting the oval incense burners,

and arranging a thick layer of comforters on the bed. After she had helped him to:

Take off his boots and unfasten his girdle,

he got into the ivory bedstead. When the painted face returned after washing her private parts, she closed the double-leaved door and joined him inside the mandarin duck bed curtains. Truly, it is a case of:

The spring beauty arouses the beholder,
complaisantly alluring;
The fragrant corolla attracts the butterfly,
in redolent surrender.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Meetings and partings are undependable
when they occur in dreams;
When one gets up, the sputtering candle
turns the window gauze red.
Real infatuation, from of old, produces
a communion between spirits;
Who says that the road to the Radian
Terrace is not approachable?⁵⁰

The two of them enjoyed:

The raptures of clouds and rain,

until the first watch before getting up, upon which a maidservant brought a lamp into the room, enabling them to straighten their clothes and tidy up their hair. They then:

Resumed decanting vintage wine,

Reordered the sumptuous repast,

and shared a few more drinks. Hsi-men Ch’ing then asked Tai-an if he had brought a lantern and an umbrella.

“Ch’in-t’ung went home,” replied Tai-an, “and brought back a lantern and an umbrella.”

Only then did Hsi-men Ch’ing prepare to leave. The procuress and the painted face accompanied him out the gate and looked on as he mounted his horse.

Cheng Ai-yüeh raised her voice, saying, “Father, whenever you want me, let me know in good time.”

“I understand,” replied Hsi-men Ch’ing.

Having mounted his horse, with his umbrella in hand, he rode out the gate of the licensed quarter and slogged through the snow as

he made his way home. When he got there, he merely told Yüeh-niang that he had been drinking at the store on Lion Street with Brother-in-law Wu the Second. But no more of this. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, the eighth, knowing that Ho Yung-shou had moved his belongings into the former home of Hsia Yen-ling, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent him four boxes of fancy tea and assorted delicacies, along with five mace of silver in lieu of the customary kerchief, as a housewarming gift.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who came in unexpectedly. Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing that the snow had cleared, but that there was a cold wind blowing, invited him into his studio in the front compound to warm himself at the brazier and directed a page boy to set up a table, and fetch some viands, so he could share a serving of congee with him.

He then went on to say, "Yesterday, I took care of sending the appropriate congratulatory presents to my kinsman Ch'iao Hung, and Brother Yün the Second. As for the gifts from the rest of you, I have already provided two mace of silver for each of you, so there is no need to give them anything. All you need to do is wait until they issue their invitations."

Ying Po-chüeh raised his hand in acknowledgment and thanked him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou has already moved into Hsia Yen-ling's place. Today, I have sent him a present of tea and a housewarming gift. Shouldn't you also send him a gift of tea?"

"Only if he invites me over," said Ying Po-chüeh.

He then went on to ask, "Yesterday, what did His Honor An Ch'en and the other two come to visit you for? And who were those two who came with him?"

"One of them was Lei Ch'i-yüan, the assistant commissioner of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and the other one was Administration Commissioner Wang Po-yen. Both of them are natives of Chekiang province. They plan to host a party here tomorrow in honor of Chao T'ing, the prefect of Hang-chou, who has recently been promoted to a position in the capital as minister of the Court of Judicial Review and has been the presiding officer of their native prefecture. There is no reason I should refuse to honor him with a table setting on their behalf, along with communal seating for the rest of us. They have undertaken to provide actors for the occasion, and I also feel obliged to engage the services of two boy actors to entertain the company. They saw fit to give me a joint contribution of a mere three taels of silver."

"Generally speaking," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "civil officials tend to be closefisted with their money. What is three taels of silver good for, after all. You will be obliged to supplement it, Brother."

"This Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the one who presided over the trial of Sun Wen-hsiang, the son of Huang the Fourth's brother-in-law. Yesterday, he chose to remind me that it was he who had undertaken to exonerate him."

"You may say he is not closefisted," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he reminded you of this as a means of settling accounts with you. He will not feel adequately repaid unless you take on the costs of putting on the party."

In the course of their conversation, Ying Po-chüeh summoned Ying Pao and said to him, "Call in that person to meet His Honor."

"Who might that be?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"There is a young man who resides in my neighborhood," replied Ying Po-chüeh, "who comes from an established family, but whose father and mother are both deceased. From his youth he has worked for Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, for quite a few years by now, and has already taken a wife. But, because he did not get along with the other servants on the estate, he has left that position and is currently out of work, not having the wherewithal to go into business on his own. He is a friend of Ying Pao's and has requested him to help him find employment as a servant somewhere. This morning, Ying Pao said to me, 'Father, you're in a good position to recommend him for a job in His Honor's household. I imagine that His Honor could use some additional help.' To which I replied that I didn't know whether you could use him or not."

He then said to Ying Pao, "What name does he go by? Have him come in."

"His name is Lai-yu," said Ying Pao.

Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-yu, who wore an outfit of blue cloth, a four-piece tile-shaped hat,⁵¹ cotton socks, and sandals and proceeded to prostrate himself on the floor and kowtow, after which he stood up outside the screen.

"If you consider this creature's physique," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "he is more than strong enough to:

Sustain the light and bear the heavy."

He then went on to ask him, "How old are you?"

"I am nineteen," the young man responded.

"Has your wife borne any sons or daughters?" he continued.

"There are only the two of us," he replied.

"Your Honor," said Ying Pao, "the truth of the matter is that his wife is only eighteen. She is adept at cooking and needlework and can create articles of clothing, both large and small."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the way the young man stood deferentially with his head lowered and his feet together, exhibiting an artless nature, and said, "Since Ying the Second has seen fit to recommend you, I will give you the opportunity to render me your faithful service. If you will select an auspicious day for the event and produce a written contract, the two of you can move in."

The young man kowtowed in response, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'in-t'ung to take him back to the rear compound in order to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and the others, and explain his decision to them. Yüeh-niang decided to let him reside in the quarters that had previously been occupied by Lai-wang.

After Ying Po-chüeh had remained sitting there a while longer, he went home, and Ying Pao helped Lai-yu to draft a contract of

indenture and turn it over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who changed his name to Lai-chüeh. But no more of this.

To resume our story, ever since Pen the Fourth's wife, Yeh the Fifth, had given her daughter Pen Chang-chieh to Hsia Yen-ling as a concubine, she had fallen into the daily habit of:

Buying this and buying that,
and inviting P'ing-an, Lai-an, Hua-t'ung, or Han Hsiao-yü, the son of her next-door neighbor Auntie Han, all of them young servants in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, to come and share drinks together at her place on a dutch treat basis. Pen the Fourth's wife was of an accommodating nature and would promptly come up with whatever they requested in the way of snacks or tea. Even when Pen the Fourth happened to come home from the shop and run into them, he did not object. For this reason, when he was not at home, and she needed something done, none of them was averse to acting on her behalf. Tai-an and P'ing-an were the two who frequented her place most often.

The ninth of the month was the day on which Hsi-men Ch'ing had agreed to put on a party in honor of Prefect Chao T'ing, on behalf of Secretary An Ch'en, Administration Commissioner Wang Po-yen, and Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan. On the morning of that day, Lai-chüeh and his spouse moved in, and his wife went back to the rear compound to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and the rest. Yüeh-niang saw that she was wearing a purple damask jacket, a cape of blue cotton, and a green cotton skirt.

She was petite in stature, with
A face shaped like a melon seed,
Decorated with rouge and powder,
That embellished her ruby lips,

and her two bound feet displayed their upturned tips. When asked, she responded that she was adept at all forms of needlework. She was given the new name of Hui-yüan and was assigned, together with Hui-hsiu and Hui-hsiang, to take turns working in the kitchen every third day. But no more of this.

One day, Aunt Yang, who lived outside the city gate, died, and her page boy came to report her demise. Hsi-men Ch'ing's household prepared a portable table, along with meat of the three sacrificial animals, soup, and rice; and also sealed up five taels of silver as a contribution toward the cost of the obsequies. Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, riding in four sedan chairs, set out for the northern quarter to burn paper money and offer their condolences. Ch'in-t'ung, Ch'i-t'ung, Lai-chüeh, and Lai-an also left home to accompany the sedan chairs.

During their absence, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the studio in the silk goods store across the street and looked on while a furrier prepared to make a sable muffler for Yüeh-niang. Before he did so, he had him make another muffler out of the same sable skin and gave it to Tai-an to take to Cheng Ai-yüeh in the licensed quarter, as he had promised. In addition, he sealed up ten taels of silver, to present to her as a New Year's gift. The Cheng Establishment treated Tai-an to food and drink and gave him three mace of silver with which to buy melon seeds for himself.

When Tai-an returned to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Cheng Ai-yüeh presents her compliments and thanks. She said that she had offered you but scant entertainment the other day, and she also rewarded me with three mace of silver."

"Keep it for yourself," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

He then went on to say, "Pen the Fourth is not at home, so what were you doing when I saw you come out of his place a while ago?"

"Pen the Fourth's wife," responded Tai-an, "ever since her daughter was married off, has had no one to run errands for her, so she often calls on us servants to purchase things on her behalf."

"As long as she has no one to run errands for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you might as well do your best to help out."

He then whispered to Tai-an, saying, "I'd like you to feel her out, thus and so, saying, 'Father would like to come to your place for a visit. What would you think of that?' Then see how she responds. If she reacts favorably, ask her for a handkerchief to give to me as a token."

"I understand," replied Tai-an, who accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's directive, nodded in assent, and set out on his mission.

Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for Ch'en Ching-chi to supervise the furrier's tailoring of the sable in his stead and then prepared to go back to the house.

Who should appear at this juncture but Wang Ching, who came back from Silversmith Ku's shop with the gold tiger-shaped tiara he had ordered, along with four pairs of gold-headed silver pins, and turned them over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who stashed two pairs of pins in the studio before hiding the other articles in his sleeve and proceeding to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and sitting down. He gave the tiger-shaped tiara and one pair of pins to Ju-i, and the other pair of pins to Ying-Ch'un. The two of them accepted these gifts and immediately:

Just as if inserting a taper in its holder,
kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ying-ch'un to bring him something to eat, and she returned with it in no time at all. After he had eaten, he went to his studio and sat down. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who approached him hesitantly but, on seeing that Wang Ching was present, did not say anything.

Only after Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Wang Ching back to the rear compound to fetch some tea did Tai-an say, "I communicated your message to her, and she responded with a smile. She agreed, later this evening, to expect a visit from you and told me to bring you this handkerchief."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the packet of red "cotton paper," made from the bark of the paper-mulberry, contained a handkerchief of red satin brocade with a diapered border, and that when smelled it exuded a pungent fragrance, he was absolutely delighted and promptly secreted it in his sleeve. When Wang Ching returned with the tea, he drank it and then went back across the

street to watch the furrier at his work.

Suddenly it was reported that Hua Tzu-yu had come to pay him a visit, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Ask him to join me over here."

Hua Tzu-yu made his way to the heated chamber in the studio across the street, where he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow and sat down, thanking him for the trouble he had put him to the other day. While they were conversing, Hua-t'ung brought over a serving of tea from across the street.

While he was drinking it, Hua Tzu-yu explained, "There is a merchant outside the city gate who has five hundred bags of Wu-hsi rice on his hands, which he is anxious to dispose of because the river is frozen, and he would like to return home. It occurred to me that you might be interested in buying it, and waiting for the price to go up."

"What would I want with that?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No one wants it while the river is frozen, and when the ice breaks up and the boats can come through, the price will drop even further. And besides, at the present time, I don't have any silver on hand."

He then instructed Tai-an, "See to the setting up of a table, and then go back to the house to order some food."

He also told Hua-t'ung, "Go invite Ying the Second to come and provide company for Hua Tzu-yu."

When they had sat there for a while, Ying Po-ch'ueh showed up, and the three of them arranged themselves around the brazier and fell to enjoying the wine. The table was set with four platters and four saucers of viands, including sautéed chicken and fish, and roasted and stewed dishes to go with the wine. Sun Hsüeh-o had also been ordered to bake two batches of pastries, and to provide four bowls of soup flavored with tripe, lungs, and curds.

Sometime later, who should appear but Abbot Wu's disciple Ying-ch'un, who came to deliver New Year's gifts, and the customary memorials and writs for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him to sit down with them to have some wine and also engaged him to take care of the scripture recitation on the "hundredth day" after Li P'ing-erh's death, and paid him the silver for it in advance. They continued drinking until sunset, at which time Ying-ch'un and Hua Tzu-yu left.

Afterwards, Manager Kan Jun closed the shop and was invited to join them, whereupon he fell to throwing dice and playing at guess-fingers with Ying Po-ch'ueh. As they talked together, before they knew it, it was already past lamp-lighting time, and Wu Yüeh-niang and the other ladies arrived home in their sedan chairs.

When Lai-an came in to report their return, Ying Po-ch'ueh asked, "Where did my sisters-in-law go today?"

"Aunt Yang from the northern quarter of the city has died," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Today, they are holding the 'third day' scripture recitation in her honor. We have prepared a portable table, and appropriate sacrificial offerings for the occasion, and have also sent a contribution toward the cost of the obsequies. They went to offer their condolences."

"The venerable lady must have reached an advanced age," opined Ying Po-ch'ueh.

"She was probably seventy-four or seventy-five," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She didn't have any children of either sex and depended on her nephew who resides outside the city gate for support. It is also some years now since I undertook to provide a coffin for her."

"She was a lucky old lady," remarked Ying Po-ch'ueh. "To have a coffin at hand prepares one for the day when your:

Yellow gold is stored in the coffer.⁵²

That was really a good deed on your part, Brother."

When this conversational exchange was finished, and:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed,

Ying Po-ch'ueh and Kan Jun said farewell and departed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said, "It's the eleventh, so it's the turn of my son-in-law to spend the night here."

"In the shop over there," said Tai-an, "Uncle Fu the Second has also gone home, so I will be spending the night in the shop by myself."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then got up and went across the street, where he told his young servant Wang Hsien, "Be careful with the braziers and candles."

"I understand," responded Wang Hsien.

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked on while he locked the gate and then, observing that there was no one around, proceeded to step nimbly into Pen the Fourth's quarters, where, whom should he see but Pen the Fourth's wife, who had been standing there all by herself for some time.

When she heard the sound made by the locking of the gate and saw Hsi-men Ch'ing approaching her in the dark, she promptly opened the outer door for him and then closed it, saying, "Father, come inside the sliding paper door and sit down."

It so happens that the inner room was divided by a papered latticework partition, behind which there was a small k'ang with a smoldering brazier, a table with a lighted lamp, and two bedrails. The room had been newly plastered so that it looked as white as snow and was decorated with four framed hanging scrolls. On her head she wore a kingfisher-blue gold lamé headband, her fret was adorned with four gold pins, and a pair of clove-shaped earrings dangled from her ears. Her body was clad in a purple damask jacket and a black chiffon cape, over a jade-colored silk chiffon skirt. She stepped forward and greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, after which, she promptly served him a cup of tea to drink.

Speaking in a whisper, she said, "I'm afraid that Auntie Han next door may become aware of us."

"Never fear," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I kept in the dark, so she couldn't have seen me."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he proceeded to embrace the woman and give her a kiss. Pulling over a pillow, he undressed her, laid her down on the edge of the k'ang, lifted up her legs, and started to thrust away. The clasp was already fastened on his organ. No sooner had he inserted it into her

vagina and withdrawn it several times than, down below:

Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,

leaving her blue cotton drawers soaking wet. Hsi-men Ch'ing then withdrew his organ, groped a packet of the aphrodisiac powder known as "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties" out of his wallet, rubbed some of it on his turtle head, and thrust it back inside. Only then did he stem the flow of her vaginal fluids. While he gave himself over to thrusting and retracting, the woman clasped Hsi-men Ch'ing around the shoulders with both hands. As they responded to each other, the woman from underneath him raised her quavery voice and gave vent to unending groans of satisfaction. Hsi-men Ch'ing, exhilarated by the wine, lifted her two legs over his shoulders and proceeded to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans:

Advancing with alacrity and galloping forward,

as he slammed away at her no less than two or three hundred times. In no time at all:

Her cloud-shaped chignon became disheveled,⁵³

The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and

Her voice became completely inarticulate;⁵⁴

while Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Reduced to panting and puffing,

as the melting sensation in his "divine turtle" was such that he:

Ejaculated like a geyser.

After some time, he retracted his organ, releasing her vaginal secretions, which she proceeded to wipe up with a handkerchief.



Pen the Fourth's Wife Braves the Cold to Engage Her Lover

After the two of them had readjusted their clothing, fastened their girdles, and put themselves to rights, Hsi-men Ch'ing groped five or six taels worth of loose silver out of his sleeve, together with two pairs of gold-headed hairpins, and presented them to the woman with which to buy costume jewelry for the New Year's season. The woman bowed to him in gratitude and surreptitiously let him out the door. Tai-an was waiting in the shop, listening intently for the sound of the door knocker, and promptly opened the main gate to let Hsi-men Ch'ing in. He was confident that no one was aware of his actions, and afterwards, as the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he made out with her several times.

Truly:

The best way to avoid being found out,
Is not to do it in the first place.

Who could have known that Auntie Han would perceive the situation with her sardonic eye and pass the information on to Chin-lien in the rear compound, who opted not to expose the state of affairs for the time being.

One day, on the fifteenth of the twelfth month, the household of Ch'iao Hung hosted a party, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh and Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, set out to attend it together. There were many relatives and friends there that day, and they enjoyed the performance of theatrical selections and drinking wine until the second watch before the party broke up. The next day, each of them also received the gift of a table setting of food, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Let us return to the story of Ts'ui Pen, who had purchased two thousand taels worth of silk piece goods in Hu-chou, hired a boat to

transport them, and set out for home early in the twelfth month. Upon arriving at the dock in Lin-ch'ing, he left the young employee Jung Hai to look after the goods, hired a donkey on which to ride, and headed for home in order to get the silver for the cartage fee.

When he arrived at the gate of the shop and dismounted, Ch'in-t'ung said, "So Brother Ts'ui has come home. Take a seat in the reception hall. Father is in the house across the street. I'll go fetch him."

Upon going across the street, he did not see Hsi-men Ch'ing and asked P'ing-an where he was.

"Father has probably gone back to the rear compound," said P'ing-an.

Ch'in-t'ung, accordingly, went back to the master suite and asked Yüeh-niang where he was.

"You lousy jailbird. You've been seeing things," said Yüeh-niang. "Father went out early this morning and hasn't been back inside since."

Ch'in-t'ung proceeded to look for him in the quarters of all the residents, as well as the garden and the studio, but failed to find him.

On coming back to the main gate, he raised his voice, saying, "How utterly frustrating! Who knows where Father has gotten to that he is nowhere to be found? Even in broad daylight, he is nowhere to be seen. Brother Ts'ui Pen has been here all this time and has been forced to wait in vain."

Tai-an was well aware of the situation but did not utter a word. Unexpectedly, Hsi-men Ch'ing emerged from the front compound to the utter befuddlement of the page boys. It so happens that he had been in Pen the Fourth's quarters making out with his wife and had only just come out. P'ing-an directed Hsi-men Ch'ing to the shop across the street and then stuck out the tip of his tongue at Ch'in-t'ung.

They all broke into a sweat on his behalf, saying, "No doubt, once Brother Ts'ui Pen has gone, you'll be in for a few strokes of the cane."

Who could have anticipated the fact that when Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way into the reception hall, Ts'ui Pen kowtowed to him and turned over his account books, saying, "When the boat arrived at the dock I found that I lacked sufficient silver for the cartage fee. We set out together on the first day of the twelfth month, but on arriving in Yang-chou I separated from the other two while they went on to Hang-chou. We all stayed for two days at the home of your kinsman Miao Ch'ing."

He then went on to say, "Miao Ch'ing has expended ten taels of silver to purchase the daughter of a battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard as a present for you. She is only fifteen years old and is named Ch'u-yün. Words are inadequate to describe her.

Her face is like a flower,
Her flesh is like jade,
Her eyes are like stars,
Her eyebrows are like crescent moons,
Her waist is like a willow,
Her stockings are like hooks, and
Her two feet are barely three inches long.

Truly:

She has a face that induces fish to
dive and geese to plunge;
Her visage outshines the moon while
putting flowers to shame.⁵⁵

She has a repertory of three thousand short songs and eight hundred long songs. Truly:

If one were to describe her glamour:
It is like a shining pearl
rolling on a crystal plate.
If one were to speak of her demeanor:
It is like a red apricot on a branch tip
caught in the morning sun.

Miao Ch'ing is maintaining her in his home for the time being, so he can have a vanity case made for her and provide her with an appropriate wardrobe. This coming spring, Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao will bring her on their boat so she can wait upon Your Honor and serve to:

Dissipate your melancholy and dispel your gloom."⁵⁶

When he heard this, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted and remarked, "You could just as well have brought her on your boat. What need is there for him to provide her with a wardrobe, or to have a dressing case made for her? As though my household were unable to supply such things."

Thereupon, his only regret was that he could not:

Mount the clouds and spread his wings,
in order to fly to Yang-chou, take possession of this voluptuous beauty, and enjoy the happy event to his heart's content. Truly:

The case of the deer was one that the minister
of Cheng was unable to solve;⁵⁷
Whether the butterfly was Chuang Chou, or vice

versa, cannot be determined.⁵⁸

There is a poem that testifies to this:

He has heard tell that in Yang-chou
there is one Ch'u-yün;
But the word of such an obscure bird
may not be reliable.
He does not realize that good things
are often evanescent;
Just ask their owner about the fate
of his plum blossoms.⁵⁹

Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Ts'ui Pen company while he had something to eat and then weighed out fifty taels of silver to cover the cartage fee. He also wrote a letter to Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house, requesting that he be granted favorable treatment. When they had finished talking together, Ts'ui Pen took his leave and went to Ch'iao Hung's household to report his return.

When P'ing-an saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing did not bother to find fault with Ch'in-t'ung, he remarked, "You don't know how lucky you are. Were it not so, when Father came inside, at the very least, you would have been in for several strokes of the cane."

Ch'in-t'ung laughed at this, saying, "I guess you're the only one who truly understands Father's nature."

By the time the cargo of silk piece goods had been transported from Lin-ch'ing and unloaded at the shop on Lion Street, it was the last decade of the month. Hsi-men Ch'ing was at home at the time, supervising the delivery of New Year's gifts, when a messenger from Director-in-Chief Ching Chung arrived unexpectedly with a calling card that read: "Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's report should have arrived in the capital some days ago, but I don't know whether the imperial rescript in response to it has come down yet or not. I humbly submit, venerable sir, that if you could send someone to the censor's yamen to inquire about it, it would be most gratifying."

Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith sent an adjutant with five mace of silver to inquire about it from a clerical subofficial in the provincial censor's yamen, and, sure enough, the government gazette had come down the previous day, and the clerk agreed to make a copy of the relevant material for Hsi-men Ch'ing's perusal. It read as follows:

Memorial submitted by Sung Ch'iao-nien, Regional Investigating Censor of Shantung

In re: The Evaluation, According to Precedent, of the Local Civil and Military Officials, with a View toward Inspiring the Feelings of the Populace, and Enhancing Your Majesty's Sage Administration

I venture to observe that civil officials exist to nurture the people, and military officials exist to prevent disorder, so as to protect the territory,⁶⁰ and ensure the people's livelihood. Should the wrong men hold office,⁶¹ their actions will be illegitimate, the people will suffer, and the state will have no one on whom to rely. No institution is more important than the censorial evaluations for the inspiration and motivation of the civil and military officials, and they cannot but be undertaken with due diligence. Your servant has been delegated to survey the situation in the territory of Shantung, and to personally monitor the state of public morality. With regard to the effectiveness of the administration, the hardships of the people, and the qualifications of the civil and military officials, he has scrupulously looked into all of them, has sought the assessments of the highest authorities regarding the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the relevant officials, and is confident that he has succeeded in ascertaining the truth about them. Now that the end of my assignment is imminent, it is incumbent upon me to present in detail the results of my investigation.

The provincial administration commissioner of Shantung, Ch'en Ssu-chen, is loyal and honest in his personal conduct, and proficient at nurturing the people.

The investigation commissioner for Shantung, Chao No, upholds the legal standards with clarity, so that both gentry and commoners submit to them.

The vice-commissioner of education, Ch'en Cheng-hui, exemplifies motivational conduct and adheres strictly to the principles of leadership.

I have also ascertained that the assistant commissioner of the Military Defense Circuit, Lei Ch'i-yüan, has earned the respect of both soldiers and civilians for his judicious exercise of mercy and severity, and won the praise of both colleagues and subordinates for his experienced direction.

The prefect of Chi-nan, Chang Shu-yeh, is respected for his thrifty administration and has demonstrated a talent for governing.

The prefect of Tung-p'ing, Hu Shih-wen, is honest and scrupulous in the exercise of his office and is as solicitous of the populace as though they were invalids.⁶²

The prefect of Hsü-chou, Han Pang-ch'i, is sedulous in his devotion to his duties, and worthy of a position in the imperial court.

The prefect of Lai-chou, Yeh Ch'ien, has repulsed the maritime pirates and governed so effectively that people do not pick up articles dropped by the wayside.⁶³ He has also served the agricultural needs of the populace by preventing their land from becoming too saline.

These several officials are all worthy of being rewarded with promotion to higher positions.

I have also learned that the left assistant administration commissioner, Feng T'ing-hu, has a humpbacked physique and is in the sunset of his life.⁶⁴ Though he has no more vitality than a wooden puppet, he remains as rapacious as ever.

The prefect of Tung-ch'ang, Hsü Sung, allows the father of his concubine to engage in bribery, so that the court is swamped with accusations. He is so extortionate in assessing taxes that censure is rampant in his jurisdiction.

These two officials deserve to be promptly removed from office.

In addition, I have ascertained that the commandant of the Left Army and notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs, Chou Hsiu, is imposing in stature, and skilled at maintaining discipline, having mastered the qualifications of a military commander. He has won the allegiance of the troops in his command, and quelled the banditry in his jurisdiction.

The military director-in-chief of Chi-chou, Ching Chung, is both young and energetic, and his talent and faculties are fully developed. He won first place in the military examinations and is renowned as an erudite officer whose masterful tactics enhance his ability to engage in combat. His commands are uniform and strictly enforced, and his strategies enable him to resist aggression.

The military director-in-chief of Yen-chou, Wen Hsi, is proficient at military strategy, and practiced at archery and horsemanship. He maintains a contingent of cavalry in order to prepare for the unexpected⁶⁵ and labors to erect fortifications as a defense against the unforeseen.⁶⁶

These three officials deserve to be promptly promoted to higher office.

The battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, Wu K'ai, possesses fully developed talent and understands the responsibilities of a guard commander. In commanding his forces to attack the most hardened opponents, he never fails to win every engagement. By stocking provisions with which to feed his men, not one of them is forced to go unfed. His ability to express empathy for others⁶⁷ inspires his troops to put their lives at risk. He is truly a bastion in defense of the region and a bulwark ensuring the safety of the state. He ought to be specially promoted in order to motivate his fellow officials.

If Your Majesty sincerely believes that your servant's suggestions are worthy of consideration and chooses to implement them, it is to be hoped that the ranks of officialdom may be cleansed of superfluity, the resolution of the people may be inspired,⁶⁸ the right men may be appointed to office, and Your sage administration will have a foundation on which to rely.

The rescript elicited by this memorial read:

These proposals have met with imperial approval and should be directed to the attention of the appropriate boards.

There followed a response from the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War which read as follows:

Having perused the contents of the memorial submitted by Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, we find that his evaluation of the civil and military officials in his jurisdiction is an expression of his loyalty to the state. It incorporates public opinion and is based on honest investigation, with the intent of bolstering Your Majesty's sage administration. We humbly submit that if Your Majesty's sage wisdom sees fit to enact these proposals, the empire would then be fortunate indeed, and the people would then be fortunate indeed.⁶⁹

The rescript elicited by this memorial read:

These recommendations are imperially approved. Let them be enacted as proposed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading this material he was utterly delighted and, taking the government gazette with him, made his way back to the rear compound, where he said to Yüeh-niang, "The response to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's evaluation has already come down. Your elder brother has been promoted to the position of assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, with the substantive position of supervisor of the State Farm Battalion. Commandant Chou Hsiu and His Honor Ching Chung have also been promoted to the rank of assistant commander-generals. Right now, we ought to promptly send a page boy to invite your elder brother over so we can tell him about it."

"You go ahead and send someone to invite him," responded Yüeh-niang. "I'll get a maidservant to fetch wine and refreshments for him. My only worry is that he will be short of silver to spend on the ceremony of assuming office."

"That doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm prepared to lend him a few taels of silver to take care of it."

It was not long before Brother-in-law Wu K'ai arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing showed him the texts of the relevant memorials and rescripts.

Wu K'ai promptly bowed in gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, saying, "I am greatly indebted to the support of my brother-in-law and my sister.

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are short of money with which to put on a party to celebrate your assumption of office, I am willing to weigh out a thousand taels of silver for you to use for the purpose."

Wu K'ai, once again, bowed in gratitude, after which, wine was served in Yüeh-niang's room, and Yüeh-niang herself sat down to keep them company. Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Ch'en Ching-chi to make a copy of the relevant data from the government gazette and give it to Wu K'ai, and he also sent Tai-an to deliver copies of the gazette to the homes of Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung and Commandant Chou Hsiu in order to convey the good news. Truly:

You are urged not to waste your means on

engraving adamantine rock;

The mouths of the pedestrians on the road

are like memorial tablets.⁷⁰

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 78

HSI-MEN CH'ING VENTURES UPON A SECOND ENGAGEMENT WITH LADY LIN; WU YÜEH- NIANG INVITES HO YUNG-SHOU'S WIFE TO VIEW THE LANTERNS

The pitch changes in the lowest pitch-pipe
as a propitious breath blows;
When the yin retreats and the yang ascends
the temperate ether returns.¹
The sunflower's shadow begins to shift on
the day of the winter solstice;
The plum blossom begins to bloom at the time
of the solar term Little Cold.
The day of the sacrifice to the Eight Spirits²
portends an auspicious year;
As the ether blows into the pitch-pipes, the
ash of the pith is disturbed.
The willows on the riverbanks are all ready
for the change of season;
In their profusion, they are more than happy
to usher in the Spring.³

THE STORY GOES that on that day Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Brother-in-law Wu K'ai company as they drank together until he went home that evening.

Early the next morning, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung came on horseback to thank him, saying, "When I read the rescript that you sent me yesterday, I was:

Unable to contain my satisfaction.

It is more than sufficient to show the extent of your generous regard. I will certainly:

Carry rings and knot grass, and never forget it.

Battalion Commander Fan Hsün is getting old, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan had hoped for a promotion, but they have been left where they were and may feel somewhat disappointed."

After they had finished speaking, and the tea had been twice replenished, Ching Chung got up to go and asked, "When is His Honor Yün Li-shou going to invite us over for a drink to celebrate his promotion?"

"He won't be able to invite us during these few days before New Year's," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It will have to wait until sometime next month."

He then escorted him to the gate, where he mounted his horse and departed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then supervised the preparation of a freshly slaughtered pig, two jars of Chekiang wine, a round-collared scarlet robe of velvet embroidered with gold thread and emblazoned with a *hsieh-chih*, the mythical one-horned goat who was said to gore wrongdoers, a round-collared robe of black figured satin, and a hundred stuffed gold-colored pastries, as an expression of his gratitude to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and sent Ch'un-hung, with a calling card, to deliver them to the provincial censor's yamen. The gatekeeper went inside to report his arrival, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien called him into a heated chamber in the rear reception hall, where he was provided with tea while he waited for him to write an answer. When he had done so, he put it into an envelope, sealed it, and rewarded Ch'un-hung with three mace of silver.

When Ch'un-hung arrived home and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he tore it open and saw that it read as follows:

Having twice imposed upon your illustrious household, I am profoundly embarrassed. And now, I am once again the undeserving recipient of your magnanimity. What can I do to be worthy of such largess? I have already memorialized on behalf of your kinsman, Wu K'ai, and your colleague, Ching Chung, as I expect you know. For days on end I have longed for a glimpse of your radiant countenance, so that we may discuss things in person, and I may have an opportunity to express my gratitude.

The signature at the end read: "Respectfully indited by his devoted servant, Sung Ch'iao-nien, for the perusal of the distinguished officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, His Honor the gentleman Hsi-men Ch'ing."

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, soon thereafter, sent someone to deliver a hundred copies of the official calendar for the coming year, four hundred sheets of stationery, and a pig as a return gift to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

One day, a document came down from the higher authorities confirming that Brother-in-law Wu K'ai should report to the yamen of the local guard and assume the duties of his new office. Hsi-men Ch'ing visited him in order to offer his congratulations and gave him thirty taels of silver, and four bolts of capital brocade, to expend, both high and low.

On the twenty-fourth, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was entitled to a recess for the holiday season, put away his seal of office and came home, where he had prepared mutton and wine, red banners, and an inscribed scroll, and invited his relatives and friends for a party to celebrate Wu K'ai's accession to office. Upon returning from the guard yamen after assuming office, Wu K'ai was welcomed to the home of Hsi-men Ch'ing, where a sumptuous feast was provided in his honor.

Around the same time, the dependents of Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou arrived from the Eastern Capital, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent a welcoming gift of tea to them in Wu Yüeh-niang's name.

On the twenty-sixth, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor, along with twelve of his acolytes, came to the Hsi-men Ch'ing residence to perform the scripture recitation on the "hundredth day" after Li P'ing-erh's death. The appropriate texts for the salvation of the departed were recited ten times over, the ritual was performed with due solemnity, and there was:

Loud playing on wind and percussion instruments,⁴
to further enhance the incense-burning procession. A large number of relatives and friends came to offer gifts of tea and were duly invited to partake of the sacrificial oblations. The party did not break up until the evening. But no more of this.

On the twenty-seventh, Hsi-men Ch'ing supervised the sending out of New Year's gifts. The households of Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ts'ui Pen were each given half a pig, half a sheep, a jar of wine, a sack of rice, and a tael of silver. Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter were each given an outfit of Hang-chou silk clothing and three taels of silver. Wu Yüeh-niang had also commissioned Nun Hsüeh to preside over a service at her nunnery and ordered Lai-an to deliver incense, lamp-oil, rice, flour, and silver for the occasion. But no more of this.

Before long, it was the last day of the year.

The moon shines on the plum trees in the window;
The wind disturbs the snow lying upon the eaves.⁵
Firecrackers explode before a thousand doors;
Lanterns burn in front of ten thousand gates.⁶
Every home displays lucky interlocking lozenges;
Everywhere hang couplets inscribed on peachwood.

Hsi-men Ch'ing burned paper money and then went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to make a sacrificial offering before her spirit tablet, after which wine was served in the rear reception hall. When the whole household, high and low, including Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, had saluted him with a drink, they sat down arrayed to either side. Then Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ju-i, the five of them, kowtowed to him, followed by Hsiao-yü, Hsiu-ch'un, Hsiao-luan, Yüan-hsiao, Chung-ch'iu, and Ch'iu-chü. After this, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," Hui-ch'ing, Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang, Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu, and Lai-chüeh's wife Hui-yüan, the spouses of the four principal servants, kowtowed. Only after this did Wang Ching, Ch'un-hung, Tai-an, P'ing-an, Lai-an, Ch'i-t'ung, Ch'in-t'ung, Hua-t'ung, Lai-chao's son Little Iron Rod, Lai-pao's son Seng-pao, and Lai-hsing's daughter Nien-erh kowtow to him in turn. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang presented each of them with handkerchiefs, kerchiefs, and silver.

The next day was New Year's Day, the first day of the first month of the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period.⁷ Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early, donned his formal cap and crimson robe, lit incense dedicated to Heaven and Earth, burned paper money, had something to eat, called for his horse, and set out to proffer his New Year's greetings to Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien.

Yüeh-niang and the other ladies of the household also got up early:

Daubed on makeup and applied powder,
Stuck floral trinkets in their hair;
Donned brocade skirts, embroidered jackets,⁸
Silken hose, and shoes with upturned tips;
Dressed themselves up to look captivating,
Decorated themselves to appear enchanting;

and forgathered in Yüeh-niang's room to exchange greetings.

P'ing-an and the orderly on duty that day stationed themselves at the front gate to accept the calling cards and record the names of the officials and gentlemen who came to call.

Tai-an and Wang Ching, wearing new clothes, new boots, and new caps, went outside the gate, where they played at shuttlecock, let off firecrackers, cracked melon seeds with their teeth, concealed sachets of pomander in their sleeves, and sported quivering paper cutouts of spring moths on their heads.

The vast number of Hsi-men Ch'ing's employees, managers, and protégés who gathered to extend their New Year's greetings was so great they could hardly be counted. Ch'en Ching-chi was assigned the task of single-handedly entertaining them in the front guest room.

The furnishings for an elaborate feast were laid out in the large reception hall in the rear compound for the entertainment of the friends and relatives of the family.

In the summerhouse in the garden, felt curtains and heat-holding drapes were suspended, brocade carpets and embroidered rugs were arrayed, along with braziers burning animal-shaped briquettes, and ten tables replete with gold lamé tablecloths and figured seat cushions.

Platters were piled high with rare fruits,

Vases were embellished with gold blossoms,

The feast was spread on tortoiseshell mats,⁹

all reserved for the entertainment of the visiting gentlemen and officials.

Around noontime, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home after making his formal calls at the prefectural and district yamens. He had just dismounted from his horse when Wang the Third from the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang, garbed in formal attire and followed by four or five attendants, showed up to proffer his greetings. On arriving in the reception hall, he proceeded to perform:

Four brace makes eight kowtows,

after which he asked if Wu Yüeh-niang could come out so he could meet her. Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, invited him into the rear compound to meet Yüeh-niang and then ushered him back to the front reception hall and offered him a seat. They had just saluted each other with a cup of wine when Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came by to proffer his greetings. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Ch'en Ching-chi to entertain Wang the Third, while he went to the summerhouse to receive Ho Yung-shou. Upon drinking a little while longer, Wang the Third said goodbye, and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted him to the front gate, where he mounted his horse and departed. After this, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Commander Yün Li-shou, and Ch'iao Hung also showed up one after the other.

By this time, as a consequence of entertaining visitors all day long, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Half inebriated with wine.

That evening, after seeing everyone off, he returned to the master suite and went to sleep for the night.

The next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out again to make New Year's calls and did not return until evening. In his absence, Han Ming-ch'uan, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, and Hua Tzu-yu had all come to call, and Ch'en Ching-chi had the task of entertaining them in the reception hall, where they had been waiting for some time. When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, a new serving of wine and accompanying delicacies was provided, and they fell to drinking again. Since Han Ming-ch'uan and Hua Tzu-yu lived outside the city wall, they were the first to get up and go, but Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh continued to sit there until they were so drunk they bobbed about like the float valve in an oil jar, without venturing to leave. Brother-in-law Wu the Second also showed up. After expressing his greetings, he went back to the rear compound to pay a visit to Yüeh-niang and then came out again to join them. They continued drinking until after the lamps were lit before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing was already stinking drunk by the time he saw off Ying Po-chüeh and the others at the front gate.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Tai-an was standing beside him, he squeezed his hand, and Tai-an, who understood what this meant, said, "No one else is in her place."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, made his way toward Pen Ti-ch'uan's quarters. The woman, who was already standing inside the outer door, welcomed him inside, and the two of them, without wasting any words, went into the inner room, where the woman:

Took off her clothes, undid her girdle, and

Lay down on the k'ang with her legs spread.

Hsi-men Ch'ing let down his trousers and lifted up her legs. The silver clasp was already fastened on his organ, and he proceeded to set to work with it. It so happens that the woman liked to keep her thighs together during intercourse, but she used her two hands to separate them so that Hsi-men Ch'ing could better stimulate her clitoris. In consequence, her vaginal secretions flowed out in a warm flood, soaking the mattress. Hsi-men Ch'ing had applied an aphrodisiac to his turtle head, and he plunged it inside her, claspng her around the waist with both hands, while the two of them proceeded to knead away at each other until his chowrie handle penetrated her to the root:

Without leaving a hairsbreadth outside.¹⁰

The woman opened her eyes wide, while calling out, "My own daddy!"

Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her, "What is your given name? Tell me."

"My maiden name is Yeh," she responded, "and I am the fifth sibling in my family."

Hsi-men Ch'ing muttered to himself, saying, "Yeh the Fifth, I don't know whether you are familiar with oral intercourse, or not."

This woman had originally been employed as a wet nurse and had engaged in an affair with Pen the Fourth, who absconded with her and took her as his wife. She was petite in stature, with a sultry, treacle-sweet gaze, and was born in the year of the hare, so that she was just thirty-one years old, and there wasn't much she didn't know about anything.

Repetitions of the words "My own daddy" poured out of her mouth in an endless stream until Hsi-men Ch'ing's feelings came to a climax, and he:

Ejaculated like a geyser.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing retracted his chowrie handle and wanted to wipe it off, the woman prevented him from doing so, saying, "Don't wipe it off. Let this whore of yours get down and suck it clean for you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by this proposal.

The woman then actually squatted down on her haunches, took hold of his organ with both hands, and sucked it completely clean, before allowing him to refasten his trousers.

She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Why is it that my husband has been gone all this time without coming home?"

"I've also been expecting him," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling in the capital may be keeping him there for some reason."

He then proceeded to reward the woman with two or three taels of silver as pin money, saying, "I would give you an outfit of clothes, but I fear that if Pen the Fourth were to find out about it, it would prove embarrassing. It's better to give you this silver, so you can buy what you want for yourself."

The woman then opened the door and let him out. Tai-an was alone in the shop, where he waited behind the closed door for Hsi-men Ch'ing to come in, before securing it for the night, while Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way back to the rear compound.

Gentle reader take note: It has always been true that:

If the ridgepole is not straight,

The rafters will be crooked.

This is a natural principle.¹¹

If the head of a household commits morally questionable acts, the servants in his home will follow his example. It so happens that this wife of Pen the Fourth was not the sort to abide by her lot. She had already been carrying on an affair with Tai-an, and now she had succeeded in enticing Hsi-men Ch'ing as well.

No sooner had Tai-an seen Hsi-men Ch'ing into the house than he took advantage of the fact that Manager Fu Ming was not spending the night in the shop to join P'ing-an in filling two large vessels of wine and visiting Pen the Fourth's wife in her quarters, where they drank together until the second watch. When P'ing-an returned to the shop to sleep, Tai-an proceeded to spend the night with Pen the Fourth's wife. Can such things be? Truly:

There is no need for the people of today to

practice threading needles;

How could the Weaving Maid have the leisure

to confer such dexterity?¹²

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Romantic feelings bedazzle the eyes, causing
one's vision to blur;

Why is it that the scattered blossoms end up
trampled into the mud?

Laying aside his zither, he ceases to perform

Shang-ling's sad lament;¹³

Which is making the mountain fowl chatter as
they fly among the trees.¹⁴

To resume our story, that evening Pen the Fourth's wife said to Tai-an, "The only thing I'm afraid of is that Auntie Han next door may leak information about what's going on to the ladies in the rear compound. As in the case of Manager Han Tao-kuo's wife, if they have anything to say about it, I'll be utterly mortified¹⁵ to be seen by them."

"Aside from the First Lady and the Fifth Lady," said Tai-an, "the others don't matter. The First Lady is all right, but the Fifth Lady is prone to be officious. If you take my advice, buy something as a New Year's gift and go inside to offer it to the First Lady as a demonstration of your filial respect. She may not care that much about anything else, but she has always had a liking for steamed shortcake. You ought to buy a mace worth of stuffed steamed-short-cake pastries and a box of large melon seeds to present to her. The ninth day of the month is the Fifth Lady's birthday. You ought to give her a gift as well, and go in person to present her with a box of melon seeds. If you go inside and kowtow to them tomorrow, I guarantee it will have the effect of stopping their mouths."

Pen the Fourth's wife chose to act on Tai-an's advice, and the next day, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, Tai-an bought the gift boxes for her and took them back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound.

"Where do these come from?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"Pen the Fourth's wife is presenting these boxes of delicacies and melon seeds for Mother to eat," responded Tai-an.

"When her husband is not even at home," remarked Yüeh-niang, "how did she come up with the money to go to such trouble on my behalf?"

She promptly accepted them and sent her a box of steamed dumplings and a box of fruit in return, saying, "Present her with my respects, and thank her for me."

That day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from paying New Year's visits, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor came to extend his compliments. Hsi-men Ch'ing entertained him for a drink in the reception hall before seeing him off.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then took off his formal clothes and said to Tai-an, "You take the horse and go pay a visit to Auntie Wen. Say to her, 'Father would like to come pay his respects to Lady Lin today,' and see what she says."

"There is no need for me to go, Father," responded Tai-an. A while ago, I ran into Auntie Wen, who was riding her donkey past the front gate. Tomorrow, on the fourth, Wang the Third is going to depart for the Eastern Capital to pay his respects to his wife's uncle, the eunuch Huang Ching-ch'en. Lady Lin says she would like Father to pay her a New Year's visit on the sixth. She will be expecting you then."

"Did she really say that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You don't mean to suggest that I would dare tell a lie, do you?" protested Tai-an.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to go back to the rear compound. He had hardly arrived in the master suite and sat down before Lai-an suddenly appeared and reported that Brother-in-law Wu had come.

Wu K'ai, accordingly, came into the rear parlor, dressed in formal attire, including a girdle with a gold plaque, and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying:

"It's a long story,

but I, Wu K'ai, am greatly indebted to you, Brother-in-law, for promoting my interests and looking after me the way you have. It has cost you something to do so, and I am extremely grateful for your lavish gifts. The other day when you condescended to pay me a visit,

I was not at home. The fact that I was not there to welcome you has left me feeling as though I let you down. Today, I have come to respectfully kowtow to you in the hope that you will forgive my remissness."

So saying, he offered him a kowtow.

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly kowtowed to him in return, saying, "Brother-in-law, congratulations on your promotion.

It is only a natural development;
as a close relative of mine:

What need is there to discuss it?"

When Wu K'ai had finished paying obeisance to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang came out and kowtowed to her elder brother. She was decked out in a gilt-ridged cap of pale lavender crepe under a sealskin toque, a white satin jacket that opened down the middle, an aloeswood-colored brocaded vest, and a wide-cut skirt of jade-colored satin. On her ears she wore a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece, her chignon was studded with combs and hairpins in the shape of gold phoenixes, and on her breast there hung a gold chatelaine with its three pendant charms that served as a clasp for her collar. Beside her skirt was suspended a purple brocaded purse with eight tassels, and a key chain of variegated cord. On her feet she wore a pair of high-heeled shoes of white satin brocade with an embroidered pattern. In short, she was dolled up very vividly. Coming forward:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze:

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;

Just as if inserting a taper in its holder;
she kowtowed to her brother four times.

This threw Wu K'ai into such consternation that he promptly performed a half kowtow in return, saying, "Sister, two kowtows are enough."

He then continued, "Your elder brother and his wife are so:

Unconscious of right and wrong,

that we are constantly coming and imposing on the two of you. Your elder brother is aging, and we are increasingly dependent on you."

"If we ever let you down," responded Yüeh-niang, "I hope that you will forgive us."

"Sister," said Wu K'ai, "it goes without saying that we have put the two of you to no small trouble on our behalf."

When this exchange of courtesies was over, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Wu K'ai to sit down, saying, "By this time of day, I assume that my brother-in-law will not be visiting anyone else to extend his New Year's greetings. Why don't you loosen your clothes and sit down in the room here for a visit."

Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, who were both in an adjacent room, upon hearing the stir that Brother-in-law Wu's arrival had created, would promptly proceed to come in and kowtow to him. They both wore sealskin toques, white satin jackets, and jade-colored drawnwork skirts. One of them wore a green brocaded vest, and the other a purple brocaded vest. On their heads, they both sported frets, but Meng Yü-lou's was set off with pearl circlets, while P'an Chin-lien's was enhanced by pendant onyx earrings, and below they revealed the upturned points of their golden lotuses. After kowtowing to Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, they retreated to their own quarters.

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had ushered his brother-in-law to a seat in the room, a table was placed over the brazier, and platters of appetizers, boxes of candied fruit, assorted bowls of hot viands, large steamed dumplings, and a soup of eight ingredients were brought in and placed upon it. Hsiao-yü and Yü-hsiao also came in and kowtowed to Brother-in-law Wu. In a little while, after they had finished with the soup and rice, Yüeh-niang took up a small gold goblet, inlaid with tortoiseshell, filled it with wine, and offered it to Wu K'ai, while Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to play the role of host.

Brother-in-law Wu demurred, saying, "Sister, why don't you come and sit down with us?"

"I'll be there in a moment," responded Yüeh-niang, as she went into the inner room and came out with an assortment of delicacies to go with the wine, consisting of bamboo shoots, whitebait, ground squirrel, minced sturgeon, jellyfish, edible fungus, apples, betel nuts, fresh tangerines, pomegranates, dried caltrops, snow pears, and the like.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "Has my brother-in-law's recent promotion gone through satisfactorily?"

"Thanks to my brother-in-law's support," responded Wu K'ai, "my new appointment came through at New Year's. I have already distributed 70 or 80 percent of the customary gratuities, both above and below, but have not yet visited the site of the State Farm Battalion. Tomorrow is an auspicious day for me to go and assume my new office. The Ch'ing-ho Guard has already issued my official seal of office. When I return home, I will have to prepare some gift boxes and have them carried to the yamen of the State Farm Battalion in time for my assumption of office, and also dispatch an order for the heads of the State Farms to assemble so I can issue their instructions. My predecessor, Director Ting, having mismanaged affairs, has already been impeached by Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, and been removed from office. Now that I have been appointed to:

Assume his position and carry out his duties,

I will have to examine closely the lists of registered tenants, and motivate the heads of the State Farms to go over them with a fine-tooth comb and clearly report any additions or subtractions, in order to facilitate the collection of the autumn and summer tax assessments."

"How extensive, altogether, are the State Farms that will be under your jurisdiction?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"As for these State Farms," replied Wu K'ai, "I will be candid with you, Brother-in-law. According to the precedent promulgated by Emperor T'ai-tsu,¹⁶ units of the Military Guard were assigned to work on State Farms, which were established in order to save the transportation costs of logistical support. Later on, the grand counselor Wang An-shih introduced the Green Sprouts system,¹⁷ which

involved the additional assessment of this summer tax. Prior to that time, the State Farms were only required to submit the autumn tax assessment, and this summer tax was not applied to land owned by the civilian population. At present, within the jurisdiction of Chichou, leaving aside uncultivated land, the Imperial Reed Beds, harbors, and narrows, the total area of the State Farms is twenty-seven thousand mou. The total value of the produce collected by the autumn and summer tax assessments is one tael and eight mace per ch'ing of land, which amounts to no more than five hundred taels of silver. At the end of the year, when the taxed produce has been collected, it is turned over to the authorities in Tung-p'ing prefecture, who in turn engage merchants to transport it, in order to provide logistical support and fodder for the army."

"Is there anything left over to profit from?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Although there are always some unregistered tenants," replied Wu K'ai, "these rural villagers are a wily lot. If you try too hard to extort anything out of them by using weighted scales or oversize containers, you run the risk of arousing adverse public opinion."

"As long as there is something left over," opined Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it should be all right. The government can hardly be expected to extract everything. If something can be retained through the manipulation of containers and scales, it should be sufficient to take care of your necessary expenditures, both high and low."

"To be candid with you, Brother-in-law," said Wu K'ai, "if I am adroit in managing these State Farms, in the space of no more than a year, I should be able to realize as much as a hundred or more taels of silver. In addition to which, at the end of the year, there will be tenants who choose to present me in person with chickens, geese, pigs, or rice. These gifts are not demanded of them and fall outside what can be expected in the way of income. I am greatly indebted to you, Brother-in-law, for the strength of your support."

"As long as it suffices for your needs," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will do what little I can on your behalf."

As they were talking, Yüeh-niang came in and sat down at their side. The three of them continued drinking together until after the lamps were lit before Brother-in-law Wu K'ai got up and took his leave. That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound to spend the night.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing reported to the yamen, where he resumed the use of his seal of office, taking his place on the bench, calling the roll, and dispatching official business.

Before this, the household of Yün Li-shou had sent out cards inviting Hsi-men Ch'ing and the officers of the Guard to attend a party on the fifth in celebration of his official appointment, and Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, had sent a card inviting Yüeh-niang and her sister wives for a get-together on the sixth.

On the fifth, Hsi-men Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh, and Brother-in-law Wu, the three of them, set out together to attend the party at Yün Li-shou's place. It so happens that Yün Li-shou had rented the house next door for the occasion and used the eighteen-foot-wide parlor there to entertain his guests. He had engaged musicians playing wind and percussion instruments to welcome his visitors, each of whom was provided with an individual table setting. They enjoyed themselves there until the evening before returning home.

Hsi-men Ch'ing could hardly wait until Yüeh-niang had departed to attend the party at the home of Ho Yung-shou the next day. He then proceeded to dress himself up to befit the occasion, stuffed packets of gratuities into his sleeve, mounted his horse, put on his eye shades, and, attended by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, set out in the early afternoon for the mansion of Imperial Commissioner Wang in order to extend his New Year's greetings. Wang the Third was away from home at the time, but he left a calling card for him. Auntie Wen was already there and, taking possession of his calling card, promptly went inside to report his arrival to Lady Lin.

Upon coming out, she said, "Your Honor is invited to come back to the rear of the residence and take a seat."

Making his way past the large reception hall, he headed toward the rear of the establishment, passed through the ceremonial gate, lifted aside the translucent portiere, and entered the thirty-foot-wide parlor in the residential quarter. In the place of honor at the head of the room there was suspended a full-length portrait of the family patriarch Wang Ching-ch'ung, before which there stood two tables with sacrificial offerings of food and wine. He was depicted seated on a crimson dais in a folding armchair, covered with a tiger skin. Before the portrait:

The entire floor was covered with rugs, and

The drapery consisted of hanging red curtains.

Before long, Lady Lin appeared, wearing a full-sleeved jacket of scarlet material:

Her head was covered with pearls and trinkets, and

Her face was glossy with powder and cosmetics.

After exchanging the customary courtesies with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she invited him to sit down and share a serving of tea, and ordered a servant to lead his horse back to the stables in the rear and take care of feeding it. When they had finished drinking their tea, she suggested that Hsi-men Ch'ing should loosen his outer clothing and sit down with her in her own room.

"My son set out for the Eastern Capital on the fourth," she explained, "in order to kowtow to his wife's uncle, Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. He will not come back until after the Lantern Festival."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, took off his outer garments, under which he wore a white satin jacket, an ultramarine flying fish python robe, and white-soled black boots, presenting a really natty appearance. In the woman's room a table was set up beside a square brazier of yellow brass with animal heads protruding from its four sides, filled with smoldering charcoal. The chamber was facing the sun, which shone through the windows, so that it was brightly illuminated.

In a little while, maidservants brought in the wine.

The cups and plates were duly arranged,

Filled to the brim with rare delicacies.

The wine overflowed with golden ripples, and

A kettle of hydrangea-flavored tea was brewing.

The woman, garbed in:

A brocade skirt and embroidered jacket,
With her white teeth and bright eyes,
Passed the cup with her jadelike hands,
Conveying ardent feelings in her glance.

The two of them engaged in:

Playing at guess-fingers and throwing dice,
As their laughing banter became suggestive.
Chatting for some time,
Their thoughts were genial and their feelings warm;
Drinking quite a while,
Their gazing became risqué and their hearts stirred.
By degrees,
The sun set and dusk descended,
Before long,
Silver candles burned brightly.¹⁸

Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung were provided with wine and food at a table set up in a side chamber under the supervision of Auntie Wen. Wang the Third's wife resided in a room on the other side of the postern gate and was waited on by her own maidservants and waiting women, so that she did not ordinarily intrude on Lady Lin's living quarters. The woman had also seen to it that the postern gate was locked from the inside, so that none of the male servants would venture to barge in upon her.

When the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, they went into the woman's boudoir together, where they:

Raised the brocade curtains, and
Closed the window casements.
A maidservant deftly trimmed the silver lamp;
The beauty hastily closed the vermilion door.
The gentleman took off his clothes and went to bed;
The lady washed her feet and climbed in beside him.
The pillows were decorated with peonies;
The coverlet disturbed by crimson waves.

It so happens that before leaving home Hsi-men Ch'ing, had:

Made ready his arsenal of weapons,¹⁹

and brought his bag of sexual implements with him, intending to engage the woman in a furious battle. He had already taken a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, washing it down with wine, and had attached a pair of clasps to his organ. Under the coverlet, he lifted up the woman's two legs, inserted his chowrie handle into her vagina, arched his back and set vigorously to work. In the ensuing bout, as he lifted her body into the air and pegged away at it, the sound resembled that made by a throng of coolies plunging through the mud.²⁰

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

The woman, in her abject position, called out "Daddy!" unceasingly. Truly:

Amid autumn colors, the battle flags and banners
are reflected in the sea;
By the light of the moon, the Heaven-smiting beat
of military drums resounds.

There is a long set-piece of parallel prose that describes this engagement. Behold:

Before the brocade screen,
A soul-disorienting formation²¹ is arrayed;
Under embroidered curtains,
A spirit-conjuring banderole is unfurled.
From the soul-disorienting formation,
There emerges a guardian deity of wine,
a demon king of sex.
On his head is a flesh-colored helmet,
with a brocade visor;
On his body is a suit of glossy armor,
and a vermilion gown,
With protuberant bands, a fish skin belt,
and seamless boots.

He flaunts a black-tasseled spear,
 A tiger-eyed whip,
 A shooting star double-balled mace,
 And featherless arrows.
 Astride his curly-haired sunken-eyed roan,
 He waves a rain-flipping cloud-flapping²²
 commander's flag.
 Beneath the spirit-conjuring banderole,



Lady Lin Has a Second Engagement within the Bed Curtains

There appears a powdered skeleton,²³
 a flamboyant vixen.
 On her head is a two-phoenix ornament,
 with hanging ropes of pearls;
 On her body is a blouse of white silk,
 a kingfisher skirt waist,

A crotch of white treated silk, with
 wave-tripping stockings,
 A waistband of mermaid silk, replete
 with phoenix-toed shoes.
 She wields dismissive lashes,
 A garrulous tongue,
 Invisible arrows,
 A blubbing bludgeon,
 An emaciated mace,
 And silk-curtained scutcheon.
 Astride her coquettish jade-surfaced cunt,
 She sports a tossing and tumbling mating
 phoenixes²⁴ parasol.
 Before long, on one side, with a *p'u tung-tung*,
 drums resound like spring thunder;
 While on the other side, in wild profusion, the
 scent of orchid and musk disperses.
 On one side, amid a warm aura, the coverlet
 is disturbed by crimson waves;
 On the other side, with a rustle, curtains
 are suspended on silver hooks.
 As the coverlet is disturbed by crimson waves,
 his passions are demanding;
 Beneath the curtains suspended on silver hooks,
 her sentiments are bizarre.
 One of them, urgently, tries to run the gamut
 of all twenty-four positions;²⁵
 The other, abruptly, finds it hard to manage
 eighteen rolling responses.
 One of them is used to wielding a red floss
 noose²⁶ and tying a lovers' knot;
 The other is adept at using the kidnapper's
 shooting star date-shaped mace.
 One of them, wielding his flaring
 cylindrical spear,
 Looks forward to jabbing her three
 thousand times;
 The other, deploying her quivering
 labia bucklers,
 Expects to be surmounted at least
 fifty times.
 This one is accustomed to don his armor and
 wear a uniform when he fights;
 That one is deft at purloining the semen and
 sucking the marrow of her foe.
 One of them, riding his fighting steed,
 with a *p'a t'a-t'a*,
 Tramples the realm of song and dance;
 The other, like a cunning foot soldier,
 surreptitiously,
 Hides in the densely wooded gorge.
 One of them presents an ugly, belligerent,
 and unbending physique;
 The other reveals a seductive apricot face
 and peach-colored cheeks.

One of them flaunts his ability to maintain
even a prolonged conflict;
The other her skill at giving forth oriole's
notes and swallow's cries.²⁷
One of them, after undergoing a
protracted engagement,
Drips with sweat, her hairpins askew, her
coiffure in disarray;²⁸
The other, after maintaining a
relentless assault,
Pants and puffs, his pillow dislodged, his
mattress displaced.
Before long, behold, the ballista attacks have
reduced Crotch County to rubble,
Leaving each of them with bulging brows
and swollen eyes;
In no time, one perceives, the sparsely wooded
field is so gored with the spear,
That they are each left with split flesh
and broken skin.²⁹

Truly:

The thundering clouds rise up as high as
the nine-layered heavens,
While down below the defeated combatants
lie tumbled on the field.³⁰
Although he had often engaged lascivious
women in furious battles,
None of them had ever risen to the level
of this one's intensity.³¹

On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing burned two pellets of moxa on the middle of the woman's chest and her mons veneris and promised that he would put on a party at his residence in the near future, and invite her and Wang the Third's wife to come and enjoy viewing the lanterns. The woman's body and mind had already been so tightly entrained by Hsi-men Ch'ing that she:

Effusively voiced her acceptance,³²

promising that they would both go. Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted to hear this. On getting up, they resumed drinking heartily and enjoying each other's company until the second watch, when the horse was led out to the back gate, and Hsi-men Ch'ing took his leave and returned home. Truly:

Do not fear lest the bright moon should set,
It will be succeeded by a subtle fragrance.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

All day long I yearn for you, within
my painted boudoir;
Having met, I cannot give you up, but
press you to remain.
Master Liu³³ is undeterred by the age
of the peach blossoms;
Wantonly scattering the pink petals
into the flowing stream.³⁴

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, he was met at the gate by P'ing-an, who reported, "Today, Eunuch Director Hsüeh sent someone to deliver a written invitation for you to pay a visit to the imperial estates outside the city wall tomorrow morning, in order to enjoy the advent of spring. In addition, Yün Li-shou has sent someone to deliver five calling cards inviting the ladies of your household to a New Year's party. I have already sent the cards inside."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he had nothing to say, but proceeded to make his way back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were already sitting there. Yüeh-niang, who had just returned from the party at Ho Yung-shou's place, had already removed her head ornaments and was only wearing a fret, held in place with six gold pins, and a pearl headband. Attired above in a blue satin jacket, and below a skirt of soft yellow cotton material, she had sat down to chat with them. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, she hastily stood up and greeted him with a bow.

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken a seat at the head of the room, she asked him, "Where have you been today that you have come home so late?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated before replying, "I was at Brother Ying the Second's place, where he retained me until now."

Yüeh-niang then told him about the party at Ho Yung-shou's place that day, saying, "It so happens that Battalion Commander Ho's wife is still young, being only seventeen-years-old this year. She is as pretty as a figure on a decorative lantern, possesses an impressive demeanor:

Is well-informed about the present and the past,³⁵
and is as vivacious as can be. She treated me as intimately as though we had already met more than once and showed herself to be extremely congenial. She has been married to Ho Yung-shou for only two years or so, but she already has four maidservants, two waiting women, and two servants' wives at her disposal."

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "She is the niece of Eunuch Director Lan Ts'ung-hsi, who is in charge of the Daily Provisions Office of the Imperial Household Department and provided her with a substantial dowry when she was married."

Yüeh-niang went on to say, "As the page boy has probably told you, the household of Yün Li-shou has also invited us womenfolk to a New Year's party, sending five individual invitations, which are lying there on top of the cabinet, along with the invitation from Eunuch Director Hsüeh."

She then turned to Yü-hsiao and said, "Bring them over for Father to take a look at."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked over the invitation from Eunuch Director Hsüeh and those from Yün Li-shou's household and noticed that the latter were signed below by his wife with the words, "Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Su, of the Yün family."

"Tomorrow, all of you might as well get your things together and go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"We should leave Sister Sun Hsüeh-o at home," said Yüeh-niang. "I fear that during this major festival season, if someone were to pay us a call, there would be no one to cope with the situation."

"All right, then," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can leave Sun Hsüeh-o at home while the other four of you go. I won't be going anywhere tomorrow either. Eunuch Director Hsüeh has invited me to come to his place outside the city wall to enjoy the advent of spring with him, but I'm reluctant to go. The last few days, I don't know whether it is due to the advent of spring, or what, but I've developed a pain on one side of my waist and my thigh."

"If you are feeling pain in your waist and thigh," opined Yüeh-niang, "I fear it must be an outbreak of phlegm-fire. You ought to get Doctor Jen Hou-ch'i to prescribe a couple of doses of medicine to treat it. What's the point of merely putting up with it?"

"It doesn't matter," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If I wait a few days before seeking any medication, things will calm down."

He then went on to discuss his plans with Yüeh-niang, saying, "On the occasion of the Lantern Festival a few days from now, we'll have to throw a party and invite Ho Yung-shou's wife, Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife, Ching Chung's wife, Chang Kuan's wife, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Yün Li-shou's wife, Wang the Third's mother, Sister-in-law Wu, and Ts'ui Pen's mother for a get-together. On the twelfth or thirteenth, we'll have to hang up the lanterns, and engage the services of the troupe of actors maintained by Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to entertain us for the day. Unfortunately, however, last year Pen the Fourth was here and took care of the erection of stands for the fireworks display, but this year he has gone off to the Eastern Capital and hasn't come back yet, so who are we to get to take care of the fireworks?"

Chin-lien interrupted him from the sidelines, saying, "Since Pen the Fourth is not here, his wife is equally adept at dealing with erections."

At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Chin-lien a look, saying, "Why you little whore! You can't utter three sentences without getting vulgar."

Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou chose to ignore this exchange, and Yüeh-niang went on to say, "As for the mother of Wang the Third, none of us has formally met her.

We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.

What's the point of inviting her? I fear she is unlikely to come."

"Since she has acknowledged me as a kinsman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well send her an invitation. Whether she chooses to come or not is up to her."

Yüeh-niang then went on to say, "I don't think I'll go to Yün Li-shou's place tomorrow. I'm in the last month of my pregnancy, and if I continue to run around this way it will only cause tongues to wag."

"Sister," remarked Meng Yü-lou, "there's really nothing to be afraid of. The fact that you are pregnant is not conspicuous, and I doubt if your child will actually be born within the month. It doesn't matter. You might as well relax and enjoy yourself during such a major festival."

When they had done discussing it, Hsi-men Ch'ing finished his tea and headed for Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound. When P'an Chin-lien saw that he had chosen to go to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters, she spoke to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and accompanied her out to the front compound. Upon arriving in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters that evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing had her pummel his legs and massage his body for half the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next morning, who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, who came to borrow some clothes and head ornaments, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Yesterday, the wife of Yün Li-shou sent a card inviting my wife to join my sisters-in-law at her party. Although she has some old clothes at home, they are all in bad shape. During the first month of the new year:

Venturing out and returning home,³⁶
without decent clothes to wear can only give rise to ridicule. For this reason, I have made bold to come pay my respects to my sister-in-law, in the hope that if she has any sets of clothing and head ornaments, hairpins, or bracelets to spare, I might borrow a few of them so

she can be appropriately garbed for the occasion.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly turned to Wang Ching and said, “Go inside and convey the message to the First Lady.”

Ying Po-chüeh also addressed Wang Ching, saying, “Ying Pao is waiting outside with a felt bag and a box. May I impose on you to take them inside and bring them back out when the borrowed things have been packed in them?”

Wang Ching, thereupon, collected the felt bag and went back to the rear compound.

After some time, he came back out with the parcel and handed it to Ying Pao, saying, “There are two outfits of first-class satin brocaded garments, five head ornaments, large and small, and a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece inside.”

Ying Pao took the package and set out for home, while Hsi-men Ch'ing drank tea with Ying Po-chüeh, saying, “Yesterday, my wife attended a party at Ho Yung-shou's place and did not return home until late. And today, unexpectedly, Yün Li-shou's wife has sent five cards inviting my spouses to a get-together. My First Lady is in the last month of her pregnancy and was reluctant to go, but I said to her, ‘Since they have taken the trouble to invite you on the occasion of a major festival like this, all of you might as well go.’ I also haven't had any free time the last few days. It was only yesterday that I finished paying my New Year's courtesy calls. The other day, we all went to that party at Yün Li-shou's place, and yesterday, I had to go out again to fulfill a minor obligation and didn't arrive home until late. On top of which, today, Eunuch Director Hsüeh has invited me to visit his place outside the city wall in order to enjoy the advent of spring. How can I find the time to go? Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor has also sent a card reminding me that he is going to perform the annual *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal on the ninth. I won't be able to go myself but will send my son-in-law instead. The last few days, I don't know whether it's because I've had too much to drink, or what, but I've been suffering from pain in my lower back and haven't felt like doing anything.”

“Brother,” responded Ying Po-chüeh, “it probably is a case of excessive drinking causing damp phlegm to accumulate in the lower body.”

“During this festival season,” remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, “who is going to let you off lightly? One can scarcely avoid drinking.”

“How many of my sisters-in-law are going to attend the party today?” asked Ying Po-chüeh.

“The First Lady, the Second and Third Ladies, and the Fifth Lady, the four of them, are going,” replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. As for me, I'm going to stay home and rest for a few days.”

As they were speaking, who should appear but Tai-an, carrying a card box in his hand, who announced, “His Honor Ho Yung-shou's household has sent someone to deliver an invitation to a New Year's party on the ninth.”

“You see what I mean,” Hsi-men Ch'ing remarked to Ying Po-chüeh. “When people take the trouble to invite you, one can hardly refuse.”

Thereupon, he looked in the card box and saw that it contained three invitations. One of them, inscribed on safflower red paper, was addressed, “To My Superior the Venerable Gentleman Ssu-ch'üan,” one of them, “To the Assistant Commander of the Guard the Venerable Gentleman Wu K'ai,” and another, “To the Respected Member of the Community the Venerable Gentleman Ying Po-chüeh.” All of them were signed, “Respectfully indited with his compliments by your devoted servant, Ho Yung-shou.”

Tai-an explained, “The sender said that since he was not yet acquainted with the other two gentlemen, he hoped that we would forward their invitations on his behalf.”

On taking this in, Ying Po-chüeh said, “What am I to do about this? Before I have sent anything to him, he has seen fit to send an invitation to me. How can I go under the circumstances?”

“I can seal up the customary gift of a handkerchief on your behalf,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing, “and you can have Ying Pao deliver it to him. That ought to take care of it.”

So saying, he said to Wang Ching, “Go seal up two mace of silver and a handkerchief, write Ying Po-chüeh's name on the package, and give it to him.”

He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh, and said, “If you put this invitation of yours in your sleeve you can save me the trouble of having it forwarded to you. I'll have Lai-an deliver Wu K'ai's invitation to him.”

Before long, Wang Ching sealed up the gift of the handkerchief and handed it to Ying Po-chüeh, who thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, “Brother, you've made it a lot easier for me. I'll come over early the day after tomorrow, and we can set off together.”

When he had finished speaking, he took his leave and departed.

To resume our story, that noon, Wu Yüeh-niang and the others, having dressed themselves appropriately, set out in one large sedan chair and three smaller sedan chairs, followed by Hui-yüan, the wife of Lai Chüeh, who accompanied them in a small sedan chair in order to look after their clothes. With four orderlies preceding them to clear the way, and attended by Ch'in-t'ung, Ch'un-hung, Ch'i-t'ung, and Lai-an, they proceeded to the residence of Yün Li-shou to attend the party. Truly:

With blackened eyebrows and cloudy locks,
they are pretty as pictures;
Displaying slender and lithesome waists,
they are out of this world.
Veritable models of the Goddess of the
Moon, up in the heavens;
In their seductive beauty they generate
fervent spring feelings.³⁷

We will say no more about how Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Li Chiaoerh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, set out to attend the party at Yün Lishou's residence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders to P'ing-an, the keeper of the main gate, saying, “No matter who may come, simply tell them that I am not at home. If they have cards to leave, just accept them, that's all.”

P'ing-an, having already suffered the consequences of failing to strictly obey such orders in the past, did not dare to stray from his post but remained seated at the gate. No matter who showed up, he simply told them that the master was not at home.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, that day he went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and sat down to warm himself at the stove.

Ever since Li P'ing-erh had died, Yüeh-niang had instructed Ju-i not to bind up her breasts in order to prevent lactation, but to breast-feed Lai-hsing's baby daughter Ch'eng-erh every day. For several days in a row, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been suffering from pain in his legs. Suddenly he recalled that Dr. Jen Houch'i had given him a prescription for life-prolonging pills that were to be taken with human milk. For this reason, on coming into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, he asked Ju-i to squeeze out some of her milk for him.

Ju-i, in celebration of the New Year's festival, had studded her chignon with frosty gold-colored pins and rings, so that:

Her head was covered with costume jewelry, set-off with a kingfisher-blue gold lamé headband. She wore a jacket of blue pongee, and a cloak of jade-white cloud-patterned satin, over a yellow cotton skirt, and a pair of sand-green Lu-chou silk shoes with high white-satin heels. She was dressed up quite differently from the way she had been in the past and was also wearing four silver-coated pewter rings on her hands.

She sat down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing in order to assist him in taking his medication and then proceeded to pour wine for him and urge him to have something to eat. After Ying-ch'un had seen to providing a meal for him, she withdrew into the next room, where she sat down to play at a board game with Ch'un-mei. If tea or water were required, Hsiu-ch'un was available to fetch them from the kitchen.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the maidservants had vacated the room, he leaned nonchalantly against the back of the k'ang, undid the white satin cord of his woolen trousers, exposed his organ, which was already fitted with a silver clasp, and told her to suck it for him. As she did so, he was able to help himself to the wine and delicacies that were conveniently arrayed at his side.



Calling out, “Chang the Fourth, my child,” he went on to say, “if you do your best to suck it off for me, tomorrow, I’ll find a patterned satin vest for you to wear for the Lantern Festival that begins on the twelfth.”

“I appreciate your concern,” the woman responded.

After she had played with his organ for the time it would take to eat a meal, Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “My child, I’d like to burn some moxa on your body.”

“Do as you please,” the woman replied. “You can burn moxa on me wherever you like.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing told her to close the door to the room, take off her skirt, climb onto the k’ang, and recline face-up on the pillow. On her lower body, she was wearing a pair of newly made scarlet drawers of Lu-chou silk, one leg of which she proceeded to pull down. In his sleeve, Hsi-men Ch’ing still retained three pellets of the moxa steeped in distilled spirits that he had burnt on Lady Lin. Removing her bodice, he placed one of them on the middle of her chest, one on her lower abdomen, and one on her mons veneris. Igniting them with a stick of benzoin incense, he thrust his organ into her vagina and lowered his head in order to observe its movements. Alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, he proceeded to move it in and out without ceasing. He also moved a mirror stand over beside him so he could better observe the action. In a little while, as the moxa burnt its way down to the skin, the woman:

Knit her brows and clenched her teeth,³⁸

in order to endure the pain.

In a trembling voice and faint tones,

While groaning for all she was worth,

she cried out inarticulately, “Daddy! Father! You’ll be the end of me yet. It’s really hard to take.”

“Chang the Fourth, whore that you are,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “whose wife are you?”

“I’m Father’s wife,” the woman responded.

Hsi-men Ch’ing instructed her, “Say to me, ‘I was once Hsiung Wang’s wife, but today I belong to my own daddy.’”

The woman did as she was told, saying, “Whore that I am, I was originally Hsiung Wang’s wife, but today I belong to my own daddy.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing went on to ask, “Do I know how to fuck or not?”

“Daddy really knows how to fuck a cunt,” the woman replied.

What with their:

Obscene noises and lascivious words,

there was nothing the two of them left unsaid. Hsi-men Ch’ing’s organ was thick and large, stretching the woman’s vagina to the limits. As it went back and forth and in and out, it agitated her clitoris:

As red as a parrot’s tongue,

And as dark as a bat’s wing,

in a pleasurable way. Hsi-men Ch’ing thereupon placed her two legs around his waist, so that their four limbs were intertwined as they responded to each other. His organ penetrated her all the way to the root:

Without leaving a hairsbreadth outside.

The woman opened her eyes wide and cried out involuntarily as her vaginal fluids flowed out below. When Hsi-men Ch’ing’s passion became intense and his pleasure reached its height, his semen spurted out like a gushing spring. Truly:

Not yet apprised that the tidings of spring

had already arrived;

They knew only that their bodies and joints

were melting away.³⁹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Letting him have his way in proffering his

cups of “sunset clouds.”⁴⁰

Her brain is flooded with lustful feelings,

vast and without limit.

Her whole body is at the disposal of The

Lord of the East’s whim;

What does she care if her jeweled hairpin

should fall by the bedside?⁴¹

On that day, after Hsi-men Ch’ing had finished burning three pellets of moxa on the woman’s body, he opened the door, searched out a patterned vest of jet-colored satin, and presented it to her.

That evening, when Yüeh-ning and the others returned home, she said to Hsi-men Ch’ing, “It turns out that Yün Li-shou’s wife is also in a late state of pregnancy. At the party today, the two of us toasted each other and agreed that when the time comes for us to give birth, if one of the babies is a boy and the other a girl, our two households will betroth them to each other, and thus become related. If they are both boys, we will arrange for them to study together, and if they are both girls, we will have them treat each other as sisters, do their needlework together, and play with each other as if they were related. Ying Po-chüeh’s wife undertook to act as a witness to

the agreement.”

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he merely smiled.

To make a long story short, the next day was the eve of P'an Chin-lien's birthday. Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early that morning to go to the yamen. Before doing so, he ordered the page boys to get out the lanterns, clean them up, take care of suspending them in the large reception hall, the summerhouse, and elsewhere, and set out brocade hangings and standing screens for the occasion. He also told Lai-hsing to buy fresh fruits and so forth, and engage the services of boy musicians, for the celebration that evening.

That morning, P'an Chin-lien dressed herself up and came out:

Richly adorned and daubed with powder,

In turquoise sleeves with rouged lips,

and ventured into the large reception hall, where she saw Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, standing on high stools, in order to suspend the three beaded hanging lanterns with their large bowls.

With an ingratiating smile, she said, "I wondered who I would find here, and it turns out to be the two of you, hanging up the lanterns."

"Today is the eve of your birthday," said Ch'in-t'ung, "and Father ordered us to hang up the lanterns so they will be in place for your birthday party tomorrow. This evening, we will all come and kowtow to you, and expect to be rewarded appropriately."

"If it's a beating you want, I will be happy to oblige," the woman responded. "But as for rewards, there won't be any."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'in-t'ung. "You:

Rarely say a word without threatening a beating.

Whatever we do, you respond by proposing to beat us. We are all like your children, after all. It would be better if you were to care for us instead of constantly threatening us with punishment."

"You lousy jailbird!" the woman responded. "You had better stop shooting off your mouth and get back to the task of carefully hanging up the lanterns. If you don't watch what you're doing, you're likely to lose your grip, and let one of them fall to the ground. The other day, before New Year's, when Ts'ui Pen arrived home, you were heard to say, 'Even in broad daylight, Father is nowhere to be seen.' On that occasion, despite the risk you ran, you were lucky enough to escape a beating. But, on this occasion, you may be in for one."

"Mother," protested Ch'in-t'ung, "how can you persist in using such disparaging language? My existence is precarious enough as it is without your continuing to frighten me."

"Mother was not there to hear that remark of his," interjected Tai-an. "How did you know about it?"

The woman responded:

"Outside the palace is a pine tree,

Inside the palace there is a bell;

Just as a bell has its sound,

A tree has its shadow.

How could I not know about it? The other day, Father said to the First Lady, 'Last year Pen the Fourth was here and took care of the erection of stands for the fireworks display, but this year he is not here, so there is no one to take care of the fireworks.' This prompted me to remark, 'Although he is not here, his wife is equally adept at handling erections. You might as well let her take care of it.'"

"Mother," protested Tai-an, "how can you bring yourself to utter such an allegation? You're talking about the household of his own manager. How could there be any such thing?"

The woman responded:

"What kind of talk is that?

It's got a sandalwood haft.

Such things do indeed occur. Though you may draw a line against such conduct, people will be tempted to violate the boundary."

"Mother," said Ch'in-t'ung, "you ought not to believe what people accuse her of. I fear that when Pen the Fourth arrives home, he will find out about it."

"You may succeed in deceiving a thousand gullible cuckolds," the woman responded, "but I pronounce this cuckold to be an open cuckold. It is not surprising that he should be willing to go off to the Eastern Capital while leaving his wife behind, knowing full well that she would be unwilling to let her cunt lie idle. You lousy jailbirds should keep your mouths shut. You band together to act as procurers for your master and make it possible for him to have his way, while hoping to be able to follow in his footsteps. Am I right, or am I not? And yet you dare to suggest that I don't know what I'm talking about. No wonder that lousy whore bought me a birthday gift, made a present of steamed shortcake to the First Lady, and even had a large box of melon seeds delivered to me in order to buy my silence. She's an old hand at taking on lovers, and my guess is that one of them is none other than Tai-an. It's that lousy jailbird that has:

Laid plans and hatched a scheme,
on her behalf."

"Mother," protested Tai-an, "you do me a mortal injustice. Why should I concern myself with her doings, for no good reason? I don't ordinarily frequent her quarters. You really ought not to listen to what that wife of Mohammedan Han has to say. The two of them have been quarreling vociferously over their children. As the sayings go:

It is hard to keep on good terms,

But it is easy to pick a quarrel.
The collapse of a house may not be deadly,
But an evil tongue can lead to your death.
If you believe something, it will be true,
If you disbelieve in it, it will be false.

If you stop to consider it, Pen the Fourth's wife possesses an accommodating nature. Dwelling as she does by the gate of the residence, she has not antagonized even a single member of the household, great or small. Who is there who has not procured a serving of tea from her? Do you mean to suggest that she has taken them all on as lovers? There would hardly be room for them all."

"I know that watery-eyed whore for what she is," responded Chin-lien. "What with her short stature, she's no bigger than half a brick, and when she squeezes those eyes of hers, you could almost scoop the liquid out of them with a spoon. She's nothing but a crazy whore, just like that overgrown pumpkin head of a whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo. I don't know but what I'd rather scratch my eyes out than have to contemplate the likes of her."

As they were speaking, who should appear but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "My mistress is calling for you, Fifth Lady. Your mother, Old Mrs. P'an, has arrived and needs you to pay the cost of her sedan chair."

"I've been standing here all this time," responded Chin-lien. "When did she come in?"

"The old lady entered through the enclosed passageway," said Ch'in-t'ung, "and I escorted her inside. The bearers who brought her want six candareens of silver."

"Where would I get the silver from?" said Chin-lien. "Whoever heard of anyone coming by sedan chair without bringing the money to pay the fare?"

She then went back to the rear compound to see her mother but did not give her the money for the fare, saying, "I don't have it."

"You can give your mother a mace of silver," said Yüeh-niang, "and enter it in your account book for the household expenses."

"I can't touch that money," said Chin-lien. "It is provided by our husband in definite amounts to purchase provisions for the household. He wouldn't want me to spend it on sedan chair fares."

They sat there for a while, merely staring at each other with wide-open eyes, while the sedan chair bearers outside pressed for the fare so they could leave. Finally, Meng Yü-lou, seeing that they had reached an impasse, groped a mace of silver out of her sleeve and took care of sending the sedan chair on its way.

Before long, Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery arrived, and Yüeh-niang provided them with a serving of tea.

Old Mrs. P'an then set out for her daughter's quarters in the front compound, and Chin-lien proceeded to upbraid her severely, saying, "Who asked you to come if you didn't even have enough money to pay for the sedan chair? If you make such a shameful spectacle of yourself, you will only cause people to look down on you."

"My daughter," protested Old Mrs. P'an, "if you refuse me the money to pay for a visit, where am I to get it? It was hard enough for me to come up with the cost of a gift for you."

"You may have expected to get the money from me," said Chin-lien, "but where am I to get it from? If you will only open your eyes, you will see that for every seven outlays, there are eight people waiting to be paid. In the future, if you have the money to pay for a sedan chair, come here to visit; but if you don't have enough money to pay for a sedan chair, don't bother to come. I doubt if his household will feel diminished by the lack of such poor relatives as yourself. Don't risk the retribution of having your face slapped. You've got to be tough like:

Kuan Yü, the God of War, peddling
his bean curd:
The man is hard, even though his
goods are not.⁴²

I'm sick and tired of having to listen to people shooting off their cunts about me behind my back. The other day, merely because you went home earlier than she expected, I ended up getting into:

A vituperative altercation,
with the First Lady. If you knew how it is for me, you'd shut up.

The droppings of a donkey may be shiny
enough on the outside;⁴³
But you are quite unaware of how messy
they are on the inside."

With these few remarks she managed to reduce Old Mrs. P'an to a state of:

Sobbing and wailing,
as she broke out in tears.

"Mother," Ch'un-mei protested, "whatever has induced you to find fault with your old lady this way today?"

So saying, she helped the old woman onto the k'ang in the inner room and hastened to pour her a serving of tea. Old Mrs. P'an was so exasperated that all she could do was lie down on the k'ang and go to sleep. Only when someone from the rear compound came to invite her to join Sister-in-law Wu for a meal did she get up and go back to the rear compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned home from the yamen and was about to sit down for a meal in the master suite, when Tai-an suddenly

came in with a calling card and said, "His Honor Ching Chung has been promoted to the post of commander-general of the Southeast and has come to pay his respects."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the card he saw that it read, "Respectfully indited with his compliments by the newly promoted commander-general of the Southeast, and concurrently grain transport commander, Regional Commander Ching Chung."

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he ordered the dining table to be removed, hastened to don his formal garments, including his official cap and girdle, and went out to welcome his guest. What should he see but Commander-General Ching Chung, wearing a crimson robe emblazoned with a mandarin square featuring a *ch'i-lin*, and a gold-buckled girdle, followed by a retinue of subordinates and soldiers. Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him into the large reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities and then sat down in the positions of guest and host.

Tea was served, and after it was finished, Ching Chung said, "The rescript confirming my promotion only arrived the other day, and before even formally assuming office, I have come to express my gratitude to you, venerable sir."

"Venerable commander," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you are to be congratulated on your illustrious promotion. Talents as great as yours are sure to be put to significant use."

It is only natural, and redounds to the credit of the rest of us. It is appropriate that we should offer our congratulations."

Going on to say, "Please loosen your respected garments, and sit down for something to eat," he ordered his attendants to set up a table.

Ching Chung repeatedly expressed his thanks, saying, "Your pupil must inform you, venerable sir, that I have not yet gone to pay my respects anywhere else and have a great many insignificant tasks to attend to. Allow me to come seek your instruction another day."

So saying, he got up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not have it and proceeded to order his attendants to come forward and take his outer garments, wipe off the table, and provide it with wine and food.

Animal-shaped briquettes smolder,
Heat-holding drapes are suspended.
Golden flagons decant jade hued liquids,
Turquoise goblets contain Yang-kao wine.

Just as the wine was being poured, who should appear but Cheng Ch'un and Wang Hsiang, the two boy actors, who came in, knelt down before them, and kowtowed.

"Why are the two of you so late?" inquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"And what is the name of this other fellow?" he asked Cheng Ch'un.

"His name is Wang Hsiang," said Cheng Ch'un, "and he is the younger brother of Wang Chu."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told them, "Get out your instruments and come play and sing for the entertainment of His Honor Ching Chung."

In no time at all, when the two boy actors had readied their instruments, they proceeded to perform the song suite the first number of which, to the tune "Flowers in Brocade," begins with the words:

The fair weather is balmy.⁴⁴

As they did so, the attendants brought out two partitioned food boxes filled with pastries and refreshments, and two bottles of wine, for the people that had come with Ching Chung.

"This will never do," said Ching Chung. "Your pupil is the recipient of your magnanimity, and my servants are also to enjoy the bestowal of refreshments."

What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"

So saying, he ordered his servants to come forward and kowtow.

"In a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my wife plans, with the utmost sincerity, to invite your honorable spouse to attend a party in order to enjoy the lanterns. It is our humble hope that she will condescend to come. Those she plans to invite include your venerable lady, my kinsman Chang Kuan's wife, my colleague Ho Yung-shou's wife, and two other female relatives of ours. No one else has been invited."

"Upon receipt of your venerable lady's invitation," said Ching Chung, "my humble spouse will be sure to attend."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then inquired, "How is it that the venerable Commandant Chou Hsiu has not yet received a promotion?"

"I have heard," replied Ching Chung, "that in the third month Chou Hsiu will be promoted to a position in the Capital Training Divisions."

"That seems appropriate," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After sitting for a while, Ching Chung said goodbye and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him to the gate and looked on as he mounted his horse and departed, with his attendants shouting to clear the way.

That evening, they celebrated the eve of P'an Chin-lien's birthday. The boy actors played their instruments and sang to entertain the company in the rear reception hall. When everyone had been provided with wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and went out to Chin-lien's quarters, while Yüeh-niang, along with Sister-in-law Wu, Old Mrs. P'an, the professional singer Big Sister Yü, and the two nuns sat down in the master suite to enjoy their wine.

P'an Chin-lien accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing to her quarters, where she set out more wine and personally proffered him a drink and

kowtowed to him. After a while, Old Mrs. P'an came in, and Chin-lien packed her off to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to spend the night, while she kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company, drinking wine and enjoying themselves, as they went on to play with each other.

To resume our story, when Old Mrs. P'an arrived in Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door, Ju-i and Ying-ch'un invited her to sit down on the heated k'ang. On her way in, Old Mrs. P'an noticed that before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet in the parlor there were arrayed candied effigies of Buddhist lions, immortals, and the Five Ancients; tree-borne fresh fruits such as tangerines, pomegranates, apples, and snow pears; steamed-shortcake pastries, crullers, and fried dough twists. A brazier was burning powdered incense, and a candle was lit in the long-lasting vigil lamp. The table was shrouded in a gold lamé tablecloth, and beside it there hung her half-length portrait, dressed in a crimson brocaded gown, a brocade skirt and embroidered jacket, and a chignon decorated with two phoenixes, from whose beaks dangled bangles on ropes of pearls.

Stepping forward, she saluted the portrait in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "Sister, you are blessed in having ascended to Heaven."

Then, after sitting down on the k'ang, she said to Ju-i and Ying-ch'un, "Your mistress is lucky to have a husband who has gone to such lengths to insure her salvation, and in being the recipient of such lavish offerings. It is more than ample. She is fortunate indeed."

"Recently," said Ju-i, "on the occasion of the 'hundredth-day' ceremony after our mistress's death, though you were invited to attend, you failed to come. Hua Tzu-yu's wife from outside the city wall and Sister-in-law Wu were both here. Twelve Taoist acolytes came to perform the scripture recitation, and there was:

Loud playing on wind and percussion instruments.

What with the flag-raising ceremony to invite the presence of the gods, and the Water and Fire sublimation ritual, night had fallen before they left."

"With the New Year's festivities so close at hand," explained Old Mrs. P'an, "and the child I am taking care of at home, if I had come, there would have been no one to look after the place. So I chose not to come. Why have I not seen Aunt Yang here today?"

"You must not have heard about it yet," said Ju-i, "but Aunt Yang finally died of sickness and old age so she also was unable to come for our mistress's 'hundredth-day' scripture-reading ceremony. The ladies of our household all went to the northern quarter of the city to offer their sacrifices to the deceased."

"How sad," exclaimed Old Mrs. P'an. "She was older than I am, but I didn't know that she had died. No wonder I didn't see her today."

After they had talked about Aunt Yang for a while, Ju-i said, "We have some sweet wine on hand. Why don't you try some of it?"

She then turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Sister, set up a bed table on the k'ang, and pour out some sweet wine so Old Mrs. P'an can have a cup of it."

In no time at all, the wine was provided, and as they were drinking it, Old Mrs. P'an brought up the subject of Li P'ing-erh again, saying, "Your mistress was a good person. She was both kind and just, and she had a warm disposition. Whenever I came here, she never treated me as a stranger, but always provided me with hot tea and hot water, and only objected if I didn't drink them. At night she would sit up and talk to me, and when I was ready to go home, she would always wrap something up to take with me. I swear, she never let me depart empty-handed. Not to deceive the two of you, this cape I am wearing right now is something your mistress gave me. This perverse daughter of mine, on the other hand, has never come up with so much as half a broken needle for me.⁴⁵ I am not lying when I state before Amitābha Buddha himself that even if:

I had neither water nor rice to eat,⁴⁶

if she were willing to cough up so much as a mace of silver for me, my eyeballs would drop onto the ground. When your mistress gave me anything, she would accuse me of being:

Mean-spirited and covetous,

hankering after other people's possessions. Today, for example, with regard to the fare for the sedan chair I came in, though you have a large amount of silver at your disposal, were you willing to cough up a few candareens on my behalf, or what? Instead, you just clenched your teeth and denied that you had any money to spare, so that, in the end, the Lady from the west side of the rear compound had to come up with a mace of silver to take care of the bearers of the sedan chair, and send them on their way. And when we returned to her quarters, she upbraided me severely, saying, 'In the future, if you have the money to pay for a sedan chair, go ahead and come; but if you don't have enough money to pay for a sedan chair, you had better not cross my doorstep.' When I leave this time, I won't come back. Who wants to come here only to become a target for her anger? Let her do as she pleases. No doubt there are many hard-hearted people in this world, but none of them is a match for this death-bound short-life of a daughter of mine. You two pay heed to what I say. Should I die, in the future, what with her refusal to take anyone's advice, who knows what sort of a harvest she will reap for herself. You ought to remember how, after your father died when you were only six years old, I have continued to care for you right up to the present. How I taught you to do needlework while you were still a child. How I sent you to a girls' school in the home of Licentiate Yü. How I made sure that you had:

Compressed hands and bound feet.⁴⁷

You have always been just as smart as can be, which has made it possible for you to arrive at your present state. But now, she orders her mother around, this way and that, without giving her so much as a glance."

"So the Fifth Lady went to school as a child, did she?" said Ju-i. "No wonder, now that you mention it, she is as literate as she is."

"She started to a girls' school when she was six years old," said Old Mrs. P'an, "and attended it for three years. While there, she learned to trace characters from books of sample calligraphy, so there are hardly any characters in the printed copies of poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies that she doesn't know."

As they were speaking, they heard the sound of knocking at the postern gate, and Ju-i said, "I wonder who it could be knocking at the gate?"

She then turned to Hsiu-ch'un and said, "Second Sister, go see who it is."

Hsiu-ch'un came back and reported, "It's Sister Ch'un-mei who has come."

At this, Ju-i hastily squeezed the hand of Old Mrs. P'an and said, "You'd better watch what you say. Ch'un-mei is here."

"I understand," said Old Mrs. P'an. "She could be said to share a leg with that perverse daughter of mine."

What should they see at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, who came in sporting a cloud-shaped chignon with turquoise ornaments on her head, a gold-spangled pearl headband, a blue satin jacket that opened down the middle, over a yellow cotton skirt, gold lantern earrings, and a sable muffler.

Upon coming in and seeing that they were drinking wine with Old Mrs. P'an, she said, "I see that Granny hasn't gone to bed yet. I've come to visit with her."

Ju-i offered her a seat, and Ch'un-mei hoisted up her skirt and proceeded to park her posterior on the k'ang. Ying-ch'un sat down next to her on one side, while Ju-i sat to her right by the head of the k'ang, and Old Mrs. P'an sat in the middle.

"Have your master and mistress gone to bed yet, or not?" asked Old Mrs. P'an.

"They finished drinking just now," said Ch'un-mei, "and I have sent the two of them off to bed. I have come over here to visit with you, Granny, and have several delicacies and a flagon of wine to share with you."

She then asked Hsiu-ch'un, "Would you go next door and tell Ch'iu-chü to bring them over here? I have already prepared them."

Hsiu-ch'un, accordingly, went next door to fetch them and came back in no time at all, with Ch'iu-chü carrying a square box containing the delicacies, while she brought a pewter pitcher of Chin-hua wine.

Ch'un-mei then ordered Ch'iu-chü, "You go back to our place and keep your ears open. If they should call for me, come back here and let me know."

Ch'iu-chü went back as she was told, but with a pout on her lips.

The repast was duly laid out on the bed table that had been placed on the k'ang. It consisted of roast duck, ham, smoked goose, marinated fish in a fine mash, nut kernels, savory preserved fruits, seafood, and so forth, covering the entire table surface. Hsiu-ch'un closed the postern gate and then came in and sat down beside them. Thereupon, when the wine had been poured, Ch'un-mei first offered a cup to Old Mrs. P'an, and then a cup to Ju-i, and a cup to Ying-ch'un. Hsiu-ch'un sat down on the edge of the k'ang, and the five of them proceeded to enjoy their drinks.

Ch'un-mei, protecting her clothes with a napkin, selected morsels from each of the dishes and offered them to Old Mrs. P'an and the rest, saying, "Granny, these are all special delicacies. Feel free to sample them."

"Sister," the old woman responded, "I'll help myself."

She then went on to say, "Even your mistress has never gone to the trouble to entertain me in the way you are doing. Sister, you possess a heart that is:

Concerned for the bereft and kind to the aged.

In the future, you will surely be able:

Step by step,⁴⁸

to better your condition. That perverse daughter of mine, on the other hand, is utterly lacking in humanity and righteousness. On more than one occasion, when she has been acting outrageously, and I have attempted to remonstrate with her, she has turned her wrath against me and caused me to lose face. This morning, as you saw for yourself, Sister, I came to visit in the hope of picking up a few morsels of cold food, and she once again treated me as badly as she did."

"Granny," said Ch'un-mei:

"You only see one side of it,

Without perceiving the other."⁴⁹

It is the disposition of my mistress to:

Contend for supremacy without conceding defeat."⁵⁰

She cannot be compared to the Sixth Lady, who had a fortune at her disposal, while she has no money of her own. You allege that she refuses to give you anything. Others may not know the true story, but I do. Although Father has entrusted her with the silver for household expenses, which is stored in her quarters, my mistress does not presume to regard it as her own. When she needs to buy costume jewelry or things like that for herself, she is meticulous about asking him for them up front, rather than:

Surreptitiously acquiring things on the sly,⁵¹

thereby causing people to look down on her, and making it hard for her to open her mouth and accuse anyone else of anything. Since she really has no money of her own, for you to hold it against her, Granny, is unjust. You may accuse me of endeavoring to excuse her conduct, but one must be just about it."

"You are wrong to hold it against the Fifth Lady," said Ju-i. "It has always been true that:

Relatives are one's own flesh and blood.

If the Fifth Lady had any money of her own, were she not to show her filiality by sharing it with you, Granny, whom should she lavish it upon? As the sayings have it:

Before beating a child one should regard

it's mother's face.

Even a thousand peach blossoms may stem

from a single tree."⁵²

In the future, when the day comes when your:

Yellow gold is stored in the coffer,

the Fifth Lady will be bereft of any close relatives, like the rest of us whose mothers have died.”

The old woman responded, “As for me:

I’ve lived to this year, but not the next.

Who knows whether:

I’ll succumb today, or succumb tomorrow?

I won’t hold it against her any longer.”

Ch’un-mei, upon seeing that the old woman, after consuming two goblets of wine, was becoming more loquacious, said to Ying-ch’un, “Go get the dice-box. Let’s throw the dice and amuse ourselves by playing at ‘Competing for the Red.’”

In no time at all, a dicebox with forty dice in it was brought out, and Ch’unmei proceeded to play a game with Ju-i. After they had played for a while, she went on to play with Ying-ch’un. The losers of each round had to down large goblets of wine.

What with:

First a cup for you,

Then a goblet for me,

it was not long before they:

Felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine, and

Peach blossoms bloomed upon their cheeks,⁵³

as they polished off the entire pewter pitcher of wine. Ying-ch’un then produced half a jar of Ma-ku wine, and they managed to finish it as well. As the time approached the second watch, Old Mrs. P’an could not hold out any longer and took to:

Swaying forwards and backwards,

as she started to doze off. Only then did the party break up.

Ch’un-mei headed back next door and gave the postern gate a push. When it opened, she proceeded through the courtyard and found that Ch’iu-chü was situated on a wide bench in the parlor, next to a crack in the wooden partition, eavesdropping on Hsi-men Ch’ing and Chin-lien as they engaged in sexual intercourse in the bedroom in order to hear what noises they produced and what exclamations they uttered.

She was so preoccupied that she failed to prevent Ch’un-mei from coming right up to her and giving her a slap on the cheek with all her strength, saying as she did so, “You lousy dead duck of a slave! Just what are you listening to, for no good reason?”

She hit Ch’iu-chü so hard that she opened her eyes wide and protested, “I was only dozing here. What was I listening to that would justify your slapping me that way?”

Who could have anticipated that this exchange was overheard by the woman in the bedroom, who asked Ch’un-mei who she was talking to.

“There’s nobody here,” replied Ch’un-mei. “I told Ch’iu-chü to close the door, and she failed to respond. That’s all.”

In this way she covered up for Ch’iu-chü, who rubbed her eyes and went to close the door of the room. Ch’un-mei then got onto the k’ang, removed her headdress, and went to sleep. But no more of this. Truly:

Though the oriole wishes to retain

the evanescent day;

The unfeeling cuckoo relishes the

luster of the night.⁵⁴

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day was P’an Chin-lien’s birthday, and those who were present to celebrate it included the wife of Manager Fu Ming, the wife of Manager Kan Jun, Pen the Fourth’s wife, Ts’ui Pen’s wife Big Sister Tuan, Wu Shun-ch’en’s wife Third Sister Cheng, and Wu the Second’s wife.

Hsi-men Ch’ing, along with Wu K’ai and Ying Po-chüeh:

Straightened his robe and cap;

Assumed a dignified demeanor,⁵⁵

and set out on horseback, with attendants shouting to clear the way, to attend the party at the home of Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou. There were many other officials there that day, and they were entertained by four singing girls and a vaudeville troupe. Commandant Chou Hsiu was also among those present. They continued drinking until evening, when Hsi-men Ch’ing returned home and spent the night with Ju-i in the front compound.

On the tenth, invitations were sent out inviting the wives of the various officials to a party, and Yüeh-niang said to Hsi-men Ch’ing, “For this lantern-viewing party on the twelfth, I suggest that we also invite Meng Yü-lou’s elder sister from outside the city gate and my elder sister to attend, lest they find out about it and resent the fact that they were not invited.”

“It’s a good thing you mentioned it,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, and he told Ch’en Ching-chi to write out two additional invitations and send Ch’in-t’ung to deliver them.

P’an Chin-lien, who was standing nearby, overheard this and was disturbed by it. Going back to her quarters, she pressed Old Mrs. P’an to depart immediately.

When Yüeh-niang learned of this, she said, "Granny, what are you in such a hurry to leave for? Why not stay over another day?"

"Sister," said Chin-lien, "it's the New Year's season, and she has left a child at home with no one to look after her. You had better let her go."

This threw Yüeh-niang into such consternation that she hastily prepared two boxes of delicacies for her, provided her with a mace of silver with which to pay her sedan chair fare, and sent her on her way.

Chin-lien subsequently explained this to Li Chiao-erh, saying, "She's invited her well-to-do elder sister to come to the lantern-viewing party, and that old baggage of mine is only likely to be looked askance at. If I hadn't sent her away, what would be the point of keeping her around here? If she were taken to be a guest, she would not be appropriately dressed. If she were taken to be a charwoman, she doesn't really look the part. It could only have the effect of driving me to my wit's end."

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to deliver another two invitations to Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence, one to invite Lady Lin, and one to invite Wang the Third's wife, née Huang. He also sent to the licensed quarter to engage the services of the four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Hung the Fourth, as well as the three young actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng.

Who could have anticipated that Pen the Fourth should arrive back from the Eastern Capital that day. After washing his face and combing his hair, he dressed himself appropriately and came to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, presenting him with a letter of reply from Hsia Yen-ling.

"How come you stayed as long as this before returning?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know.

Pen the Fourth explained that he had been stricken with a severe cold in the capital, saying, "It was not until the second day of the first month that I was able to get my things together and set out for home. His Honor Hsia Yen-ling sends you his compliments and wishes to thank you for all you have done on his behalf."

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave him the keys as before and put him back in charge of his knitting and sewing supplies store. He also opened an adjacent shop in which Wu the Second could continue to sell silk goods. In the future, when the boatload of goods from Sung-chiang arrived, he planned to have it all stored in the house on Lion Street, where Lai-pao could cooperate with the others in selling it. He also told Pen the Fourth to hire a fireworks specialist to come and prepare two racks of fireworks, ready to be set off on the twelfth for the entertainment of their female guests. He had already invited Ying Pochüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Wu K'ai, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh to convene with him in an anteroom during the daylight hours on that occasion.

That evening, who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, bringing Li the Third with him to see Hsi-men Ch'ing. After first thanking him for the help he had received the other day, and then sitting down to drink his tea, he initiated the conversation by saying, "Brother Li the Third is here because there is a piece of business he would like to propose to you, if you are willing to participate in it."

"Really?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What piece of business is that? Tell me about it."

"At present," responded Li the Third, "a document has come down from the court in the Eastern Capital requiring each of the thirteen provinces in the realm to submit to it several tens of thousands of taels worth of antiquarian relics. This Tung-p'ing prefecture of ours has been allotted a quota of ten thousand taels worth of these antique artifacts. The rescript authorizing this behest is still in the hands of the grand coordinator and has not yet come down to the lower levels of the bureaucracy. At present, Chang the Second of Main Street has put up two hundred taels of silver in a bid to secure this contract, but it will require a total of ten thousand taels in all. I have come, together with Uncle Ying the Second, to broach the subject with Your Honor. If Your Honor is willing to participate, Chang the Second will put up five thousand taels, Your Honor will put up the other five thousand taels, and the two of you can close the deal between you. No one else will be involved but Uncle Ying the Second, myself, and Huang the Fourth on your side, and two of Chang the Second's managers on the other, and the profits will be shared on a ratio of eight to two between the principals and their backers. But I don't know what Your Honor thinks about it."

"What sort of antiquarian relics are involved?" inquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Your Honor may not know about it yet," said Li the Third, "but at present the Emperor has changed the name of the recently completed Mount Ken Imperial Park in the Forbidden City to the Mount Longevity Imperial Park. Within it he has erected numerous pavilions, terraces, halls, and chambers, including the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity,⁵⁶ the Chamber of the Assembled Perfected, the Hall of Meditative Concentration,⁵⁷ and even the dressing chamber of his favorite, Consort An, née Liu.⁵⁸ He has stocked them with:

Rare birds and unusual animals,⁵⁹

Chou vessels and Shang tripods,⁶⁰

Han censers and Ch'in burners,

The stone drums of King Hsüan,⁶¹

Bronze ladles of various eras,

Immortals' palms,

Dew-catching pans,⁶²

and rare antiques and relics of all kinds.⁶³ He has initiated lavish building projects and expended no insignificant amount in the way of resources."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Rather than going into partnership with anyone else, why shouldn't I undertake to do it on my own? No doubt you assume that I would be unable to come up with ten or twenty thousand taels of silver."

"If Your Honor wants to take it all on yourself, that would be fine," said Li the Third. "We can keep the other side in the dark about it, and on our side, no one will be involved other than Uncle Ying the Second, Huang the Fourth, and myself."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "do you plan to bring in anyone from your household, or not?"

"When he shows up, I'll have Pen the Fourth participate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He can do some of the legwork for us."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Where is the document authorizing this transaction at present?"

"It is still in the hands of the grand coordinator," said Li the Third, "and has not yet come down to the lower levels of the bureaucracy."

"That shouldn't be a problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send someone with a letter, and an appropriate gift, to ask Sung Ch'iao-nien to obtain it for us."

"If Your Honor is going to try to get hold of it," said Li the Third, "the matter will brook no delay. It has always been the case that:

In warfare, speediness of execution is fundamental.⁶⁴

The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat.

I fear that by the time you get to the prefectural yamen, someone else may have gotten hold of it before you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "I'm not afraid of that. Even if someone should get to the prefectural yamen before me, I would still be able to induce Sung Ch'iao-nien to recover it. The prefect of Tung-p'ing, Hu Shihwen, is also an acquaintance of mine."

Thereupon, he invited Li the Third and Ying Po-chüeh to share a meal with him and promised them, saying, "I will have a letter written now and will send off a servant with it tomorrow."

"There is another problem," said Li the Third. "His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is making his investigative rounds and is not in Tung-p'ing at present. The day before yesterday, he set out for Yen-chou prefecture to conduct his investigations there."

"You could make the trip to Yen-chou prefecture tomorrow, together with my servant," suggested Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That would not be a problem," responded Li the Third. "I'll go then. The round trip won't take more than five or six days. Which of your servants does Your Honor intend to send? When we have concluded our plans, and the letter is written, send him over to my place to spend the night, so we can set out early tomorrow morning."

"His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is not familiar with any of my other servants," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he has always been fond of Ch'un-hung. I'll have Ch'un-hung and Lai-chüeh, the two of them, go together."

Thereupon, he called the two servants into his presence to meet with Li the Third and instructed them to go spend the night at his place.

"That's the way to do it," remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "This is something that needs to be acted upon as quickly as possible.

Only he with the most talent and swiftest

feet can accomplish it."⁶⁵

Thereupon, when he and Li the Third had finished their meal, they took their leave and departed.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, after getting Ch'en Ching-chi to write the letter, also sealed up ten ounces of gold leaf in the packet and entrusted it to Ch'un-hung and Lai-chüeh, saying, "Be careful on the road, and if you succeed in obtaining the document, return immediately. When you get to Yen-chou prefecture, ask His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien for a note entitling you to pick it up in Tung-p'ing."

"Father, you need not instruct us any further," said Lai-chüeh. "I once worked for Assistant Administration Commissioner Hsü of Yen-chou and will know what to do."

Thereupon, he took the packet containing the letter, secreted it upon his person, and set out with his companion for the house of Li the Third. We will say no more at present about how Lai-chüeh, Ch'un-hung, and Li the Third hired long-distance mounts early on the morning of the eleventh and set out for Yen-chou prefecture.

To resume our story, on the twelfth, Hsi-men Ch'ing's family had invited the wives of the various officials to a party, and he chose to remain at home without going out. He had already invited Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, the four of them, to join him in the summerhouse that evening to enjoy the lanterns and drink wine together. The troupe of actors that he had arranged to engage from Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, showed up that morning, carrying their box of costumes, and set up an anteroom in the front compound as their green room. When the female guests arrived, they beat on bronze gongs and bronze drums to welcome them.

Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife was suffering from an eye ailment and was thus unable to come, though she sent someone to explain the situation. The wife of Commander-General Ching Chung, the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, the wife of Commander Yün Li-shou, along with Ch'iao Hung's wife, Ts'ui Pen's mother, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, were the first to arrive. Only Ho Yung-shou's wife, Wang the Third's mother Lady Lin, and Wang the Third's wife had not yet come, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent an orderly, along with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, back and forth two or three times, urging them to come. He also sent Auntie Wen to the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang for the same end.

At noontime, Lady Lin arrived in a large sedan chair, followed by a smaller one, and asked to pay her respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who inquired, "Why has Wang the Third's wife not come?"

"My son is not at home," replied Lady Lin, "so there is no one to look after the place."

After paying her respects, she withdrew to the rear compound.

It was well after noon before Ho Yung-shou's wife finally arrived, riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, with a servant's wife riding in a smaller sedan chair behind her, and accompanied by orderlies carrying her dressing case, as well as two servants in black livery, trotting close beside the carrying poles. Only after being borne past the second gate did she deign to get out of her sedan chair, to the welcoming music of drums, and wind and percussion instruments, as Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister wives came out to the ceremonial gate to receive her.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had concealed himself in the anteroom on the western side of the courtyard and let down the blinds, so that he

could gaze at her surreptitiously. Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, was no more than nineteen years old. She was:

Tall and slender in stature,
and was made up so that she looked to be:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.
On her head:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles,
Phoenix feathers emerged in pairs.

She was wearing a full-sleeved crimson jacket, adorned with a variegated motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*, her waist was encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold, beneath which she wore a skirt of blue brocade, hanging from which decorative pendants tinkled, exuding the scent of musk and orchid. Behold:

Her image is captivating;⁶⁶
Her demeanor is delicate.⁶⁷
By nature, she is as clever
as can be;
Her height is neither short
nor tall.
Delicately curved, her two
moth eyebrows,⁶⁸
Extend to her temples;
With a flutter, her pair of
phoenix eyes,
Glance back and forth.
Her captivating voice is like that of an
oriole singing in the sun;
Her lissome waist reminds one of willow
fronds tossed in the wind.

Truly:

Although born amid quantities of silk and gauze,
She opts to avoid the trappings of luxury;
Though raised amid piles of pearls and trinkets,
She adorns herself with elegant simplicity.
The flowering crab apples are in full bloom,
But she does not ask how many blossomed overnight;
The willow catkins are scattered everywhere,
But she is unaware of the spring season's advance.
The only one who knows anything of her true feelings,
Is the bright moon that penetrates her gauze windows;
The only thing that affects the content of her heart,
Is the clear breeze that flutters her brocade drapes.⁶⁹
Lightly moving her lotus feet,
She is alluring as an immortal from the
Palace of Clustered Pearls;
Gently lifting her beige skirt,
She has the bearing of the Bodhisattva
Kuan-yin of the Water Moon.⁷⁰

Truly:

She is like a bloom that can converse;
She is like jade that emits fragrance.⁷¹

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not seen her, that would have been that; but having seen her:

His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and
His material souls fled to the Nine Heavens.
Even without any physical contact,
He had already forfeited his soul.

It did not take long for Yüeh-niang and the others to usher her into the parlor in the rear compound where, after they had exchanged the customary amenities, she asked to be introduced to Hsi-men Ch'ing. This was just the signal he had been waiting for, and he hastily

adjusted his formal attire and came in to present himself to her. It seemed to him just as though:

A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster had
descended into the world;
The Goddess of Witches' Mountain had emerged
in the subcelestial realm.

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance.
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,

to such an extent that:

He was unable to control himself.

When they had finished paying their respects to each other, Yüeh-niang invited her guests into the summerhouse where tables had been set up for tea, and an assortment of exotic viands had been provided; after which they took their places in the large reception hall, where:

Rare delicacies from land and sea,
were already arrayed.

Behold:

At the head of the room,
There stand Shih Ch'ung's brocade windbreak⁷²
and folding screens;
On all four sides,
There are tortoiseshell mats and capacious
table settings.
Decorated lanterns are raised on high;
Colorful ropes are suspended in midair.
From the carved rafters brocaded
bands droop low;
Painted candles throw light upon
jeweled canopies.
Lanterns depicting fish and dragons
sporting in the mountains,
Scintillate like a cluster of pearls;
Others depicting halls and chambers,
towers and terraces,
Gather like a thousand balls of jade.
On the left,
The nine older and ten younger sisters,
Are depicted as portraits of beauties⁷³
in red and green;
On the right,
The nine stars and eight grotto heavens,
Are seen with their gods and immortals
in gold and azure.
The food provided consists of,
Dragons' livers and phoenix marrow,
Bears' paws and dromedaries' humps;
The music performed is that of,
Patterned cithara, silver psaltery,
Phoenix flute, and ivory clarinet.
The resounding beat of alligator drums
startles the flying birds;
The melodious sound of singing voices
diverts the moving clouds.
The alluring beauties at the feast,
Are like clustering pearls and kingfisher ornaments;
The entertainers beneath the steps,

Enact life's partings and reunions, sorrows and joys.⁷⁴
Truly, it is the case that:

The maidservants proffering wine are duplicates of
the Goddess of the Lo River;⁷⁵
The serving girls presenting soup are replicas of
Ch'ang-o, the Goddess of the Moon.⁷⁶

On this occasion, when Lady Lin had taken her seat at the feast, the hsi-wen drama *Hsiao T'ien-hsiang pan-yeh ch'ao-yüan*, or *Little Heavenly Fragrance Ascends to Paradise at Midnight*,⁷⁷ was performed. After the first two scenes had been acted, the players withdrew, and the four singing girls, Li Kueichieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Hung the Fourth, came out to play their musical instruments and sing for the entertainment of the company. Because Meng Yü-lou's elder sister resided outside the city gate, she was the first to get up to go, and in order to see her off they sang the song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival that begins with the tune "Drunk in the Flowers' Shade," the first line of which is:

Decorative embroidered lanterns are
suspended in midair.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking in the summerhouse with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, while the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, played their instruments and sang for their entertainment. From time to time, he left the others and peered into the large reception hall through the latticework. The servants and attendants who had accompanied the sedan chairs of the female guests were supplied with food and wine in the front reception hall, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Gentle reader take note:

Only at intervals is the bright moon full;
The variegated clouds are easily dispersed.
When joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow;
The nadir will be followed by the zenith.
This is a self-evident principle.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was only bent on:

Competing for prestige and usurping profit,⁷⁹
Indulging his desires and slaking his lust.

He was utterly oblivious to the fact that, since:

The Way of Heaven is inimical to excess,⁸⁰
The recorders of Hell were on his heels,
And the hour of his death was impending.⁸¹

That evening, as the lanterns in the chamber were lit, and the boy actors sang songs in celebration of the Lantern Festival, even before the first watch began, Hsi-men Ch'ing, while sitting in the presence of his guests, began to snore loudly as he dozed off.

Ying Po-chüeh continued:

Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,
and pestered him, saying, "Brother, you don't seem to be in high spirits today. How is it that you keep dozing off this way?"

"I didn't get enough sleep yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know why, but today I don't seem to have any energy, and keep dozing off."

When the four singing girls came in from entertaining the ladies, Ying Pochüeh told two of them to sing Lantern Festival songs, and the other two to serve the wine. Thereupon, Hung the Fourth and Cheng Ai-yüeh accompanied themselves on the psaltery and the balloon guitar as they sang for them, while Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh served the wine.

Just as they were enjoying themselves to the full, Tai-an suddenly came in and announced that Lady Lin and Ho Yung-shou's wife were preparing to leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly withdrew from the gathering and, concealing himself in the dark shadows, made his way to the second gate in order to catch a surreptitious view of them as they got into their sedan chairs.

Yüeh-ning and the others escorted them as far as the front courtyard to watch the setting off of the fireworks. Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, had on a jacket of crimson brocade, a sable cloak, and a skirt of kingfisher-blue brocade. Lady Lin wore a white satin jacket, a sable cloak, and a crimson skirt, with gold bracelets and jade bangles. Their attendants, carrying lanterns, clustered around them as they got into their sedan chairs and made their departure.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, truly:

Though his hungry eyes were about to burst,⁸²
He could only swallow his thirsting saliva,⁸³

and could hardly wait to begin an affair with her. Having watched Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, depart, he was quietly making his way inside through the enclosed passageway when:

Without coincidences there would be no stories;
Predestined unions have a way of happening;
Strange as it may seem,

he could not have anticipated that Lai-chüeh's wife, Hui-yüan, on seeing that the female guests had left, was coming back up front in order to open the door to her quarters, when she happened to run right into Hsi-men Ch'ing and had no way of avoiding him.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already observed the natural seductiveness of Lai-chüeh's wife and had long since set his sights on her. Although she was not quite as attractive as Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, she was more than adequate as a substitute. Thereupon, exhilarated by the wine he had consumed, he embraced her with both arms, stepped into her quarters with her, and proceeded to kiss her. Originally, this woman had worked for Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, but she had engaged in hanky-panky with her master, which caused such an uproar in his household that she was driven out. On this day, confronted with an opportunity to pursue the same path, she saw no reason to refuse. There and then, she responded by sticking her tongue into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth, and the two of them proceeded to unfasten their clothing and let down their pants. Lying down on the edge of the k'ang and raising her legs, she allowed Hsi-men Ch'ing to thrust away at her until he might well have ejaculated:

Is it not delightful?

Truly:

Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying;
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The competing lusters of lanterns and moon⁸⁴
bathe the jade flagon;
Their clear rays of light serve separately
to illuminate Lü-chu.⁸⁵
Protest not that the gentleman already has
a wife of his own;
He is tempted, beneath the mulberry trees,
to seek out Lo-fu.⁸⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 79

HSI-MEN CH'ING IN HIS SEXUAL INDULGENCE INCURS AN ILLNESS; WU YÜEH-NIANG BEARS A CHILD UPON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND

Even the kindest of men are seldom able to
maintain consistency;
Be careful, whatever you do, never to say,
"It doesn't matter."
Those who always strive for precedence
resort to evil devices;
Words that are uttered in due turn
have a more enduring savor.
A surfeit of tasty foodstuffs will end up
making you sick;
Pleasurable events, once over, are sure to
result in disaster.
Rather than having to seek for medicine
after you are sick;
It would be better to take preventive steps
before falling ill.¹

THESE EIGHT LINES of poetry are by Shao Yung. Their message is that:

The Way of Heaven ensures fortune for the good;²
Both ghosts and spirits are inimical to excess.
Those whose conduct is good will be rewarded
with a hundred blessings;
Those whose conduct is evil will be rewarded
with a hundred disasters.³

Hsi-men Ch'ing only knew how to:

Defile the wife and children of another,⁴

but remained:

Unaware that his own death was imminent.

That day, after encountering Lai-chüeh's wife in the enclosed passageway and committing adultery with her, he went back to the summerhouse and continued drinking with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh.

The wife of Commander-General Ching Chung, the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Ts'ui Pen's mother, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Wu K'ai's wife, and Big Sister Tuan remained for some time. It was only after the Lantern Festival dumplings had been served that they prepared to go, said their farewells, got into their sedan chairs, and departed. Wu K'ai's wife and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, accompanied each other on the way home. Ch'en Ching-chi sent off the troupe of actors from the household of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, with two taels of silver as remuneration for their performance, after seeing that they were provided with food and wine. The four singing girls, and the boy actors, were still in the summerhouse meanwhile, where they continued to play their musical instruments, sing, and pour wine for the company.

Ying Po-chüeh said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, tomorrow is Hua Tzu-yu's birthday. Have you sent a present to him, or not?"

"I sent something to him this morning," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Tai-an said, "Hua Tzu-yu's household has already sent Lai-ting to us with an invitation for the occasion."

"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "are you going to go tomorrow, or not? I can come over and go with you."

"I'll have to see how I feel tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Actually, you'd better go ahead on your own, and I'll follow when I feel up to it."

After serving a round of wine, the four singing girls went back to the rear compound, and Li Ming and the other boy actors came forward to play their instruments and sing for the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing, meanwhile, was constantly dozing off on his chair.

Observing this, Wu K'ai said, "Brother-in-law, you have been wearing yourself out for days on end. Enough is enough. We had better bid you farewell."

Thereupon, they got up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing held them back and insisted on their resuming their seats. It was not until the

second watch that the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw off the four singing girls in their sedan chairs and then rewarded Li Ming and the other two boy actors with two large goblets of wine apiece and gave them six mace of silver for their performance.

As they were about to go out the gate, he called Li Ming back and said to him, "On the fifteenth, I'm going to invite His Honor Chou Hsiu, His Honor Ching Chung, and His Honor Ho Yung-shou to a party. Would you, as soon as possible, engage the services of four singing girls for the occasion on my behalf? It is important that you not be remiss about it."

Li Ming knelt down before him and inquired, "Father, which four do you want?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Fan Pai-chia-nu, Ch'in Yü-chih, that Feng Chin-pao who sang the other day at His Honor Ho Yung-shou's place, and Lü Sai-erh. Do your best to engage them for me."

Li Ming assented, saying, "I understand," and then kowtowed and departed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound, she said to him, "Today, at the party, Lady Lin and Ching Chung's wife really enjoyed each others' company and stayed quite late before going home. Ching Chung's wife also expressed to me her thanks for the support you have rendered her husband, saying:

'Whatever benefit he may obtain,

He will never dare to forget it.'

Next month he is going to report to the Huai River region to take charge of speeding up the grain transport system."

She then went on to say, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou's wife also had a lot to drink today. She took a liking to Sister Six, who took her into the garden to see the artificial hill. All of the guests today gave generous gifts to the singing girls."

When they had finished talking, Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night there in the master suite.

In the middle of the night, Yüeh-niang had a dream which she described to Hsi-men Ch'ing the next morning, saying, "No doubt it was because I had noticed the robe of crimson velvet that Lady Lin was wearing at the party, but during the night I dreamed that you had taken a robe of crimson velvet out of Li P'ing-erh's trunk and given it to me to wear, when Sister P'an the Sixth grabbed it away from me and put it on herself. This really annoyed me, and I said to her, 'You have already demanded her fur coat for yourself, and now you are taking this robe as well.' At which, in a fit of temper, she tore a large hole in the robe, which caused me to get into a shouting match with her that woke me up. To my surprise, it turned out to be nothing but:

A dream of the Southern Branch."

"When you woke up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you were cursing angrily. It's not important. I'll find one like it for you to wear in the future, that's all. It has always been true that:

Dreams are produced by what is on your mind."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing got up the next day, his head felt heavy, and he did not feel well enough to go to the yamen. After combing his hair and washing his face, he put on his clothes and went out to his studio in the front compound, where he sat down and warmed himself at the brazier. Who should appear at this juncture but Yü-hsiao, who had gone over to Ju-i's room that morning and had her squeeze out half a cup of milk, which she brought to the studio for Hsi-men Ch'ing to take with his medicine. She found Hsi-men Ch'ing reclining on the bed while Wang Ching pummeled his thighs for him. On seeing Yü-hsiao come in, Wang Ching withdrew. After she had helped him to take his medicine, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a pair of gold-plated hairpins and four silver-coated pewter rings and told her to deliver them to the quarters of Lai-chüeh's wife. When Yü-hsiao heard her master send her on this mission, it reminded her of the affair of Lai-wang's wife, and being quick to:

Stick her head into any cranny,

she tucked them into her sleeve and went off on her errand.

Having delivered the objects, she came back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "She accepted them and said that she would kowtow to you on another day."

Taking the empty cup with her, she went back to the master suite, where Yüeh-niang asked her, "If Father has already taken his medicine, what is he doing in his studio?"

"He didn't say," responded Yü-hsiao.

"You should heat up some congee for him," Yüeh-niang told her, but when breakfast time had come and gone, he had not yet returned.

It so happens that Wang Ching had delivered a package of gifts from his sister Wang Liu-erh, which he handed to Hsi-men Ch'ing to look at, and extended her invitation for him to visit her at home. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the paper wrapping, he found a lock of her dark-black glossy hair, bound into a circlet with variegated satin displaying the motif of "joined hearts," and with two brocade straps attached to it, so that it could be fastened around the root of his chowrie handle. It was a work of exquisite craftsmanship. In addition, there was a wallet with two pockets, decorated with a pair of mandarin ducks, with a diapered border of close-stitched embroidered brocade, and filled with melon seeds. Hsi-men Ch'ing admired them for some time and was utterly delighted. Eventually, he put the wallet in the bookcase and tucked the brocade circlet into his sleeve.

Just as he was lost in thought, Wu Yüeh-niang suddenly came in. Lifting aside the portiere, she saw that he was lying on the bed, while Wang Ching knelt beside him, pummeling his thighs.

"Why do you insist on staying here in the front compound," she said, "instead of coming back to our quarters, where your congee is waiting for you? Tell me what's going on. How are you feeling, that you seem to be so lethargic?"

"I don't know why," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'm feeling out of sorts, and I'm suffering from pain in the thighs."

"I imagine it must be due to the advent of spring," said Yüeh-niang. "Take your medicine, and go easy on your way back."

Having induced him to return to the master suite, and fed him his congee, she said, "During a major festival like this, you had better

pluck up your spirits. Today is the birthday of Hua Tzu-yu, who resides outside the city wall, and he has invited you to pay him a visit. You can summon Ying the Second to go with you.”

“He’s not at home,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “He’s already left to attend Hua Tzu-yu’s birthday party. If you would have some wine and food prepared for me, I could go pay a visit to the house by the Lantern Market and share a drink with Brother-in-law Wu the Second.”

“You might as well saddle up your horse and go,” said Yüeh-niang. “I’ll have the maidservants prepare the food and wine for you.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing, thereupon, told Tai-an to prepare his horse, asked Wang Ching to accompany him, put on his clothes, and headed straight for the Lantern Market on Lion Street. What did the Lantern Market look like? Behold:

Carriages and horses rumble like thunder;

The round lanterns are ablaze with color.

The revelers swarm like ants;

The merrymaking is at its height.

In this era of great peace,⁵ beneficent
breezes enhance the scene;
Beauties in gauze and silk return after
showing off their finery.

Hills of lanterns soar into the heights⁶
above the azure clouds;

From whence do revelers not congregate
to take in the sights?⁷

After pausing to admire the lanterns, Hsi-men Ch’ing proceeded to the door of the house on Lion Street, where he dismounted, went inside, and sat down. This threw Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth into such consternation that they both hastened to come forward and welcome him with a bow, reporting that the shop was doing a thriving business. Laichao’s wife, “The Beanpole,” quickly lit a brazier in the studio and provided a serving of tea. It was not long before Wu Yüeh-niang sent Ch’in-t’ung and Lai-an to deliver two square boxes of appetizers and other dishes to go with the drinks. There was a supply of mung bean wine in the shop that had been brought back from the South, a jug of which was opened and taken upstairs to be heated on the brazier in the studio. Hsi-men Ch’ing invited Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth to join him in toasting each other as they drank, and they enjoyed the spectacle of the Lantern Market right outside the window, where crowds of people moved back and forth incessantly, and the goods purveyed by the various guilds were piled up like mountains.

When they had indulged themselves until after the normal lunch hour, Hsi-men Ch’ing sent Wang Ching to inform Wang Liu-erh of his visit. Upon hearing that Hsi-men Ch’ing was coming, Wang Liu-erh prepared a table replete with boxes of candied fruit, wine, and other delicacies and awaited his arrival. Hsi-men Ch’ing told Lai-chao to keep what was left of the table setting of food and wine for Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth to enjoy that evening while on night duty, rather than sending it home. He also directed Ch’in-t’ung to deliver a jug of wine to Wang Liu-erh’s place, after which he mounted his horse and made his way directly to her home.

The woman had dressed herself up to welcome him and conducted him into the parlor, where she kowtowed to him four times:

Just as if inserting a taper in its holder.

Hsi-men Ch’ing responded by saying, “I am grateful for your lavish gifts on more than one occasion, but why is it that the last two times we invited you to our home you failed to come?”

“Father, that’s a fine way to talk,” she said. “Who else is there to look after the place? I don’t know why it is, but the last few days I’ve been feeling out of sorts, and haven’t even felt like eating or drinking. I’ve hardly been able to get started on anything.”

“No doubt,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “it’s because you’ve been longing for your old man.”

“Since when have I been longing for him?” the woman responded. “It’s rather because you have neglected me for such a long time. I don’t know how I have been remiss toward you that you should put me in the position of:

The rings that hold your hairnet in place, always
at the back of your head.

I fear you must have found someone else who is uppermost in your mind.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing laughed, saying, “Where did you get any such idea? It’s simply because during this festival season I’ve been busy entertaining people at our place the last few days.”

“I have heard that yesterday you entertained a bunch of female guests,” said the woman.

“That is true,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “The First Lady had been entertained at two New Year’s parties and felt obliged to put on a party in return.”

“What female guests were invited?” the woman asked.

“So-and-so and so-and-so,” Hsi-men Ch’ing responded, and went on to run through the list from beginning to end.

“So,” the woman responded, “for your lantern-viewing party you only invited important guests, but not the likes of me.”

“Don’t make such a thing out of it,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “In days to come, on the sixteenth of the first month, we’re going to have a party for the wives of my managers and employees, to which you had better come, and not make any excuses for not doing so.”

“If Mother deigns to send me an invitation,” the woman said, “how would I dare not to come? However, the other day, that young lady from your household reviled Second Sister Shen so severely that she was filled with resentment and took it out on me. That day, she had not wanted to go, and it was I who persuaded her to do so. Afterwards, when she came back after suffering such abuse, she broke down and cried like anything, to my extreme mortification; and it was only after you and Mother sent a box of delicacies and a

tael of silver to mollify her, that she stopped complaining. I was unaware that the young lady in question had such an explosive temper. After all:

Before beating a dog, you ought to consider
the face of its owner.”⁸

“You don’t know that little oily mouth,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “She’s got an extremely gutsy personality and has even been known to brazen it out with me. But if she asked Second Sister Shen to sing a song for her, why should she have refused to do so? Whoever told her not only to refuse to sing, but to criticize her into the bargain?”

“Ai-ya! Ai-ya!” the woman protested. “She assured me that she had never criticized the young lady, but that she came barging in, pointed a finger at her, and began to abuse her, telling her to get out. By the time she got back here, she was in terrible shape and broke out crying:

Sniveling three ribbons of snot, and
Dribbling two rivulets of tears.

I kept her here overnight before sending her home the next day.”

After they had talked for a while, a maidservant brought in a serving of tea. The page boy Chin-ts’ai had gone out to purchase appetizers, fresh fish, and other viands, which Old Mother Feng was preparing in the kitchen. She also came out and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch’ing.

Hsi-men Ch’ing gave her a lump of silver worth three or four mace and said, “Since your mistress died, you have not visited my place very often.”

Wang Liu-erh said, “Since her mistress died, what reason would she have to do that? Instead, she frequently comes here to keep me company.”

In a little while, when her room had been straightened up, the woman invited Hsi-men Ch’ing to come inside and sit down, asking him, “Father, have you eaten lunch, or not?”

“I had a little congee at home this morning,” replied Hsi-men Ch’ing, “and just now I shared a snack with Brother-in-law Wu the Second, but I haven’t had a real meal.”

A table was, accordingly, set up and a spread laid out to go with the wine, consisting of festival foods, and fine delicacies of all kinds. The woman told Wang Ching to open the jug of mung bean wine, and fill their cups so she could have a drink with Hsi-men Ch’ing.

The woman then said, “Father, I assume that you have looked over the gift that I sent you. I coiled up and cut off a lock of hair from the crown of my head and fashioned it with my own hands. I’m sure that it must have tickled your fancy.”

“I’m grateful for your consideration,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

After they had:

Drunk until they were half inebriated,⁹

observing that they were alone in the room, Hsi-men Ch’ing pulled it out of his sleeve, placed it around the base of his organ, and tied the two brocade straps around his waist. He also attached a “Yunnanese tickler”¹⁰ to his turtle head and washed down a dose of the Indian monk’s medicine with his wine. The woman started to manipulate his organ with her hand, and in no time at all:

Its protuberances swelled, its head sprang up,

Its distended blood vessels were all exposed,

and it was the color of purple liver. The device proved to be more than a match for the silver clasp or the white satin band. Hsi-men Ch’ing pulled the woman onto his lap and inserted his organ into her vagina, while up above, the two of them passed the same goblet back and forth between them as they drank wine and sucked each other’s tongues. The woman also used the tip of her tongue to pass nut kernels into Hsi-men Ch’ing’s mouth.

They continued to play with each other as they ate and drank until lamplighting time, when Old Mother Feng came in from the kitchen with some pork and leek pastries that she had made. The woman and Hsi-men Ch’ing ate two of them apiece, after which a maidservant took the leftovers away. The two of them then made their way to the heated k’ang in the inner room where they:

Lifted aside the brocade curtains,

Took off their clothes, and went to bed.

The woman knew that Hsi-men Ch’ing liked to engage in intercourse by lamplight, so she moved a lampstand from the parlor and placed it on a table beside the k’ang. She then proceeded to close the sliding paper door, wash her private parts, and put on a pair of slippers made of crimson Lu-chou silk with flat white satin soles; after which, she took off her drawers, burrowed her way under the bedclothes, and snuggled up to Hsi-men Ch’ing. As they hugged and embraced each other, they dozed off for a while.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch’ing’s mind was totally obsessed with Ho Yung-shou’s wife, née Lan; and, as a result, his

Lecherous desires were on fire,

and his organ became stiff and hard. He started out by telling the woman to get down on all fours in front of him and then inserted his organ into the flower in her rear courtyard and proceeded to slam away at her as hard as he could two or three hundred times; slamming into her bottom so hard that:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly,

while the woman beneath him stimulated her clitoris with her hand and called out “Daddy” unceasingly.

Thereupon, still not completely satisfied, he got up and put on a short jacket of white satin, sat down on a pillow, and had the

woman recline face up, while he sought out two of her foot bindings and used them to suspend her feet from the bed posts on either side so that she appeared like “A Golden Dragon Extending Its Claws.” Upon inserting his organ into her vagina, he began alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts. As his organ continued to be half exposed and half submerged, he finally started:

Advancing with alacrity and galloping forward.

Fearing that the woman might be cold, he also covered her body with a short jacket of red satin. Exhilarated by the wine he had consumed, Hsi-men Ch’ing moved the lampstand closer and:

Bent his head in order the better to savor,

The marvelous sight as it went in and out,

while he retracted his organ as far as the knob of the glans, and then plunged it in all the way up to the root another several hundred times. Meanwhile the woman gave vent to her feelings in a hundred ways:

In a faint voice and trembling tones.

Hsi-men Ch’ing also took some of the pink ointment the Indian monk had given him and daubed it on his turtle head before plunging it back in. The woman’s vagina was so intensely stimulated that she could hardly bear it, and she begged him to penetrate more deeply as they responded to each other. But Hsi-men Ch’ing deliberately lingered, playfully dallying around the mouth of her vagina and titillating her clitoris, while refusing to penetrate more deeply, which aroused the woman to the point that her vaginal fluids began to flow, like a snail secreting its slime. As he moved back and forth, it agitated her clitoris in a pleasurable way. By the light of the lamp, Hsi-men Ch’ing contemplated her two fresh white legs, clad in crimson shoes, as they were suspended high on either side. As they moved back and forth, lunging and butting at each other, he could hardly contain his excitement.

Thereupon, he called out, “Whore that you are, do you care for me, or not?”

“How could I not care for my daddy?” the woman responded. “So long as you remain constant like:

The pine and the cypress that are evergreen

through both winter and summer,

everything will be fine; but you must not:

Grow distant and aloof as the days go by,¹¹

and choose to ignore me once you’ve had your fill of fun. Though I should long to death for you, who could I tell about it, and who would care? When that cuckold of mine comes home, there would be no point in my telling him about it. I hardly think that while he is away from home on business and has money in hand, he chooses to remain chaste for love of me.”

“My child,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “if you can dedicate yourself exclusively to me, when he comes home I’ll simply find another wife for him, and you can devote yourself to me on a long-term basis.”

“My own daddy,” the woman responded, “when he comes home, go ahead, whatever happens, and find him another wife. You can either maintain me outside, or take me into your household, whichever you like. This whore of yours will simply abandon her worthless body to you, that’s all. There is no wish of yours that I will refuse to comply with.”

“I understand,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing.

While they talked together, they had been going at it for the time it would take to eat two meals before Hsi-men Ch’ing finally ejaculated. He then unfastened the woman’s foot bindings and proceeded to embrace her under the bedclothes. The two of them:

Head to head and thigh over thigh,

As their drunken eyes grew bleary,¹²

slept until the third watch before waking up.

Hsi-men Ch’ing got out of bed, put on his clothes, and washed his hands, while the woman opened the door of the room and called in a maidservant.

Thereupon, they:

Replenished the special delicacies,

Resumed drinking the fragrant wine,

Decanting the warmed-over beverage,

and drank another ten cups or more together. Only after they began to feel intoxicated did they proceed to pour some tea and rinse out their mouths with it.

Hsi-men Ch’ing then groped a card out of his sleeve and handed it to the woman, saying, “Show this to Kan Jun, the manager of my silk goods store, and have him give you an outfit of clothes to wear, of any pattern you choose.”

The woman thanked Hsi-men Ch’ing with a bow and saw him to the door. Wang Ching was there to hold the lantern for him, and Tai-an and Ch’int’ung stood by with his horse. Only after she had seen him into the saddle did the woman return inside and shut the door.

Hsi-men Ch’ing sat on his horse wearing a purple sheep’s wool coat and a scarf wrapped around his neck. It was already the third watch of the night and dark clouds in the sky:

Darkened and obscured,¹³

the light of the moon. Silence had descended over the marketplace, the nine thoroughfares were empty, and the only sound to be heard in the streets was the rattle of the night watchman:

Shouting the hour and ringing his bell.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave his horse a touch with the whip and started on his way. Just as he arrived in front of the stone bridge at the western end of the street, a dark shadow swirled up from under the bridge and lunged at him. At the sight of the shadow his horse shied and Hsi-men Ch'ing felt a cold shiver go up his spine.¹⁴ Drunkenly he struck his horse with his whip and it shook its mane. Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung pulled on the bridle with all their might but were unable to hold the beast in check. Like a cloud scudding before the wind, the horse bolted for home and only slowed to a halt when it reached the front gate. Wang Ching, who had charge of the lantern, was unable to catch up with them.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing dismounted, he was unsteady on his legs and had to be helped inside by the servants, whereupon he went straight to P'an Chin-lien's quarters in the front garden. Nothing might have happened if he had not gone there, but since he did go, truly, it was a case of:

A sleepy slugabed encountering the General
of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into
Chung K'uei.¹⁵

It so happens that P'an Chin-lien had returned to her quarters from the rear compound but had not yet gone to sleep. Without bothering to undress she had stretched out on the k'ang to wait for Hsi-men Ch'ing. When she heard him come in, she hastily crawled to her feet and came forward to take his clothes from him. He was obviously stinking drunk, and she didn't dare ask him where he had been.

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her as best he could with one hand resting on her shoulder and mumbled, "You little whore! Your Daddy's drunk tonight. Get the bed ready so I can go to sleep."

The woman helped him onto the k'ang and got him bedded down for the night. No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing's head hit the pillow than he began:

Snoring thunderously,
and could not be shaken awake. The woman then removed her own clothes, burrowed her way under the bedclothes, and began lazily to grope around his loins for his organ. It was as soft as cotton and as lifeless as could be.

"Wherever has he come from?" she wondered as she:

Tossed first this way and then that,
unable to withstand:

The flames of desire that consumed her body;
The lustful visions that disturbed her mind.

For some time she devoted herself to manipulating his organ with her hand. Then she crouched down under the covers and teased it with her lips a hundred ways, but it refused to rise.

Frustrated beyond endurance, she asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Where have you put the monk's medicine?"

She had to shake him for what seemed like half a day before he woke up.

"You crazy little whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing protested. "What makes you so demanding? You want your daddy to take care of you, but today your daddy's just not up to it. The medicine's in the cylindrical gold pillbox in the sleeve of my jacket. Go ahead and take some. If you can suck the thing till it stands up, more power to you."

The woman groped in the sleeve of his jacket until she found the pillbox. When she opened it she saw that there were only three or four pills left.¹⁶ She picked up a flask of distilled spirits, poured some into a cup, and took one of the pills. She feared that the normal dosage would not be enough to do the trick so although:

She never, ever, should have done it,
she put all three pills into his mouth and washed them down with a draught of distilled spirits. Too drunk to know what he was doing, Hsi-men Ch'ing closed his eyes and swallowed the whole dose.

In less time than it takes to drink a cup of hot tea, the medicine began to take effect. The moment the woman tied the white satin band around the root of his organ:

It sprang lustily to life.¹⁷
Behold:

In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye
grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells
itself erect.

Although she realized full well that all her partner wanted to do was go back to sleep, the woman sat astride his body,¹⁸ put a glob of aphrodisiac ointment in the mouth of his urethra, and plunged the object into her vagina. Thus impaled, she gave herself over to wriggling until the tip of his organ penetrated all the way to her cervix. She felt a melting sensation as though her whole body were turning numb,¹⁹ the pleasure of which was indescribable. Then, supporting herself on the pillow with both hands, she raised and lowered her hips, alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans one or two hundred times. At first it felt uncomfortably tight, but once her vaginal secretions began to flow it grew more slippery.

Hsi-men Ch'ing let her disport herself as she pleased without paying any attention.²⁰ The woman could control herself no longer. Sticking her tongue into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth, she put her arms around his neck and wriggled for all she was worth, rubbing up

against him this way and that. His chowrie handle was totally submerged inside her, all the way up to the root, while only his two testicles remained outside. Meanwhile she stimulated herself with her hand until she began to feel inexpressible delight.²¹ She wiped away her vaginal secretions but they continued to flow. By the time the third watch was over she had used up five napkins for this purpose²² and had two orgasms in rapid succession.²³

But Hsi-men Ch'ing did not ejaculate. His turtle head had swollen larger than ever and turned the color of purple liver.²⁴

Its distended blood vessels were all exposed, and it was as hot as fire to the touch. It was gorged with blood, and though he told the woman to remove the band that was tied around its root, it continued to swell without ceasing. He told her to suck it, and so she crouched over his body, engulfed his turtle head with her ruby lips, and proceeded to move it:

Back and forth without stopping.

She continued for as much time as it would take to eat a meal, until the semen in his urethra spurted out en masse like mercury pouring into a bucket. She tried to catch it in her mouth and swallow it but she wasn't quick enough.

The emission went on and on. At first it was semen but it soon changed to blood. There was no stopping it. Hsi-men Ch'ing had fainted and his four limbs lay inert. In a state of panic the woman put a red date into his mouth and he swallowed it.²⁵ When the flow of semen ceased, it was followed by blood,²⁶ when the flow of blood stopped, nothing came out but a discharge of cold air. It was some time before this came to an end.

The woman was beside herself. Embracing Hsi-men Ch'ing, she asked, "My darling, what do you feel like inside?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing finally came to, he said:

"My head feels so dizzy,

I hardly know where I am."²⁷

"Why did you have such a big discharge today?" she asked, but said nothing of the overdose of aphrodisiac she had given him.

Gentle reader take note:

The vitality of the individual is finite, but

The prurience in this world is unlimited.

It has also been said that:

Where desires and cravings are deep,

The Heavenly impulse is shallow.²⁸

Hsi-men Ch'ing sought only his own sexual gratification but did not realize that:

When its oil is used up the lamp goes out;

When his marrow is drained a man will die.

It so happens that the allure of feminine beauty ensnares men in such a way that:

Where there is initial success,

There will be ultimate disaster.²⁹

A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that put this very well:

A flower-faced guardian god,

A jade-fleshed demon king,³⁰

She is a ravenous beast attired
in silk and satin.

Her bed is an execution ground,

Her ivory couch a penitentiary.

Her willowy brows are blades,

Her starry eyes are swords,

Her ruby lips are spears.

Her sweet mouth and her fragrant tongue,

Mask the designs of a snake or scorpion;³¹

No one who succumbs to her is able
to avoid disaster.

They are but fine dust in fluid,

Or snowflakes in scalding water.

The states of Ch'in and Ch'u were hardy,

The states of Wu and Yüeh were powerful,

But they perished on her account.

You may be warned that beauty is

a deadly sword,

That slays us all; but few defend

themselves.³²

The beauty of sixteen³³ has a body
as smooth as cream,
Her loins are a sword³⁴ with which
to slay the unwary.
Though no one may see your head
fall from your neck,
Before you know it, the marrow
of your bones is sapped.³⁵

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

Early the next morning Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and started to comb his hair when he was suddenly overcome by a spell of dizziness, which caused him to pitch forward in his chair. Fortunately Ch'un-mei caught him in her arms and prevented him from falling to the floor and hurting his head or face. She sat him back in his chair, and it was some time before he recovered.

Chin-lien was alarmed and blurted out, "You must be feeling debilitated from lack of food. You had better just sit where you are and have something to eat before going anywhere."

She told Ch'iu-chü, "Go back to the kitchen and fetch some congee for Father to eat."

Ch'iu-chü went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and said to Sun Hsüeh-o, "Is the congee ready yet? This morning, thus and so, when Father got up he had a spell of vertigo that nearly caused him to collapse. He needs some congee to eat right away."

Wu Yüeh-niang happened to overhear what Ch'iu-chü said and called her into her presence to ask what had happened. Ch'iu-chü told her the whole story of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had felt so light-headed that morning that he had nearly fallen over while combing his hair.

If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it:

Her ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and

Her material souls fled to the Nine Heavens.

After telling Sun Hsüeh-o to prepare the congee right away, she headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters to see for herself what condition her husband was in.

She found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in a chair and asked him, "What brought about this attack of giddiness today?"

"I don't know what's the matter with me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "A little while ago I just started feeling woozy."

"It's lucky Ch'un-mei and I were here to catch him," said Chin-lien. "Otherwise, light-headed as he was, he might have had a really nasty fall."

"You must have stayed out late last night," said Yüeh-niang, "and had more to drink than was good for you. It's still affecting your head."

"Whose place were you drinking at anyway," demanded Chin-lien, "that you didn't get back until such an hour?"

"He was drinking with my second brother in the shop on Lion Street," said Yüeh-niang.

Before long, Sun Hsüeh-o finished boiling the congee and told Ch'iu-chü to take it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. Hsi-men Ch'ing took up the congee but lost interest after eating only half a bowl and put it down again.

"What are you feeling inside?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"Nothing in particular," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just empty and queasy, and not much like doing anything."

"You really shouldn't go to the yamen today," said Yüeh-niang.

"I'm not going to," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied. "In a while I'll go out to the front compound and get Ch'en Ching-chi to write out the invitations and send them off. I'm inviting Chou Hsiu, Ching Chung, Ho Yung-shou, and some other officials to come over for a drink on the fifteenth."

"You haven't taken your medicine yet today," said Yüeh-niang. "Get your milk and take another dose with it. You've been overextending yourself for days on end and have let yourself get run down."

She had Ch'un-mei ask Ju-i to squeeze a little of her milk into a cup for him and watched Hsi-men Ch'ing take his medicine before getting up and going to the front compound. Ch'un-mei helped him along, but before he had gotten as far as the postern gate into the garden he started to black out. Unable to stand on his tottering legs, he would have fallen down if Ch'un-mei had not been there to help him back inside.

"If I were you," said Yüeh-niang, "I'd take it easy for a couple of days and forget about inviting all those people. Who cares about things like that at a time like this? Stay at home and rest for a few days, and forget about going out."

"And if there's anything you'd specially like to eat," she added. "I'll go back to the kitchen and get the maidservants to prepare it for you."

"I don't feel like eating anything," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied.

When Yüeh-niang returned to the rear compound, she questioned Chin-lien again, saying, "If he wasn't already drunk when he came home last night, and he didn't have anything more to drink, what sort of shenanigans was he up to with you?"

When Chin-lien heard this, she:

Wished she had more mouths than nature had provided,
so that she could issue a thousand denials.

"Sister," she protested, "needless to say, by the time he got home he was so drunk he didn't even bother to greet me. On top of

which, he demanded that I bring him distilled spirits so he could continue drinking. I gave him tea instead, telling him I didn't have any spirits, and then put him right to bed. Ever since you spoke to me about it, who would have dared to have anything to do with him in that way? How embarrassing can you get? It may well be that he had been up to something outside. Of course, I wouldn't know about that. But I can assure you that absolutely nothing of the kind occurred after he got home."

Yüeh-niang, who was sitting there along with Meng Yü-lou, called Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung before her and interrogated them, saying, "Where was Father out drinking yesterday? If you tell the truth, I'll let it go at that. But if you engage in:

The slightest deceit or prevarication,
you two jailbirds will be held to account.

Tai-an clenched his teeth and insisted, "He was drinking with Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth in the shop on Lion Street and didn't venture anywhere else."

Later, she called Brother-in-law Wu in to ask him about it, and he said, "Brother-in-law drank with us for only a short time, and then got up and went somewhere else."

When Yüeh-niang heard this she became enraged. As soon as Brother-in-law Wu the Second left, she gave Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung a real dressing down and threatened them with a beating. The two of them panicked and finally admitted, "Yesterday he went to have a drink with Han Tao-kuo's wife."

This was just the signal that P'an Chin-lien had been waiting for, and she came forward, saying, "Sister, when you showed your resentment against me just now, it was a case of:

Taking things out on an innocent bystander,
while giving the culprit a laugh.

After all:

Every person has a face;
Every tree has its bark.

When you talk about me that way, it makes it look as though, all day long, I give this one thing priority over everything else."

She then went on to say, "Sister, you ought to further ask those two jailbirds why it was that he arrived home so late the other day when you went to the party at Ho Yung-shou's place. Who knows where he had been? It's hardly likely that anyone would stay out that late making a New Year's courtesy call."

Tai-an, who was afraid that Ch'in-t'ung would spill the beans, decided not to conceal the truth any longer and told her all about Hsi-men Ch'ing's surreptitious affair with Lady Lin.

Only then did Yüeh-niang believe him and remark, "No wonder he had me send an invitation to her. I said to him:

'We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.

I fear she is unlikely to come.' Who could have known that he was having an affair with her? It seems to me that, for someone of her age to:

Paint her eyebrows and dye her hair,
powdering her face till it looks as though it's been plastered with putty, only shows her to be nothing but an aging strumpet."

"Sister," remarked Meng Yü-lou, "who ever heard of anyone with a grown-up son, who has already taken a wife, still carrying on that way? If she can't bear her widowhood, she should take another husband."

"That old whore," pronounced Chin-lien, "shameless as she is, could not accept the disgrace that would entail."

"I said that I feared she would refuse to come," said Yüeh-niang. "Who could have anticipated that she would be wanton enough to exhibit herself that way?"

"As far as she is concerned, Sister," said Chin-lien, "you have finally perceived the difference between black and white. But with regard to that whore of Han Tao-kuo's, you have been critical of me for condemning her. The fact is that their whole household collaborates in affairs like this. Her mate is an open cuckold, and yet our husband continues to support that beggar of a cuckold. In the future he may well prove to be as fatal as a ghost-snatching demon."

"You call Wang the Third's mother an old whore," said Yüeh-niang. "But she says that when you were young you were employed as a servant in their household."

If Chin-lien had not heard this, nothing might have happened, but having heard it, her face turned crimson from her ears to her neck and she started to swear, saying, "That lousy old whore is delirious. What would I be doing in her household for no good reason? The fact is that my maternal aunt lived next door to her. They had a garden, and when I was staying with my aunt as a child, I used to go over to their place to play with their maidservants. She may claim that I worked for her family, but I don't acknowledge anything of the sort. She's nothing but an:

Open-eyed and brazen-faced,
old whore."

"You'd better watch that mouth of yours," said Yüeh-niang. "I merely told you what she said, and you start cursing her."

Chin-lien did not have another word to say on the subject.

Yüeh-niang then told Sun Hsüeh-o to make some boiled dumplings for Hsi-men Ch'ing, and she set out for the front compound in order to feed them to him.

Just as she got to the ceremonial gate, she saw P'ing-an going into the garden and called him to a halt, saying, "What are you up to?"

"Li Ming has engaged the services of four singing girls to entertain the company at the party on the fifteenth," P'ing-an explained. "He has come to report this and wants to know whether it will take place as planned, or not. I told him the invitations had not yet been sent out, but he didn't believe me and asked me to come in and tell Father about it."

"You crazy louse of a slave!" Yüeh-niang exclaimed. "How can we have a party under the circumstances? What need is there for you to ask about it? Why didn't you simply send that cuckold away, instead of coming to report anything to your master or mistress?"

She railed at P'ing-an until he fled, as though:

Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,

There was no place for him to hide.

Yüeh-niang proceeded on her way to Chin-lien's quarters, where she looked on as Hsi-men Ch'ing ate three or four boiled dumplings before stopping and refusing to eat any more.

She then reported to him, "Li Ming came to report that he had engaged the singing girls, but I sent him away, telling him to cancel the engagement, because the party would have to be called off and rescheduled for another day."

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded in agreement, assuming that he would probably feel somewhat better in a few days.

Who could have anticipated that, after getting through the night, the next day his depleted organ swelled up, his genitalia became inflamed, and his testicles became so swollen they looked like shiny eggplants. When he urinated, his urethra felt as though it were being scraped with a knife; and every time he did so, it hurt the same way.

His orderlies and attendants had saddled his horse and were waiting outside for Hsi-men Ch'ing, in order to escort him to the yamen to preside over the general disposition of impending cases scheduled for the fifteenth of the month. Who could have foreseen that he would be afflicted with these symptoms?

Yüeh-niang said to him, "If you will do as I suggest, send a note to His Honor Ho Yung-shou, telling him that you are staying at home undergoing treatment for the next few days and can't go to the yamen. If you are feeling so debilitated, you ought to send a page boy, as soon as possible, to ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine you, and then take whatever medications he prescribes. You ought not to delay this way. That's no solution. For someone of your constitution not to eat anything to speak of for two days is hardly sustainable."

But Hsi-men Ch'ing would not give his consent to summoning the doctor, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll be all right in a couple of days and should be able to go out by then."

He thereupon sent someone off to the yamen with an explanatory note and a tally entitling him to a leave of absence and then lay down on the bed, but he felt restless and out of sorts.

When Ying Po-chüeh heard about his condition, he came to see him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into Chin-lien's quarters and offered him a seat.

Ying Po-chüeh bowed to him in greeting and said, "I imposed on your hospitality the other day Brother, but I did not know that you were feeling unwell. It is not surprising that you did not go to Hua Tzu-yu's birthday party."

"If I had felt any better, I would have gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know why, but I just didn't feel up to doing anything."

"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "how are you feeling right now?"

"It doesn't amount to much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I've had spells of vertigo, and when I stand up, I'm unsteady on my feet and find it difficult to walk."

"I notice that your face is red," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You must be running a fever. Have you sent for someone to examine you, or not?"

"My wife said I ought to invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I told her that I wasn't suffering from any ailment serious enough to justify calling for him."

"Brother, you are mistaken there," pronounced Ying Po-chüeh. "You ought to invite him to come examine you, and see what he has to say. If you take several doses of whatever he prescribes, it should dissipate your fever, and facilitate your recovery. With the advent of spring, people often suffer this way from outbreaks of phlegm-fire. Yesterday, I ran into Li Ming, who told me that you had asked him to engage the services of some singing girls for a party you were going to hold today, but that you were not feeling well and had postponed the date. This news gave me quite a start, and he suggested that I should come to see you first thing today."

"I wasn't even able to go to the yamen today to preside over the ceremony of bowing before the imperial tablet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but had to send in the tally that entitles me to a leave of absence."

"It's obvious that you couldn't go," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you undergo the appropriate medical treatment for a few days, you should be able to go out again."

When he had finished drinking his tea, he said, "I'll go now, and come back to see you later. I should also let you know that Li Kuei-chieh has arranged with Wu Yin-erh to come see how you are."

"Why don't you stay for a meal before you go?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I don't want anything to eat," said Ying Po-chüeh, as he went nonchalantly off without more ado.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent Ch'in-t'ung outside the city gate to invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come examine him.

When he came into the room and took his pulse, he said, "This ailment of yours, venerable sir, is a case of vacuity fire flaming upward, and the depletion of semen in your testicles. This lack of equilibrium in your system is symptomatic of a loss of yang energy. Your yin vacuity must be replenished before you can recover."

When he had finished pronouncing his diagnosis, he took his leave, got up, and left.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver in order to pay for the medication he prescribed and took it; but although it put a stop

to his bouts of vertigo, his body remained as weak as ever, and he could not stand up. Down below, his scrotum continued to swell painfully, and he found it extremely difficult to urinate.

That afternoon, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh came to see him in their sedan chairs, bringing with them two gift boxes apiece, containing stuffed pastries, rose-flavored gold-colored tarts, a set of pig's feet, and two roast ducks.

Upon entering the room, and kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, they said, "Father, what is it that's troubling you?"

"It is enough that you two sisters should come to see me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need was there for you to take the trouble to purchase gifts for me?"

He then went on to say, "I don't know why, but this year I am afflicted with unusually severe phlegm-fire."

"Father," said Li Kuei-chieh, "you must have been drinking too heavily during this festival season. If you will only abstain for a few days, you should recover."

After sitting with him for a while, they went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, to convey their holiday greetings to Yüeh-niang and the others. They were invited back to the rear compound and served tea, after which, they returned to the front compound, intending to sit down and visit with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

In the interim, Ying Po-chüeh, accompanied by Hsieh Hsi-ta and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, had come to see him. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Yü-hsiao to help him up to a sitting position and retained his three visitors, calling for a table to be set up, so they could drink together.

"Has Brother had any congee to eat, or not?" inquired Hsieh Hsi-ta.

Yü-hsiao turned her head away and did not respond, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I haven't had any congee. I don't seem to be able to swallow it."

"Go get some congee," suggested Hsieh Hsi-ta. "We'll keep Brother company as he eats it. That ought to help."

Before long, she came back with some congee and stood by him with a cup of it in hand, while his guests kept him company by eating snacks and other refreshments. Hsi-men Ch'ing took up the congee but only managed to scoop down half a cup of it before he stopped eating. Meanwhile, Yüeh-niang was entertaining Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh in Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door.

Ying Po-chüeh asked, "Why are Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh not to be seen?"

"They are sitting right next door," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Lai-an and said, "You go over there and invite them to come here and sing a song suite for your master's entertainment."

Wu Yüeh-niang was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in no shape to be thus entertained and refused to let them go on the grounds that they were having a drink together.

After his guests had drunk together for a time, they said, "Brother, we fear that if you continue to sit up with us, you may wear yourself out. We'd better go, so you can lie back down for a while."

"I appreciate your concern for me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The three of them then said goodbye and proceeded to leave.

When Ying Po-chüeh had gone through the little gate to the courtyard, he called Tai-an over and said to him, "Tell the First Lady that Ying the Second reported that your Father's face has changed color, a sign of stagnant circulation, and that she ought to have someone come and examine him as soon as possible. Dr. Hu, who resides on Main Street, is especially proficient at treating phlegm-fire. Why don't you have someone go and invite him to come and examine him? There is no time to be wasted."

Tai-an did not dare to be remiss and promptly went to report this to Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang hastily went into the room he was in and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ying the Second, just now, told Tai-an that Dr. Hu, who resides on Main Street, is good at treating phlegm-fire. Why don't you invite him to come examine you?"

"That Dr. Hu," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "formerly came to treat Li P'ing-erh, but to no effect. Why should I invite him?"

Yüeh-niang responded:

"Medicine cures only those diseases

which are not fatal;

The Buddha saves only those destined

to be saved.³⁶

Though he may not have treated her effectively, it could be your destiny to recover after taking his medication."

"All right," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go ahead and invite him."

Before long, Ch'i-t'ung was sent on this errand and brought Dr. Hu back with him. He arrived just as Brother-in-law Wu K'ai came by to see Hsi-men Ch'ing, and they entered his room together.

After taking his pulse, he said to Wu K'ai and Ch'en Ching-chi, "His Honor is suffering from accumulated toxicity in his genitalia. Unless this is treated in a timely manner, it will produce a leakage of blood in his urine. This condition is the result of engaging in sexual intercourse while suppressing the urge to urinate."

Once again, five mace of silver was sealed up to pay for the medication he prescribed, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing took it, it was no more efficacious than:

A stone sunk in the vast sea,

and he found himself unable to urinate at all.

Yüeh-niang was so alarmed by this that she sent Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh away and then invited Dr. Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, the son of Old Man Ho, to come and examine him.

He said, "This is a urinary blockage due to the inflammatory swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin, caused by the descent of pathogenic fire from the bladder. The accumulation of damp phlegm in the circulatory channels of the four limbs has interrupted the communication between the heart and the kidneys."

Once again, five mace of silver was sealed up to pay for the medication he prescribed, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing took it, his depleted organ rose up until his chowrie handle was as hard as iron and would not relax by day or by night. That night, P'an Chin-lien, as though she:

 Didn't know any better,
sat astride Hsi-men Ch'ing's body and amused herself by "dipping the candle upside down" until he:

 Passed out and then came to again,³⁷
a number of times in succession.

The next day, Ho Yung-shou came to see him and sent someone ahead to announce his coming.

On hearing this, Yüeh-niang said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou is about to come visit you. Let me help you move back to the rear compound. This out-of-the-way location is not a fit place to receive guests."

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded in assent, and Yüeh-niang, thereupon, helped him into some warm clothes; after which, she and Chin-lien supported him on either side as he made his way out of Chin-lien's quarters and back to the master suite in the rear compound. Once there, they put down a mattress and bedding, propped him up on a high pillow on the k'ang in the master bedroom, straightened up the room, and lit some incense.

Before long, Ho Yung-shou arrived, and Ch'en Ching-chi invited him into the bedroom in the rear compound, where he found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting up in his sickbed, and said, "My colleague, I will not bother with a formal obeisance."



Hsi-men Ch'ing in His Sexual Indulgence Forfeits His Life

He then went on to ask, "Do you feel that your ailment is getting any better?"

"The fever in my upper body has receded somewhat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but the toxicity in my swollen scrotum down below is more than I can take."

"That sounds like a case of swollen lymph nodes in the groin," said Ho Yung-shou. "Your pupil has an acquaintance who has been visiting his relatives in Tung-ch'ang prefecture but just arrived back yesterday. I have a note to that effect at home. He is a native of Fen-chou in Shansi province, and his name is Liu Ch'ü-chai. He is some fifty years old and is extremely proficient at treating infectious disorders. I could send someone to invite him to come and diagnose my colleague's disorder."

"I deeply appreciate my colleague's concern," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I will send someone myself to invite him."

When Ho Yung-shou had finished his tea, he said, "You must take it easy and look after yourself, my colleague. With regard to business at the yamen, I will send someone to inform you of what is going on every day. There is no need for you to worry about it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing raised his hand in a gesture of gratitude and said, "I fear I am putting my colleague to a lot of trouble."

When Ho Yung-shou had taken his leave and gone out the door, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched Tai-an with a note, accompanied by one of Ho's servants, to go and invite Liu Ch'ü-chai to come examine him.

After taking his pulse and scrutinizing his genitalia, Liu Ch'ü-chai applied a medication to the area and also sealed up a decoction for him to take orally. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with a bolt of Hang-chou silk, and a tael of silver; but when he took the first cup of the decoction, it produced no visible effect.

That same day, unexpectedly, Cheng Ai-yüeh came to see Hsi-men Ch'ing in her sedan chair, bringing a box of squabs, and a box of

stuffed pastries and cream puff pastries for him.

Upon coming in the door:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;

she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I didn't know that you had fallen ill. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, fine pair that they are, didn't tell me about it and came ahead of me, so that I have been remiss in coming to see you. Please don't hold it against me."

"You're not remiss," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and your mother has also gone to the trouble of purchasing gifts for me."

Cheng Ai-yüeh laughed, saying, "What do these paltry gifts amount to? You embarrass me no end."

She then went on to say, "Father, since you have lost weight to such an extent, you can supplement your daily diet with these things."

"It would be a good thing if he eats them," said Yüeh-niang. "He hasn't been eating much of anything. This morning, he only consumed a little congee and hasn't had anything else to eat. The doctor was just here to examine him."

"Mother," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "get a maidservant to boil one of these squabs until it is tender, and I will urge Father to eat some more congee with it. Venerable sir, it won't do for someone of your hefty build not to eat. The whole household depends on you for their support like a mountain of gold. What would they do without you?"

"He's suffering from a feeling of abdominal obstruction," said Yüeh-niang, "and can't get anything down."

"Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you should do as I say. Though you may not feel like eating or drinking anything from day to day, you've got to force yourself to consume something. What are you afraid of?"

Human beings have no roots to nourish them;

It is food and water that sustain our lives.

The fact is you've got to eat enough to maintain your stamina, or else your vitality will become even more exhausted."

Before long, the squab was boiled until it was tender, and Hsiao-yü brought it in together with some congee. The congee was made with polished nonglutinous rice flavored with sweet squash and eggplant julienne and marinated with ten spices. Cheng Ai-yüeh then jumped onto the k'ang holding the bowl of congee in her hand and knelt down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing, feeding him one mouthful at a time. Although he did the best he could, he was only able to get down half a bowl of congee and two chopstick's worth of squab, before he shook his head and refused to eat any more.

Cheng Ai-yüeh said, "On the one hand, because he knows it's therapeutic, and on the other hand, because I urged him to do so, he has had a little something to eat."

"Father has not been eating that much," said Yü-hsiao, "but today, thanks to your urging, he has eaten more than usual."

Yüeh-niang treated Cheng Ai-yüeh to a serving of tea. That evening she also entertained her with food and wine and rewarded her with five mace of silver before sending her home.

As she was about to leave, Cheng Ai-yüeh kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing once again, saying, "Father, be patient and do your best to recuperate for a few days. I will come back to see you again."

That night, Hsi-men Ch'ing took a second dose of the medicine prescribed by Liu Chü-chai, but his whole body started to ache and he could not help groaning with pain all night long. During the fifth watch, his swollen scrotum burst open, releasing a pool of fresh blood, and chancres appeared on his turtle head that exuded a yellow fluid incessantly. Before he knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing fell into a faint and blacked out.

Yüeh-niang and the other members of the household were thrown into a panic and came to keep vigil over him. When they saw that the medication was not having the desired effect, they decided to send for Dame Liu to come to the summerhouse in the front compound to light candles in the shape of human figurines, and perform a shamanistic dance on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf. They also intended to send a page boy to the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu to inquire if Immortal Wu was there, and to invite him to come and assess Hsi-men Ch'ing's situation, since he had predicted, when he told his fortune, that during this year he would suffer from:

The calamity of spitting blood, and discharging pus, and

The affliction of desiccated bones and emaciated frame.³⁸

Pen the Fourth said, "There is no need to ask after him at the home of His Honor Chou Hsiu. At present, he has set up a fortune-telling shop in front of the Temple of the Tutelary God outside the city gate, where he dispenses medical advice and sells fortunes. When people come to him for help, he is not out to make a profit but goes forthwith to diagnose their troubles."

Upon hearing this, Yüeh-niang immediately sent Ch'in-t'ung to summon Immortal Wu.

When he came into the room and looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing, he saw that:

He no longer resembled his former self.

His frame was cadaverous and emaciated;

His diseased body was utterly enervated;³⁹

and a kerchief was tied around his head as he lay there on his sickbed.

After first taking his pulse, he said, "Sir, you are suffering from the results of:

Excessive indulgence in drunkenness and lust;⁴⁰

Your reserve of semen is completely depleted.

The pathogenic fire of your generative organ,

Is choking the conduit leading to your heart.

The disease has penetrated your vital organs,⁴¹

And is no longer possible to treat medically.

There is a poem of eight lines that is relevant to your case, which I will recite for you.

When you engage in sex while drunk and sated,⁴²
lusting after female beauty,
Your vital energy and your blood vessels will
imperceptibly be worn away.
Your semen will leak, your urine contain blood,
and you will emit milky muck;
Just as a lamp goes out when its oil is spent,
your store of semen will dry up.
In the past your only regret was that occasions
for gratification were too few;
But now, on the contrary, it has come to pass
that your maladies are too many.
The jade pinnacle will collapse all by itself,⁴³
without anyone else's help;
Even the famous physician, Pien Ch'ieh of Lu,⁴⁴
would be unable to save you.

When Yüeh-niang realized that Immortal Wu would not be able to cure him, she said, "Since you cannot prescribe any medication to improve his condition, would you be willing to predict his fate?"

Immortal Wu then:

Calculated on the joints of his fingers,

in order to ascertain the eight characters that determined Hsi-men Ch'ing's horoscope, and said, "He was born in the year of the tiger, in a *ping-yin* year, during a *wu-shen* month, on a *jen-wu* day, during the *ping-ch'en* time period. In this *wu-hsü* year of his horoscope he should be thirty-two years old. He is currently in the third of his 'decennial periods of fate' that is designated by the combination *kuei-hai*. The elements fire and earth in his horoscope constitute his 'injurer of the official,' and the element earth that corresponds to the stem *wu* in the combination for the current year will overcome the element water that corresponds to the stem *jen*, so that the combination for the current year will be in conflict with that for the day of his birth. The first month of this year is also a *wu-yin* month. Thus the three occurrences of the stem *wu* in the combinations for the month of his birth, the current year, and the current month, will conflict with the branch *ch'en* in the combination for the time period of his birth. How can he hope to withstand this? Though he has enjoyed both wealth and good fortune thus far, his longevity cannot be preserved. I will render a judgment in four lines of verse, though it may be hard to take.

When one's fate is crossed by an unlucky star
it is sure to be unpropitious;
The body is feeble, the baleful spirit strong,
and sure to portend catastrophe.
If the time and day indicate an encounter with
the genuine ill-boding Year God;
Even should one be a god or an immortal, one
would have to knit one's brows."⁴⁵

Yüeh-niang said, "If the prospects for him do not look good, could you calculate the correlations between the five phases, the twenty-eight lunar mansions, and their corresponding animals that govern his fate to see what they portend?"

Immortal Wu proceeded to chart the implications of the animals associated with the stem-branch combinations in his horoscope and said:

The heart-moon-fox mansion and the
horn-wood-flood dragon,
Deep under the crimson bed-curtains⁴⁶
cannot be reconciled.
One constantly sends jade dew flying
from the moon palace;
The other, beneath the moon, tries to
seize the golden trophy.
When excited, he is transformed into
a real fighting cock;
Even on the brink of death, he longs
for an overripe peach.
Neither celestial deities nor earthly
spirits can save him;
The Master of the Demon Gorge⁴⁷ himself
would labor in vain."

Yüeh-niang said, "If the prognostication from his horoscopic animals is not propitious, would you interpret a dream for me?"

"Describe it to me," said Immortal Wu, "and I will interpret it for you."

Yüeh-niang said, "I dreamt of a spacious structure on the verge of collapse, of a body covered with a red garment, of the breaking of a green jade hairpin, and the smashing of a caltrop-patterned mirror."

"Pray do not take offense at what I have to say," responded Immortal Wu, "but the spacious structure on the verge of collapse portends a calamity for your husband. The body covered with a red garment portends that you will be wearing mourning clothes. The

breaking of the green jade hairpin portends a splitting up of you and your sister wives. The smashing of the caltrop-patterned mirror portends the immanent separation of you and your husband. This dream is also not propitious, not propitious.”

“Is there anything you can do to alleviate the situation, sir?” asked Yüeh-niang.

Immortal Wu responded:

“The White Tiger is blocking the road ahead,
Death Knell and Condoler are wreaking havoc,⁴⁸
Gods and immortals are not able to cure him,
The ill-boding Year God cannot be withstood.
The Creator has determined the outcome;
Neither gods nor spirits can modify it.”⁴⁹

When Yüeh-niang realized that there was no saving star in his horoscope, she presented Immortal Wu with a bolt of fabric to thank him for his services and sent him on his way. But no more of this. Truly:

In consulting the yin and yang forces
in the hexagrams,
One should neglect mere trivialities,
paying them no heed.
If you devote your life to good works,
Heaven will reward you;
If you refrain from deceiving Heaven,
mishaps will not occur.⁵⁰

When Yüeh-niang saw that though:

The gods were besought and diviners consulted,
the results of these prognostications were all:

Ominous and inauspicious,
her heart was filled with consternation. That evening, she burnt incense in the courtyard and swore an oath before Heaven that if her husband should recover, she would make three annual pilgrimages to the peak of Mount T'ai in T'ai-an subprefecture, in order to burn incense and present a robe to Pi-hsia Yüan-chün, the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds.⁵¹ Meng Yü-lou also promised that she would pay obeisance to the dipper on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh of each month. Only P'an Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh failed to make any vows on his behalf.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing felt that his body was becoming more and more torpid, and he intermittently lost consciousness. During these episodes, he saw Hua Tzu-hsü and Wu the Elder standing in front of him, demanding retribution for the harm he had done them. He was reluctant to tell anyone about this but merely saw to it that he was not left alone.

On one occasion, observing that Yüeh-niang was not present, he took hold of P'an Chin-lien with one hand, feeling that he could not bear to relinquish her, and, letting his eyes brim over with tears, said to her, “My darling, after I die, I hope that you and your sister wives will keep vigil over my spirit tablet, and not go your separate ways.”

Chin-lien also, feeling that:

Her anguish could not be overcome,
said, “Brother, my only fear is that I will not be tolerated.”

“Wait until the First Lady comes in,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “I will speak to her about it.”

Before long, Wu Yüeh-niang came in, and seeing that the eyes of the two of them were red with weeping, said, “Brother, if you have something to say, tell me about it, as befits the fact that you and I have shared the experience of:

Being husband and wife all this time.”⁵²

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became so choked up he had difficulty uttering a sound, but finally said, “I realize that I am unlikely to recover, but there are a few words that I would like to bequeath to you. After I die, if you give birth to:

A single boy or half a girl,
you and your sister wives ought to devote yourselves to raising it, and continue to live together, rather than going your separate ways and thereby incurring the contempt of the community.”

Pointing to Chin-lien, he went on to say, “As for Sister Six here, you should make allowances for what she did in the past.”

When he had finished speaking, the pearly tears rolled down Yüeh-niang's peach-colored face, as she commenced to cry out loud, giving herself over to boundless sorrow.

“Don't cry,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “Listen to my injunction.”

There is a song to the tune “Stopping the Horse to Listen” that expresses what he had to say:

“My worthy wife,
I have a heartfelt wish to
impart to you:
Wife,
Whether the child you are carrying
is male or female,
After it is born, raise it
to adulthood,
So it can take charge of my estate.

Follow the example of the former martyrs
by remaining chaste,
One wife and four concubines looking out
for each other;
Thus being able to maintain each others'
reputations.
Though I am dead beneath the Nine Springs,⁵³
I will be able to close my mouth and eyes."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she replied to the same tune:

"Thank you my husband,
For sharing your dying wishes
with me.
Husband,
Though I fall into the category
of womenfolk,
I adhere to the four virtues and
three obediences,⁵⁴
Appropriate to husband and wife.
Throughout my life I have chosen not
to act ambiguously.⁵⁵
I will remain chaste, and refuse to
sully my husband's name.
We will tread the same road in life
and in death.⁵⁶
Only a single saddle for a single horse;⁵⁷
There is no need for you to admonish me."⁵⁸

When he had finished exhorting Wu Yüeh-niang, Hsi-men Ch'ing also summoned Ch'en Ching-chi into his presence and said, "Son-in-law, as the saying goes:

If you have raised a son, rely on your son;

If you lack a son, rely on your son-in-law.

As my son-in-law you are the equivalent of a son to me. If I should end up:

High as the hills or deep as the sea,

after escorting me to my grave, whatever you do, endeavor to:

Keep the whole household of one mind,⁵⁹

and support your mother-in-law and her sister wives as they live out their lives, without doing anything to arouse the derision of others."

He then went on to instruct him, saying, "The satin piece goods store has a capital worth 50,000 taels of silver, but part of the capital and interest belongs to our kinsman Ch'iao Hung and should be returned to him. Have Manager Fu Ming sell off the stock, one batch at a time, and then close the shop. The knitting and sewing supplies store being managed by Pen the Fourth has a capital worth 6,500 taels of silver, and the silk goods store being managed by Brother-in-law Wu the Second a capital worth 5,000 taels. After selling off the stock, the proceeds should be brought home. As for that contract to supply antiquarian relics to the court that Li the Third has been pursuing, there is no need for us to participate any further. Have Ying the Second find someone else to invest in the scheme. Li the Third and Huang the Fourth still owe us the 500 taels of capital that they borrowed, not to mention the 150 taels of interest that they owe us. If you succeed in collecting these debts, you can use the money to pay for my funeral expenses. You and Manager Fu Ming can continue to operate the two shops in the front of our property. The pawnshop has an operating capital of 20,000 taels, and the pharmaceutical shop one of 5,000 taels. Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao have 4,000 taels worth of merchandise on their boat in Sung-chiang. As soon as the waterways are open to navigation again, you should go down to meet their boat and bring the cargo back home to be sold. The silver realized by the sale can be used to provide the living expenses for your mother-in-law and the rest of the family. School Official Liu still owes me 340 taels; Assistant Magistrate Hua Ho-lu owes me 50 taels; and Hsü the Fourth's shop outside the city gate still owes me 340 taels of capital and interest. The contracts for these debts are all in my possession, and someone should be sent as soon as possible to press for their collection. In the future, you might as well sell the property across the street and the house on Lion Street as well, since I fear that your mother-in-law and company will be unable to manage them."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, he broke into tears, accompanied by loud weeping and wailing.

"Father," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I understand all of your injunctions."

In a little while, Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Pen the Fourth, and Ts'ui Pen all came in together to see him, and to ask after his health.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave each of them his instructions, and they said to him, "Venerable sir, you should relax. Everything will be all right."

Many other people came to ask after his health that day, and upon seeing how serious his condition was, they all departed with a sigh.

Two days passed by, during which Yüeh-niang naively hoped that Hsi-men Ch'ing would recover. Who could have known that:

His fate had already been determined,

and he was destined to die in the thirty-third year of his life. On the twenty-first day of the first month, during the fifth watch:

His ministerial fire inflamed his body,⁶⁰

Transforming itself into interior wind.

After panting like an ox for some time, during the period from 9:00 to 11:00 that morning:

Alas and alack,

He stopped breathing and died.

Truly:

So long as one has three inches of breath,

one uses it a thousand ways;

But when the messenger of death shows up,

everything comes to an end.⁶¹

A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that put this very well:

Humans should try to accumulate good deeds,
Rather than striving to accumulate wealth.
Accumulating good makes one a better person,
Accumulating money only invites catastrophe.
Though Shih Ch'ung was wealthy in his time,
It did not save him from being put to death.
Teng T'ung died suffering from starvation,
What good did the Copper Mountains do him?⁶²
Today is not to be compared to the past,
Peoples' minds are completely befuddled.
They say that accumulating wealth is right,
And deride the idiocy of accumulating good.
How many of those who possess great wealth,
Confront death without so much as a coffin?

It so happens that when Hsi-men Ch'ing died a coffin had not yet been prepared for him. This threw Wu Yüeh-niang into such consternation that she called her brother Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth into her presence, opened a trunk from which she extracted four silver ingots weighing fifty taels apiece, and directed the two of them to see to purchasing a set of coffin boards.

She had hardly sent them on their way when Yüeh-niang was suddenly beset with a pain in her belly, staggered into her room, fell down on the bed, and lost consciousness, becoming:

Oblivious to human affairs.

Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o were all in the next room engaged, hugger-mugger, in putting a T'ang-style cap on Hsi-men Ch'ing's head, and getting him properly dressed in his burial clothes.

All of a sudden, they heard Hsiao-yü come in, and say, "Mother has fallen down onto her bed."

This threw them into such consternation that Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh went over immediately to see what was happening. They found Yüeh-niang holding her hand on the pain in her belly and realized that she was about to give birth.

Meng Yü-lou told Li Chiao-erh to tend to Yüeh-niang while she went out and dispatched a page boy to go as quickly as possible to summon Midwife Ts'ai. Li Chiao-erh also sent Yü-hsiao to the front compound to summon Ju-i. By the time Meng Yü-lou returned to Yüeh-niang's room, Li Chiao-erh had disappeared. It so happens that Li Chiao-erh, taking advantage of Yüeh-niang's unconscious state, had noticed that the trunk was open and had surreptitiously taken out five silver ingots worth fifty taels apiece and carried them off to her quarters.

Returning with a bunch of absorbent grass paper in her hand, she ran into Meng Yü-lou and said, "I didn't find any grass paper in her room, so I went to my quarters to fetch some."

Meng Yü-lou did not pay much attention to this but devoted herself to tending to Yüeh-niang, and preparing the commode for her. She saw that Yüeh-niang's pain was gradually becoming more intense. No sooner did Midwife Ts'ai arrive than Yüeh-niang gave birth to a child, while in the other room, it was only after they had finished dressing Hsi-men Ch'ing in his burial clothes that he breathed his last breath. At this, the members of the entire household, high and low, started to cry out loud in full voice.

Meanwhile Midwife Ts'ai wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes, cut the umbilical cord, decocted a "heart stabilizing potion," fed it to Yüeh-niang, and then helped her into a sitting position on the heated k'ang.



Wu Yüeh-niang Loses Her Husband but Gives Birth to a Son

Yüeh-niang gave Midwife Ts'ai three taels of silver, but she complained that it was too little, saying, "When that other boy was born I received more than this. You could, at the very least, give me the same amount as before, especially since this boy was born to you as the First Lady of the household."

"The situations are not comparable," said Yüeh-niang. "At that time, Father was still here presiding over the household, but now Father has passed away. You had better make the best of it, and take what you are offered. If you come back for the third-day lustration ceremony, I will give you another tael of silver then."

"I would rather have an outfit of clothing," said Midwife Ts'ai, before expressing her thanks and taking her leave.

When Yüeh-niang became more aware of her surroundings, she noticed that the trunk was wide open and took Yü-hsiao to task, saying, "You lousy little stinker! I may have been unconscious, but you seem to have been unconscious too. The trunk has been lying wide open with all these people about. Why didn't you remind me to lock it?"

"I thought that you had locked the trunk," said Yü-hsiao, "so I didn't bother to check it."

So saying, she got the lock and proceeded to snap it in place.

When Meng Yü-lou saw how suspicious Yüeh-niang seemed to be, she chose not to stay in the room but went outside and remarked to Chin-lien, "What a character our elder sister turns out to be. On the very day of her husband's death, she starts acting defensively toward the rest of us."

She did not realize that Li Chiao-erh had already stolen five silver ingots worth fifty taels apiece and carted them off to her quarters.

That day, Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth went to the home of Prefectural Judge Shang Liu-t'ang, from whom

they purchased a set of coffin boards, and hired carpenters to fit them together to form a coffin. The page boys carried Hsi-men Ch'ing's body out to the large reception hall and proceeded to lay him out appropriately. Yin-yang Master Hsü was also invited to come and interpret his divinatory texts.

Before long, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai also came. Wu the Second and the other managers were all in the front reception hall, where they were busy taking down the lanterns, rolling up the picture scrolls, covering the body with a paper shroud, and putting votive incense lamps, tables, and mats in place, while Lai-an was deputed to strike the chime.

After calculating the time on his fingers, Yin-yang Master Hsü said, "He expired at 8:00 in the morning, and no member of the household will be adversely affected by his baleful spirit."

He then consulted with Yüeh-niang and said, "The encoffining ceremony should take place on the third day after his death, the ground breaking for his tomb should take place on the sixteenth of the second month, and the burial ceremony on the twentieth, a day or so after the fourth weekly commemoration."

After Yin-yang Master Hsü had been entertained and seen on his way, servants were dispatched to various places to inform people of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, and to hand over his seal of office to Ho Yung-shou, while the members of the household devoted themselves to preparing mourning garments for visitors and putting up temporary structures for the funeral observances, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

On the third day, Buddhist monks were engaged to recite sutras for the salvation of the deceased and carry paper money outside to be burned, while the members of the entire household, high and low:

Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel.

Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, garbed in untrimmed sackcloth and leaning on a mourning staff, as prescribed for the son of the deceased, bowed to the guests in front of the spirit tablet. Yüeh-niang was not yet able to emerge from her lying-in room, but Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou entertained the female visitors, while P'an Chin-lien took charge of the storeroom and accepted the offertory tables that people presented. Sun Hsüeh-o superintended the servants' wives in the kitchen as they prepared tea and refreshments for the visitors; Manager Fu Ming together with Brother-in-law Wu the Second took charge of the accounts; Ts'ui Pen was placed in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear; Lai-hsing was made responsible for supplying the kitchen; and Brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Manager Kan Jun entertained the male guests.

Midwife Ts'ai came back to conduct the third-day lustration ceremony, and Yüeh-niang presented her with an outfit of silk clothing before sending her on her way. She decided to name her newborn child Hsiao-ko, or Filial Son, and, as custom demanded, sent celebratory noodles to their relatives and neighbors in honor of the occasion.

The neighbors who lived in the vicinity all remarked, "His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing's principal wife has borne him a posthumous son, and this son was delivered on the same day and at the same time that he breathed his last. Such a thing is:

Rarely to be seen in this world.⁶³

It is as weird and strange as can be."

We will say no more at this juncture about how bewildered they all were by this event.

To resume our story, when Ying Po-chüeh heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died, he came to offer his condolences and wept tears over it for some time.

The brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Wu the Second were in the summerhouse, looking on as an artist painted a portrait of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Ying Po-chüeh came in, greeted them with a bow, and said, "How regrettable! I never dreamed that Brother would pass away this way."

He then asked if Yüeh-niang could come out so that he could pay her his respects, but Wu K'ai replied, "My younger sister is unable to leave her lying-in room for the present. It so happens, thus and so, that she has given birth to a boy on the very day of her husband's death."

Ying Po-chüeh expressed astonishment, saying:

"Can such things be?

Oh well. Oh well. At least Brother will have a male heir, so there will be someone to take charge of the property."

Later on, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, attired in heavy mourning, and kowtowed to Ying Po-chüeh.

Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Son-in-law! Son-in-law! You are certainly being put to the test. Your father-in-law has died, and your mothers-in-law will be like stagnant water, without any source of livelihood. You must be careful how you deal with the affairs of the household. If problems arise, you must not act on your own, but seek the advice of the two brothers-in-law here. Though it may be impolitic for me to say so, you are still quite young, and not too experienced in handling affairs."

"Brother Ying the Second," said Wu K'ai, "you shouldn't say such things. I have public responsibilities to attend to and have little free time. After all, his mother-in-law is here."

"Brother-in-law," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "though my sister-in-law is here, how can she be expected to take care of external affairs? It would be better if you could lend him your advice. It has always been the case that:

Without distaff relatives one cannot survive;

Without distaff relatives one cannot flourish.

One's mother's brothers are not to be compared with other people. You are a mainstay of the family, venerable sir. Who is there more important than you?"

He then went on to ask, "Has a date been set for the funeral procession?"

"The ground breaking for his tomb," said Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, "will take place on the sixteenth day of the second month, and

the burial ceremony on the twentieth, shortly after the fourth weekly commemoration.”

Not long afterwards, Yin-yang Master Hsü arrived to perform the sacrificial announcements and preside over the encoffining ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing's body was then laid inside the coffin, the “longevity nails” were driven into the lid, and it was placed in position, with an inscribed funeral banner that read: Casket of Master Hsi-men, Imperially Commissioned Commandant for Military Strategy.

That day, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came to convey his condolences. After he had finished bowing before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh kept him company as he drank a serving of tea. Ho Yung-shou asked what date had been set for the funeral procession and then gave orders that the entire contingent of orderlies and attendants that had been assigned to Hsi-men Ch'ing should remain on duty there, without exception. Only after the date of the funeral procession were they to return to their service at the yamen. He even appointed two underlings to take charge of them and promised that should any instances of disobedience be reported to him, he would see that the culprits were severely punished.

He also said to Wu K'ai, “Venerable brother-in-law, if any outsiders should delay paying their debts to the Hsi-men household, simply report it to me, and your pupil will see that the sums in question are recovered.”

After paying his condolences, he went to the yamen, prepared a report on the vacancy created by Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, and submitted it to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital.

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, one day, Lai-chüeh, Ch'un-hung, and Li the Third arrived at the provincial censor's yamen in Yen-chou prefecture and delivered the letter and the accompanying gift they had been entrusted with.

When Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien read Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter and realized that he was seeking to obtain the document authorizing the procurement of antiquarian relics, he said, “If you had only come a step earlier everything would have been all right, but yesterday I sent the authorization for this procurement down to the various prefectures.”

As he thought about it, and noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had sealed up ten ounces of gold leaf in the packet, he decided that it would be a pity to refuse and arranged to put up Ch'un-hung, Lai-chüeh, and Li the Third in the yamen, while he dispatched a courier with a validating tally to make haste to Tung-p'ing prefecture and bring back the authorization. When it arrived, he sealed it inside a letter which he entrusted to Ch'un-hung, together with a tael of silver to cover their traveling expenses, and they then set out to return to Ch'ing-ho district. The round trip took them ten days.

As they made their way into the city, they overheard people talking in the street and learned that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had died, that this was the third day after his death, and that a sutra recitation and commemorative rites were being conducted in his household.

When Li the Third heard this:

A crafty scheme arose in his mind,⁶⁴

and as they walked along the street, he suggested to Lai-chüeh and Ch'un-hung, “Let's hold back this authorization, saying that Sung Ch'iao-nien refused to give it to us, and go instead to offer it to Chang the Second on Main Street. If you refuse to go along with me, I'll give you ten taels of silver apiece as long as you promise to keep quiet about it when you get home, and not reveal anything.”

Lai-chüeh was tempted by the prospect of this windfall and agreed to the proposition, but Ch'un-hung was reluctant to go along with it and gave only an ambiguous answer.

When they arrived at the gate, they saw that paper money had been brought out to be burnt, that Buddhist monks were performing a ceremony, and that the number of relatives and friends who had come to express their condolences was so great they could hardly be counted. At this prospect, Li the Third parted company with the other two and went to his own home, while Lai-chüeh and Ch'un-hung sought out Wu K'ai and Ch'en Ching-chi and kowtowed to them.

When they were asked if they had succeeded in obtaining the authorization, and why Li the Third was not with them, Lai-chüeh said nothing, but Ch'un-hung took out Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's letter and the enclosed authorization and handed them to Wu K'ai.

He then proceeded to explain how Li the Third had given each of them ten taels of silver on the road and proposed, thus and so, that they should conceal this fact, hold back the authorization, and join him in going to offer it to Chang the Second.

“How could I be so ungrateful as to:

Forget favor and break faith?”⁶⁵

exclaimed Ch'un-hung. “So I have respectfully made my way home.”

Wu K'ai went back to the rear compound and told Yüeh-niang what had happened, saying, “This youngster really possesses a sense of obligation. How could that rascal of a short-life Li the Third harbor such evil ideas immediately upon learning that my brother-in-law had died a few days ago?”

He then went on to explain the situation to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, “Li Chih and Huang the Fourth signed a loan contract with Hsi-men Ch'ing on which they are obligated to pay back 650 taels of silver in the way of principal and interest. We have been instructed by His Honor Ho Yung-shou to submit this loan contract to the yamen so he can proceed to recover the sum that is owed, and it can be used to cover my brother-in-law's funeral expenses. As a colleague of the deceased, he feels obliged to do him this favor.”

Ying Po-chüeh was thrown into consternation by this and said, “Li the Third certainly ought never to have done such a thing, but before you decide on anything, venerable brother-in-law, let me go and speak to him about it.”

Thereupon, he went straight to Li the Third's place and sent for Huang the Fourth so they could confer about it together.

“You should never have proffered silver to that page boy,” he said. “By so doing you have given him a handle to use against you.

Having failed to snare the fox,

You have only defiled yourself.

They now propose, thus and so, to submit your loan contract to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and sue you for the return of the money that you owe. As the saying goes:

Officials shield one another.⁶⁶

On top of which, as colleagues in the same office, they will have no reason not to pursue the matter. What likelihood is there that you could resist them? If you will take my advice, you should:

Thus and thus, and

So and so,

surreptitiously present twenty taels of silver to Wu K'ai. You can write it off as something you might have had to expend in Yen-chou prefecture. I have heard that their household is not interested any longer in pursuing this venture. If you can manage somehow to get them to relinquish this authorization, we can go and negotiate a deal with Chang the Second. The two of you should scrape up the sum of two hundred taels, less than that will not do, and also prepare an offertory table. On the one hand, you can present the latter as a sacrificial offering in memory of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, and on the other hand, you can offer the money to them as a partial payment of your debt, and negotiate a new contract for the remainder, allowing you to repay it in installments out of whatever profits you accrue in the future. That way you can:

Kill two birds with one stone,

and smooth things over without rupturing your relationship."

"What you say makes sense," said Huang the Fourth. "Brother Li the Third, you acted too precipitously."

Sure enough, that evening, Huang the Fourth and Ying Po-ch'ieh took twenty taels of silver and went to Wu K'ai's home, where they proceeded, thus and so, to negotiate for the authorization, saying, "Venerable brother-in-law, we rely on your support."

Wu K'ai had already heard his younger sister say that she was no longer interested in pursuing this venture. Moreover, when his black eyes caught sight of the shiny white silver, how could he bring himself to refuse? Therewith, he agreed to their proposition and accepted the silver.

The next day, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth prepared a portable table, replete with a pig's head and the three sacrificial animals, and two hundred taels of silver, and went to offer a sacrifice in Hsi-men Ch'ing's honor. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai had spoken to Yüeh-niang, who agreed to return the original loan contract and make out a new one for the sum of four hundred taels, forgiving them fifty taels of the original amount they owed, and allowing them to return the remainder in installments out of the proceeds of their business transactions. The document authorizing the local procurement of antiquarian relics for the court was also handed over to Ying Po-ch'ieh, who went with them to collaborate with Chang the Second in bidding for the contract. But no more of this. Truly:

Only when gold is subjected to smelting

is its quality assessed;

Only when humans are tempted by riches

are their hearts exposed.⁶⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The Creator does not demand too much
from human beings;
Only urging them, in all things, to
rein in their hearts.
Though you may wish to appropriate
the property of another,
There will be someone in your wake
to do the same to you.⁶⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

Chapter 80

CH'EN CHING-CHI RESORTS TO PILFERING JADE AND PURLOINING PERFUME;¹ LI CHIAO-ERH MAKES OFF WITH THE SILVER AND RETURNS TO THE BROTHEL

THERE IS A POEM that reads:

When temples collapse the resident monks are few;
When bridges fall down the crossers are not many.
When households are poor their servants are lazy;
When officials retire their inferiors scorn them.
When waters are shallow the fish will not remain;
When forests are scanty the birds will not roost.
The way of the world responds to cold and warmth;
Human prestige is thereby enhanced or diminished.²

These eight lines of verse refer to the fact that:

Warmth and coldness convey the way of the world;³

Human sentiments respond to failure and success.

This phenomenon is much to be regretted.

On the first of the seven weekly commemorations of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Required, led a contingent of sixteen monks to come and perform a "land and water" mass for the salvation of the deceased. Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor came to attend the ceremony and secured the job of presiding over the services for the second weekly commemoration. The household of Ch'iao Hung also made a sacrificial contribution for the occasion. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh got together with several friends who were present for the ceremony. The first of these was Ying Po-chüeh himself; the second was Hsieh Hsi-ta; the third was Hua Tzu-yu; the fourth was Chu Jih-nien; the fifth was Sun T'ien-hua; the sixth was Ch'ang Shih-chieh; and the seventh was Pai Lai-ch'iang.

When the seven of them had sat down together, Ying Po-chüeh addressed them, saying, "His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is dead, and the second of the seven weekly commemorations of his death is at hand. In the course of our relationship with him, we have eaten off of him, made use of him, spent money of his, borrowed things from him, and sponged off him. Now that he is dead, we can hardly pretend not to acknowledge all this, or get away with:

Scattering sand in order to blind the eyes
of those behind us.

When he comes before King Yama in the fifth court of the underworld he is unlikely to exonerate us. The best thing to do is for each of us to come up with one mace of silver, making seven mace in all. We can spend one mace and six candareens to purchase a portable table replete with flowers, five bowls of viands, and five saucers of fruits; one mace to purchase a portion of the three sacrificial animals; one mace and five candareens to purchase a flagon of wine; five candareens to purchase paper money for the use of the dead, incense, and candles; two mace to purchase a commemorative scroll and engage Licentiate Shui to compose a funeral eulogy; and one mace and two candareens to hire bearers to convey these purchases before His Honor's spirit tablet where we can present them as a sacrificial offering. We will actually come out ahead, since they will provide each of us with a length of mourning damask worth seven candareens, which we can take home and use to make skirt waists out of. Moreover, they are hardly likely to let us go home without feeding us a meal, and on the day of the burial ceremony we can not only eat our fill at the graveyard but also take home half a table's worth of food from the graveside tables to feed to our wives and children, thus saving them two or three day's worth of money for snacks. What do you think of this proposal?"

They responded with one voice, saying, "Brother, what you say makes sense."

Thereupon, they each contributed the proposed amount of silver and turned it over to Ying Po-chüeh to take care of procuring the sacrificial offerings, purchasing the commemorative scroll, and engaging Licentiate Shui, who resided outside the city wall, to compose a funeral eulogy for the occasion.

Licentiate Shui was well aware that Ying Po-chüeh and his cronies had chosen to ingratiate themselves with Hsi-men Ch'ing, with whom they had formed:

A cabal of petty men.⁴

He therefore chose to refer suggestively to this fact in the eulogy that he composed. This was duly inscribed on the commemorative scroll, which was taken by the seven of them, together with their sacrificial offerings, and displayed before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit

tablet. Ch'en Ching-chi, clad in his mourning garments, returned their salutations. With Ying Po-chüeh taking the lead, each of them proceeded to show their respects with an offering of incense. They were all too unsophisticated to grasp the hidden significance of the eulogy. After a libation of wine had been poured, the text of the eulogy was intoned out loud, and read as follows:

On this, the third day *keng-yin*, of the second month, the first day of which was *wu-tzu*, in the year *wu-hsi*, the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period, his devoted servants Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Hua Tzu-yu, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T'ien-hua, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, and Pai Lai-ch'iang respectfully offer a pure libation along with other offertory foods in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of His Honor the late officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hsi-men Ch'ing. During his life, the deceased was upright and unbending, possessed of a rigid and ramrodlike nature. He neither feared the weak nor succumbed to the hard. He was ever ready to share his water with those in need, or moisten them with his dew. In succoring those who were stripped bare, his purse was plentifully supplied. His bearing was manly, ever prepared to respond to stimulation, or succumb to temptation. He lived in the company of brocade trousers, and hid himself amid encircling waistbands. Though his body had eight bulges, he did not bother to scratch them; but when assailed by lice, it itched unbearably. We recipients of his largess have been content to hang around between his legs, joining him to sleep amid the "willows" in the quarter,⁵ and keeping him company during sprees in the bordellos. Ever engaged in sticking his neck out and horning in, he took pride in his ability to maintain even a prolonged conflict. Who could have foreseen that he would come down with an ailment from which he would never rise again?⁶ Now he has died with his legs stretched out straight, leaving behind a son like a turtledove dropping its egg. On whom are we to rely? We can no longer visit the camps of mist and flowers, or sponge off the bordellos with their peaked red walls.⁷ We can no longer feast with him while embracing soft jade, or ride with him to enjoy warm fragrance. We are left with nothing to do but hang our heads and stamp our feet, abandoned to dangle around lackadaisically. Now we present an oblation of milky muck, followed by a meager libation. Should the spirit of the deceased not be incognizant of our actions,⁸ may it deign to come and enjoy our offering. Pray come and partake thereof.⁹

When they had finished offering their sacrifice, Ch'en Ching-chi expressed his gratitude with an obeisance and invited them into the summerhouse for an ample repast, complete with the usual:

Three soups and five courses,
after which, he saw them to the door.

That day, Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the Verdant Spring Bordello, upon hearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died:

Laid plans and hatched a scheme,
according to which she prepared an offertory table and dispatched Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh in their sedan chairs to offer paper money and express their condolences. Yüeh-niang did not come out to welcome them, but Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou entertained them in the master suite.

Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh took the opportunity to speak to Li Chiao-erh surreptitiously, saying, "Our mother says that the man is dead, and we denizens of the licensed quarter are not able to maintain our chastity. It has always been the case that:

Though you erect a thousand li marquee,

There is no party that does not come to an end.¹⁰

If you have any valuables in your hands, you should let Li Ming surreptitiously smuggle them back home for your future use. You mustn't be foolish. As the saying goes:

Though Yang-chou may be wonderful,

It's not a place you would choose to make your home.¹¹

No matter how long it may be, sooner or later you will have to leave this place."

Li Chiao-erh made a mental note of everything they said.

Who could have anticipated that on that day Han Tao-kuo's wife, Wang Liu-erh, also prepared an offertory table, dressed up in attractive mourning garments, took a sedan chair, and came to burn paper money to Hsi-men Ch'ing. After presenting her offerings before his spirit tablet, she stood there for what seemed like half a day, but nobody came out to welcome her. It so happens that during the first week after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Wang Ching had been dismissed and sent back home. When the page boys saw that Wang Liu-erh had arrived, none of them dared to go inside and report it.

Lai-an, however:

Not understanding the true state of affairs,
went back to Yüeh-niang's room and said to her, "Han Tao-kuo's wife Auntie Han has come to offer paper money in Father's honor, and she has been left standing there in the front compound for a long time. Your elder brother Wu K'ai sent me to tell you about it."

Wu Yüeh-niang, who still couldn't get over her resentment at what had happened, railed at him, saying, "You crazy louse of a slave! Get out of here. So that Auntie Han, or Auntie Cunt, has shown up, has she? That lousy dog-fucked man-baiting whore! Her shenanigans end up:

Destroying families and killing people;¹²

Impelling fathers south and sons north;¹³

Making husbands abscond and wives flee.¹⁴

How can she have the nerve to come offer her cunt's-worth of paper money?"

This tirade left Lai-an feeling that:

He hardly knew what to do.¹⁵

When he went back before the spirit tablet, and Brother-in-law Wu asked him if he had reported the situation in the rear compound or not, Lai-an merely pouted, without saying anything.

Only after being interrogated for what seemed like half a day did he respond, "Mother really cursed me out."¹⁶

Brother-in-law Wu promptly went back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "Sister, how can you act that way? You should stop bandying words that way immediately. It has always been the case that:

People may be bad but civility is not bad.¹⁷

Her husband has a considerable amount of our capital in hand. How can you treat her that way?

A good reputation is not easily obtained.

You must stop carrying on this way. Even if you choose not to go out yourself, you could send the Second Lady or the Third Lady out to greet her, and see her off. That would do just as well. Why should you open yourself to criticism by acting this way?"

It was only when Yüeh-niang realized how censorious her brother was that she had nothing further to say on the subject.

Shortly thereafter, Meng Yü-lou went to welcome Wang Liu-erh with a bow and sat down with her in front of the spirit tablet. After drinking only one cup of tea, the woman felt uncomfortable about remaining any longer, said goodbye, got up, and departed. Truly:

Even if one could draw off all the water
of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away
this day's shame.

Li Kuei-ch'ing, Li Kuei-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh were all sitting in the master suite at the time. Upon hearing Yüeh-niang abuse Han Tao-kuo's wife as every kind of whore, they couldn't help feeling implicated, since:

For every branch you chop down,
A hundred trees are threatened.

The two sisters did not feel comfortable remaining any longer and expressed a wish to go home before the sun set.

Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged the two of them to stay, saying, "This evening, our managers can keep you company while watching the puppet show. You can go home tomorrow."

She continued to urge them to stay for what seemed like half a day, but only Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh agreed to remain after seeing off Li Kuei-ch'ing on her way home.

That evening, after the monks had left, sure enough, a good many neighbors, servants, and managers, including Ch'iao Hung, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Brother-in-law Shen, Hua Tzu-yu, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, some twenty people or more, were assembled. A troupe of puppeteers had been hired for the occasion, and they put on their performance in the large temporary structure, where a feast had been prepared for the overnight wake. The piece they performed was the hsi-wen drama about the brothers Sun Jung and Sun Hua, entitled *Sha-kou ch'üan-fu* (The stratagem of killing a dog to admonish a husband).¹⁸

The female guests were gathered behind standing screens in the reception hall where Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet was located, in front of which a see-through blind had been suspended, and tables had been set up so they could enjoy the show. Li Ming and Wu Hui were engaged to wait upon them and stayed overnight in order to do so. Before long, after everybody had arrived, and the sacrifices had been completed, the candles in the temporary structure were lit, the guests took their seats, the overture of drum music began, and the performance of the hsi-wen drama commenced. It was the third watch before the performance was finished.

It so happens that since the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing not a day passed during which Ch'en Ching-chi failed to flirt with P'an Chin-lien. They either made eyes at each other in front of his spirit tablet, or joked with each other behind the screens.

At this point, taking advantage of the disorder as the guests were leaving, the women were returning to the rear compound, and the servants were clearing away the utensils, Chin-lien gave Ch'en Ching-chi's hand a squeeze while nobody was looking and said, "My son, today your mother will give you what you want. While Hsi-men Ta-chieh is in the rear compound, we can make use of your quarters for the purpose."

This was just what Ch'en Ching-chi had been waiting for, and he promptly went ahead of her to open the door to his quarters. The woman, concealing herself in the shadows, slipped inside behind him, and:

Without saying another word,¹⁹
unfastened her skirt, reclined face up on the k'ang, let:

Her pair of wild ducks fly to his shoulders,
and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to commit adultery with her. Truly:

With lustful daring as big as the sky,
what is there to fear?
Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:
a lifetime of passion.
Having been acquainted for two years,
They have succeeded in becoming mates.
After having been infatuated so long,
This fine day they have come together.
One of them gently wriggles her willowy waist;
The other makes haste to extend his jade stalk.
Into each other's ears they pour the passions
evoked by clouds and rain;
On their pillows they swear to be as faithful
as the hills and seas.
What with the oriole's abandon and the
butterfly's pursuit,

Their turbulent love-making takes a myriad forms;



P'an Chin-lien Peddles Her Charms in Her Son-in-law's Bed

What with the tempestuous rainfall and
the skittish clouds,
Her captivating maneuvers are infinite in number.
One of them, in a lowered voice,
Calls out "darling" incessantly;
The other, locked in an embrace,
Cannot help calling out "daddy."

Truly, it is the case that:

The hue of the willow has abruptly turned
a bright new green;
The complexion of the blossom has not lost
its previous red.²⁰

Before long, as soon as their bout of clouds and rain was over, the woman, fearing that someone might come in, hastily left the room

and went back to the rear compound.

The next day, the young scamp, still savoring the sweet taste of his conquest, went to Chin-lien's quarters early in the morning and found that she was still in bed, not having gotten up yet.

Peeking through the latticework he saw the woman lying there with:

Her rosy countenance wrapped in the quilt;

Her powdered cheeks like fluted jadestone;

and said to her, "What a fine keeper of the storeroom you are, not to be up yet at this hour. Today, Kinsman Ch'iao Hung has come to make a sacrificial offering, and the First Lady has directed that the offertory tables presented yesterday by Li the Third and Huang the Fourth should be taken inside. You should get up immediately, and get the key for me."

The woman promptly told Ch'un-mei to fetch the key for him, and Ch'en Ching-chi sent Ch'un-mei to precede him upstairs and open the door. Meanwhile, the woman stuck her tongue out through the latticework, and the two of them sucked away at each other for a while. Truly, it is the case that:

The aroma of rouge pervades his mouth,

as he swallows her saliva;

Her sweet spittle transfuses his heart,

drenching lungs and liver.

There is a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" that testifies to this:

It was annoying that the cries of the cuckoo
penetrated the beaded blind.
Our hearts seemed stitched together;
Our mutual feelings were like glue.
But all I saw was her smiling face on which,
The hollow cheeks were sad,
The powdered eyebrows thin.
Her fingers were emaciated.
Her chignon was disheveled, hanging loose
from its turquoise pins;
Her sleepy face was flushed, its jadelike
pallor daubed with red.
Having tasted her sandalwood mouth,
The aroma still lingers on my lips.
I cannot help recalling the sweet taste.²¹

In a little while, after Ch'un-mei had opened the door to the storeroom on the second floor, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to the front compound to take care of moving the offertory tables.

Before long, the sacrificial offering presented by the Ch'iao Hung household was duly put in place. After Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Ch'iao Hung himself, along with a number of their relations, had finished presenting their sacrificial offering in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, and Manager Kan Jun invited them into the temporary structure, where Li Ming and Wu Hui stood ready to play and sing for their entertainment.

That day, Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter also came to offer paper money and express her condolences, and Yüeh-niang told Meng Yü-lou to provide her with a mourning skirt and girdle, and invite her to join the other female guests who were gathered in the rear compound.

When Cheng Ai-yüeh saw that Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh were already there, she was annoyed at the two of them for not keeping her informed and said, "If I had known about Father's death, I would hardly have failed to come before this. A fine pair you are, not to have gotten together with me about it."

When she found that Yüeh-niang had given birth to a son, she said, "Mother, you have:

One cause for joy and one cause for sorrow.²²

It is too bad that Father passed away before his time, but now that you have an heir, you need not worry about the future."

Yüeh-niang saw that everyone was provided with mourning garb and kept them there until the evening, when the party broke up.

The third day of the second month was the time for Hsi-men Ch'ing's second weekly commemoration, and on that occasion Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor led a contingent of sixteen Taoist priests to recite scriptures and perform rites at his residence. On that day, Ho Yung-shou took the initiative in inviting Eunuch Director Liu, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Commander-General Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and Commander Yün Li-shou, his fellow military officers, to join with him in offering a sacrifice in Hsi-men Ch'ing's honor. Yüeh-niang invited Ch'iao Hung, her elder brother Wu K'ai, and Ying Po-chüeh to keep them company and arranged for Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy musicians, to play and sing for them in the temporary structure, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

That evening, after the scripture recitations were concluded, and the spirit of the deceased had been bidden farewell, Yüeh-niang gave orders that Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and portrait should be taken outside and burned, and that her trunks of possessions should be carried into the master suite and stored there. She also decided that the wet nurse Ju-i and Ying-ch'un should be kept in the rear compound to work there, gave Hsiu-ch'un to Li Chiao-erh to serve in her quarters, and locked the door of Li P'ing-erh's former quarters. Alas! Truly:

The painted beams and carved rafters

are not yet dry;

But the doting occupant is no longer
to be seen inside.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Beneath the terrace of King Hsiang of Ch'u
the water flows on unhurried;
A single case of heartsickness is able to
produce sorrow in two places.
The moon itself is completely oblivious of
the changes in human affairs;
As, late at night, it continues to shine on
the crest of the plastered wall.²³

At this time, every day, Li Ming, on the pretext of helping out in the coffin chamber, surreptitiously urged Li Chiao-erh to secretly hand over her valuables to him so he could smuggle them out and take them back to the brothel. After each trip, he would return in order to continue helping out, staying away from home for two or three nights. He succeeded thereby in pulling the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes, and no one dared to put a stop to it because her brother, Wu the Second, had been engaging in hanky-panky with Li Chiao-erh.

On the ninth day of the second month, the scripture recitation for the third weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death was performed, and Yüeh-niang emerged from her lying-in room. No monks came to recite scriptures for the fourth weekly commemoration, and on the twenty-sixth day of the month, Ch'en Ching-chi went to take care of the ground breaking for the tomb and then returned home. The funeral procession took place on the twentieth day of the month and involved a considerable number of burial objects and papier-mâché funerary fabrications, as well as people who came to escort the casket, but the crowd was not nearly as large as it had been for Li P'ing-erh's funeral procession.

When the coffin was ready to be carried outside, Ch'en Ching-chi prepared to perform the role of filial son by smashing an earthenware crock to signal that the procession was about to begin, and accompanying the casket on foot, keeping one hand upon it. Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, was invited to preside over the ceremony of raising the coffin. Sitting in his sedan chair, in an elevated position, he recited a few lines of eulogy about Hsi-men Ch'ing's life that put it very well.

In solemn commemoration of the spirit of the late Commandant for Military Strategy in the Embroidered Uniform Guard, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing. For humans living in this world,

The flash of lightning is quickly extinguished;
The spark from a flint is difficult to sustain.
Fallen blossoms are not fated to
return to the tree;
Flowing water is not destined to
return to its source.
Though living in painted hall and brocade room,
When your life is over, it is like
a windblown lamp;
Though you enjoy supreme rank and lofty office,
When your time is up, they resemble
nothing but dreams.
Yellow gold and white jade,
Are merely prerequisites for disaster;
Red powder and light furs,
Are but the expenses of mundane labor.
Wives and children cannot ensure
a lifetime of happiness;
The darkness of the grave entails
a myriad forms of grief.
One fine day, while sleeping on your pillow,
You'll end up underneath the Yellow Springs.
An empty epitaph will proclaim
your specious fame;
The yellow earth will entomb
your fragile bones.
Your hundred acres of fields and gardens,
Will only create dissension among your
sons and daughters;
Your thousand trunks of satin and brocade,
Will not furnish you an inch of thread

after your death.²⁴
When we expire like wind or fire, neither
the old nor the young are spared;
When the hills and streams are eroded away,
what heroes will there be?²⁵
It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
The breath is transformed into a clear breeze,
the dust returns to earth;
Once your three inches of breath are finished,²⁶
they will go and not return;
The head is altered and the face replaced
an infinite number of times.

As the poem says:

In this life the hardest thing to bear
is the coming of death;
Every one of us, on approaching the end,
is frantically disturbed.
The elements earth, water, fire, and wind²⁷
mutually assail us;
Our spirits and our ethereal and material
souls all fly away.
While still alive, we do not know how to
seek the road to life;
After our death, who knows what will be
our final destination?
Every last thing that we possess, we are
unable to take with us;
Without so much as a stitch of clothing²⁸
we must face King Yama.

When Buddhist Superior Lang had finished reciting the eulogy, Ch'en Ching-chi smashed the earthenware crock in which the paper money had been burned, and the casket was raised and carried on its way. The members of the household, both high and low, as well as the relatives, dressed in mourning garb, all wept until:

Their cries shook the heavens.

Wu Yüeh-niang sat in the sedan chair designated for the conveyance of the soul of the departed right behind the casket, while the female guests followed in the wake of the procession as it made its way to the family graveyard five li outside the South Gate for the interment. Ch'en Ching-chi had prepared a gift of a bolt of silk for Commander Yün Li-shou and asked him to perform the ceremony of dotting the spirit tablet. Yin-yang Master Hsü presided over the interment, and the relatives in their mourning garb participated by each throwing a spadeful of earth into the tomb. Unfortunately, the offertory tables produced at the graveside were not many in number, consisting only of those presented by Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, Ho Yung-shou, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han, and the five or six managers of Hsi-men Ch'ing's business enterprises. Abbot Wu Tsung-che also left twelve Taoist acolytes behind to preside over the return of the spirit tablet, which was placed in a position of honor in the parlor of the master suite. After the tablet had been set in place, and Yin-yang Master Hsü had performed a ritual purification, the crowd of relatives departed, and Wu Yüeh-niang and her fellow wives kept vigil beside his spirit tablet as an expression of their filiality.

A day or so later, after they had returned from the ceremony of revisiting the grave, Wu Yüeh-niang sent all the orderlies and adjutants who had been assigned to serve Hsi-men Ch'ing back to the yamen.

On the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Yüeh-niang invited Nun Hsüeh, Nun Wang, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, along with twelve nuns, to recite sutras, and perform a litany of repentance, in order to release Hsi-men Ch'ing's soul from purgatory and allow it to be reborn in Heaven. Sister-in-law Wu and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third sister Cheng, both came to keep her company.

It so happens that on the day of the burial ceremony, Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, while at the graveside, had secretively spoken to Li Chiao-erh, thus and so, saying, "Mother says that you ought to consider the fact that since you no longer have anything of value in your hands, there is no reason for you to remain any longer in his household. You have no sons or daughters, so what is there to keep you there? She suggests that you initiate a quarrel that will give you an excuse for breaking clear of the place. The other day, Brother Ying the Second came and reported that His Honor Chang the Second who lives on Main Street is willing to spend five hundred taels of silver to acquire you as his Second Lady and let you take charge of his household. If you go there, you can get a new start in life, whereas if you remain faithful to his memory until you grow old and die, what will you gain by that? After all, as denizens

of the licensed quarter we are accustomed to:

Abandoning the old to welcome the new,
and seeking advantage by:

Playing up to the rich and successful.²⁹

We can hardly afford to waste our time."

Li Chiao-erh made a mental note of everything they said and resolved that after the fifth weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, she would:

Let the wind fan the flames,

And take the easiest course.³⁰

Who could have anticipated that P'an Chin-lien would tell Sun Hsüeh-o, "On the day of the burial ceremony, while we were at the graveside, I saw Li Chiao-erh engaged in private conversation with Brother-in-law Wu the Second in one of the small chambers in the garden. And Ch'un-mei, with her own eyes, also saw Li Chiao-erh, behind the screen in the coffin chamber, hand over a package of goods to Li Ming, who stuffed it into his waist and took it home with him."

When Yüeh-niang got word of this, she called her brother, Wu the Second, onto the carpet and told him off, sending him back to the shop to take care of the business, and refusing him permission to enter the rear compound in the future. She also ordered P'ing-an, who was in charge of the gate, not to let Li Ming in anymore. At this, the former prostitute, Li Chiao-erh:

Her discomfiture turning into anger,

felt that she had found just the pretext she was looking for. One day, because Yüeh-niang was drinking tea with Sister-in-law Wu in the master suite and had invited Meng Yü-lou but not invited her, she got into:

A vituperative altercation,

with Yüeh-niang, pounding on the base of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, weeping and wailing, and yelling and screaming. While in her quarters, at the third watch in the middle of the night, she threatened to hang herself, and when her maidservant reported this to Yüeh-niang, she panicked. After consulting with Sister-in-law Wu, Yüeh-niang summoned Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the Li Family Establishment, to negotiate about sending her back to the bordello.

Auntie Li the Third, who was apprehensive that she might be forced to leave all her clothes and jewelry behind, interjected a few words, saying, "This kinswoman of mine, while here, has been forced to:

Humble herself and experience humiliation,³¹

Taking the blame for the faults of others.

If you insist on severing the relationship, hard as it may be for her, you ought to offer her the sum of several tens of taels of silver to compensate her for her embarrassment."

Wu K'ai, as the occupant of an official post, was reluctant to express an opinion on the matter, one way or the other, but after negotiating for what seemed like half a day, he suggested that Yüeh-niang should let her keep all the clothing, jewelry, luggage, bedding, and other accessories from her quarters, and send her on her way, but not permit her to take the maidservants Yüan-hsiao and Hsiu-ch'un with her.

Li Chiao-erh really wanted to retain the two maidservants, but Yüeh-niang adamantly refused to allow this, saying, "You must only want to procure them in order to make prostitutes out of them."

This accusation threw the procuress into such consternation that she did not dare utter another word on the subject, but put on an ingratiating smile and said farewell to Yüeh-niang, while Li Chiao-erh got into a sedan chair and was borne off to the bordello.

Gentle reader take note: The singing girls in the licensed quarter make their living by flaunting their beauty, and depend for their livelihood on rouge and powder. In the morning, they take on Dashing Chang, and in the evening they engage Wastrel Li. They let fathers in the front door, while opening the rear door for their sons.



Li Chiao-erh Steals the Silver and Returns to the Brothel

Abandoning the old to welcome the new,
 Their eyes open at the sight of money.³²
 This is a self-evident principle.

Before they are taken into your home, they pester you incessantly, allowing you to burn incense upon them and cutting off locks of hair, threatening to commit suicide and pleading for wedlock. But once they are taken into your home and allowed to marry out of their profession, no matter what efforts you may make to:

Play up to them a thousand ways, or
 Ensnare them with a myriad wiles,
 You cannot control the monkeys of their minds
 or the horses of their wills.

If they do not choose to fatten themselves at your expense while you are still alive, they will find a pretext for deserting your household once you are dead. Sooner or later, they will revert to:

Eating congee out of their old pot.³³

Truly:

If a serpent is confined in a tube,

its sinuosity will remain;³⁴
If a bird is released from its cage,
it will resume its flight.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

It is regrettable that the "misty willows"
are so very inconstant;
In their nuptial chambers they entertain
new grooms every night.
Their jadelike wrists pillow the heads
of thousands of patrons;
Their single daubs of ruby lips are tasted
by a myriad customers.
Though they are given to assuming a host of
voluptuous attitudes;
Their congenial hearts and feelings are
utterly untrustworthy.
No matter how adept you may think yourself
to be at controlling them;
There is no way of guaranteeing they won't
long for their former ways.³⁵

After sending Li Chiao-erh on her way, Yüeh-niang couldn't help weeping, and the others present did their best to comfort her. "Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "forget it. Don't let it disturb you so. As the saying goes:

When a man marries a whore it is like
keeping a sea eagle:
Without access to the water, it longs
for the Eastern Sea.

She is merely returning to her former profession. There is no reason for you to be so disturbed by it today."

Just as the household was in a state of perturbation, P'ing-an suddenly came in and announced, "His Honor the salt-control censor Ts'ai Yün is here, sitting in the reception hall. I told him that Father had died, and he asked how long ago it happened. I told him that he had died of an illness on the twenty-first day of the first month, and that the seventh weekly commemoration of his death had already taken place. He asked whether there was a spirit tablet, or not, and I told him there was one, and that it was set up in the rear compound. He asked if he could pay his respects to it, and I have come to tell you about it."

"Get our son-in-law to go out and welcome him," directed Yüeh-niang.

Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in his mourning clothes, went out to welcome Censor Ts'ai Yün, and sometime later, after the appropriate preparations had been made, invited him back to the rear compound where he paid his respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet.

Yüeh-niang, attired in heavy mourning, came out to bow to him in return, but without exchanging so much as a word with her, he merely said, "Lady, pray return to your chamber."

He then went on to say to Ch'en Ching-chi, "In the past I have often put your household to the trouble of entertaining me, and now that my tour of duty has expired and I am about to return to the capital, I have come to express my gratitude to him. Who could have anticipated that he would already have passed away?"

He then went on to ask, "What illness did he die of?"

"It was an ailment produced by phlegm-fire," replied Ch'en Ching-chi.

"How regrettable! How regrettable!" said Censor Ts'ai Yün.

He then summoned his attendants to bring out two bolts of Hang-chou silk, a pair of velvet socks, four preserved whitefish, and four jars of candied sweetmeats, saying, "May these paltry gifts serve, for lack of anything better, as sacrificial offerings for the dead."

He also brought out a packet containing fifty taels of silver, saying, "This is a sum that His Honor was generous enough to lend me in the past. Now that I have been able to draw upon my official salary, I am returning it as a mark of our abiding friendship. Tell your servant to take it inside."

"Your Honor is being overly conscientious," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, and Yüeh-niang said, "Will Your Honor please take a seat in the front reception hall?"

"There is no need for me to stay any longer," replied Censor Ts'ai Yün. "But if you will offer me some tea, I will drink a cup, that's all."

The attendants promptly brought in a serving of tea, and after drinking it, Censor Ts'ai Yün nonchalantly stood up, got into his sedan chair, and went his way.

Upon receiving these fifty taels of silver, Yüeh-niang felt happy at heart on the one hand, but somewhat stricken on the other. She remembered how, on former occasions, when high officials of this kind visited they would never have been allowed to leave after such scanty entertainment but would have been invited to stay and drink for who knows how long. But now that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died:

With his legs stretched out straight,
though she still possessed his property, it was obvious that there was no one left to properly entertain visitors. Truly:

When men form friendships, it is like enjoying
the breeze and the moonlight;

When Heaven unfurls a landscape,³⁶ it exposes one
to its rivers and mountains.³⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Behind gently closed double doors, the
spring days seem long;
For whom does she toss and turn as she
resents time's passing?
How winsome are her incomparable glances
like autumn ripples;
As she yearns in silence for her lover,
shedding lines of tears.³⁸

The story goes that as soon as Ying Po-chüeh learned that Li Chiao-erh had returned to the bordello, he reported the fact to Chang the Second, who went and spent five taels of silver to spend the night with her. It so happens that Chang the Second was one year younger than Hsi-men Ch'ing, was born in the year of the hare, and was thirty-one years old. Li Chiao-erh was thirty-three years old, but Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the bordello, reduced her age by six years, claiming that she was only twenty-seven, and induced Ying Po-chüeh to conceal the truth about it. Chang the Second consequently paid three hundred taels of silver to acquire her and took her home to be his Second Lady. Meanwhile, Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun continued, as before, to inveigle Wang the Third into patronizing the Li Family Establishment and carrying on with Li Kuei-chieh. But no more of this.

Ying Po-chüeh, along with Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, borrowed five thousand taels of silver from Eunuch Director Hsü, while Chang the Second put up another five thousand taels, which enabled them to secure the contract from Tung-p'ing prefecture for the procurement of antiquarian relics. Every day, on their:

Large horses with jeweled saddles,

they paraded through the licensed quarter. Upon the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, Chang the Second spent another thousand taels of silver to bribe the imperial relative, Military Affairs Commissioner Cheng Chü-chung, in the Eastern Capital to intervene with Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and have him appointed to the position of judicial commissioner left vacant by the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing. He also improved his property by purchasing a garden and putting up some new structures. Ying Po-chüeh did not let a day go by without frequenting his place and toadying up to him, and told him every last thing he knew about the affairs of the Hsi-men household, both great and small.

He said to him, "In his household there is the Fifth Lady, P'an Chin-lien, the sixth child in her generation, who is extremely attractive and as pretty as a picture. When it comes to poetry, lyrics, songs or rhapsodies; the works of the hundred schools; the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts; or backgammon and elephant chess; there is little she has not mastered. Moreover, she knows how to read, writes a good hand, and is adept at playing the balloon guitar. This year she is not more than twenty-nine years old and is cleverer than any singing girl."

His speech had the effect of lighting a fire in Chang the Second's heart, and he could hardly wait to get his hands on her.

"Was she not the wife of that Wu the Elder who made his living peddling steamed wheat cakes?" he asked.

"That's the one," replied Ying Po-chüeh. "It has been five or six years by now since Hsi-men Ch'ing took her into his household, but I don't know whether she is thinking of remarrying, or not."

"Could I trouble you to inquire on my behalf?" said Chang the Second. "If she is willing to remarry, come tell me about it, and I will arrange to marry her."

"There is someone beholden to me who is working as a servant in that household," said Ying Po-chüeh. "His name is Lai-chüeh, and I will speak to him about it. If there is any indication that she is thinking of remarrying, I will let you know. If you are lucky enough to succeed in marrying her and taking her into your household, she would be superior to any singing girl. Originally, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive, he went to great lengths in order to acquire her. As a general rule:

Everything has its rightful owner,³⁹

so there is no telling how it will turn out, but it would be a most propitious union. Now that you are possessed of such influence and prestige, if you should fail to obtain this beautiful mate, to:

Share in your glory and luxury,⁴⁰

all your wealth and distinction would be in vain. I will get Lai-chüeh to surreptitiously inquire on your behalf. If there should be the slightest indication of her willingness to remarry, I will employ my:

Honeyed words and plausible speeches,

To awaken her libidinal propensities.

If you are willing to spend several hundred taels of silver, you can bring her into your household and enjoy her to your heart's content."

Gentle reader take note: Such profligate hangers-on are nothing but:

Petty people seeking personal advantage.⁴¹

On seeing other persons to be influential and wealthy, in order to secure food and clothing for themselves they will do everything in their power to play up to them, praising their merit and eulogizing their virtue. If they should be spendthrifts, they will extol them for being:

Open-handed with their wealth and chivalrous by nature,⁴²

Heroic exemplars of magnanimity.⁴³

Shrugging their shoulders and smiling ingratiatingly,⁴⁴

Offering their children and surrendering their wives,⁴⁵

There is no length to which they will not go.

But, no sooner do they see that:

Their forecourts have become deserted,⁴⁶

than they start to:

Belittle them both openly and covertly,

Accusing them of dealing irresponsibly;

saying that they are unwilling to:

Found families and establish livelihoods;⁴⁷

That their ancestors must have been evil,

To have produced such unworthy offspring.

Despite the profound kindness they have received in the past, they treat them as though they were strangers on the road. Originally, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been so close to Ying Po-chüeh that they were:

Like glue and like lacquer,

more intimate with each other than brothers. Hardly a day passed during which he failed to sponge off him, wear something of his, or benefit from his largess; but soon after his death, while his body was still warm, he committed a series of unrightful acts. Truly:

In painting a tiger, you can paint the skin,

but you can't paint the bones;

In knowing people, you can know their faces,

but you can't know their hearts.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In former years their friendship for each other

was like gold or orchids;

He did everything he could to toady up to him,

leaving no stone unturned.

But today, no sooner is Hsi-men Ch'ing's body

safely buried in the grave,

Than he does his best to induce his concubines

to sleep with someone else.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

HAN TAO-KUO TAKES ADVANTAGE OF A CHANCE TO APPROPRIATE THE GOODS; T'ANG LAI-PAO DEFRAUDS HIS MASTER AND DISREGARDS HIS BENEVOLENCE

All things are determined by Heaven,¹ there is no
point in seeking to alter them;²
The Lord of Heaven's control of just retribution
is both clear and inescapable.
Those who give rein to their lascivious thoughts
and defile the wives of others;
Will suffer the ingratitude of subordinates who
betray them and steal their goods.
Not to mention the fact that after one is dead
others will be up to their tricks;
It has ever been true that when one loses power
one's servants will be ungrateful.
It is deplorable that Hsi-men Ch'ing should have
accumulated such unfavorable karma;
That he enabled unscrupulous scoundrels to enjoy
his wealth for half their lifetimes.

THE STORY GOES that after Hsi-men Ch'ing had entrusted Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao with four thousand taels of silver and sent them to the Chiang-nan region to purchase goods, they proceeded along the way:

Imbibing the wind and resting by water.³

Stopping by night and traveling by day,

until they arrived in Yang-chou, where they sought out the home of Miao Ch'ing in order to secure accommodations. When Miao Ch'ing read Hsi-men Ch'ing's handwritten note and remembered how he had done him:

The favor of saving his life,

he did everything in his power to entertain the two of them, enabling them to spend their days:

Scanning the flowers and inspecting the willows,

Drinking wine and seeking to gratify themselves.⁴

One day, early in the winter:

The frigid clouds were austere,

The crying geese were desolate,

The trees were shedding leaves,⁵

The landscape had turned bleak,

Homesickness was insurmountable.⁶

Thereupon, the two of them exerted themselves to visit one place after another, spending their remaining resources to purchase piece goods, and storing them in Miao Ch'ing's home preparatory to their departure.

Prior to this, Han Tao-kuo engaged the services of a singing girl named Wang Yü-chih from the Old Quarter in Yang-chou, whom he had patronized in the past, and Lai-pao engaged the services of the younger sister of Lin Ts'ai-hung, named Lin Hsiao-hung, to help them entertain the Yang-chou salt merchant Wang Ssu-feng and Miao Ch'ing on a daylong excursion to Pao-ying Lake, which was some distance from Yang-chou.

When they arrived back in the licensed quarter, it turned out to be the birthday of the madam of Wang Yü-chih's establishment, and Han Tao-kuo invited them all to a party to celebrate Auntie Wang the First's birthday. For this purpose, he sent his young employee Hu Hsiu to purchase wine and comestibles for the occasion, and also to invite the traveling merchants Wang Tung-ch'iao and Ch'ien Ch'ing-ch'uan to join them. Who could have anticipated that the two of them, along with Wang Ssu-feng, duly showed up, but Hu Hsiu did not return until sunset.

Han Tao-kuo, who was already somewhat inebriated, took him to task, saying, "Who knows where this rascal has been guzzling wine, only to show up now? He is reeking with alcohol, and our guests have already been here for what seems like half a day. Who knows where you have come from, but you can be sure I'll reckon with you tomorrow."

Hu Hsiu looked askance at him and left the room, muttering as he went, "You have some nerve to take me to task when at home your wife is:

Lying down with spread legs to solicit trade,
and you are here:

Clambering on top in order to drop your load.

Your master back at home is patronizing your wife and fucking the life out of her, which is the only reason he has entrusted capital to you to do business out of town. Meanwhile, you are enjoying yourself here while your wife is suffering who knows what at home. It's only because no one has exposed your true state of affairs that you are still able to play the role of a decent human being."

He said all this in the presence of Wang Yü-chih's madam, who took him outside and admonished him, saying, "Master Hu, you are drunk. You'd better go into your room and sleep it off."

Hu Hsiu, however:

Making all kinds of threatening noises,
refused to go into his room.

Who could have anticipated that Han Tao-kuo, who was engaged in entertaining his guests, formally garbed in a white satin robe cut like that of a Taoist priest, over an undergown of green wool, felt shoes, and woolen socks, should have overheard the way in which Hu Hsiu was:

Letting off his hot stinking farts of protest,⁷
and become enraged.

Striding outside, he gave him two swift kicks and cursed him, saying, "You lousy uncouth slave! As long as I can afford to pay you five cash a day, I will have no trouble finding a replacement. You can get out of here immediately."

But Hu Hsiu refused to leave; standing in the courtyard and raising his voice, he said, "What right have you to drive me out? I haven't been remiss in handling the accounts, while you are patronizing whores, yet you want to get rid of me. Just see if I don't report what you've been up to when I get home."

Lai-pao endeavored to pacify Han Tao-kuo and pulled Hu Hsiu aside, saying to him, "Dog bone that you are, you're altogether too hard-nosed when you're drunk."

"Uncle Pao," Hu Hsiu responded, "Don't you interfere. What have I had to drink? Let me have it out with him."

But Lai-pao persisted in pushing him into his room and putting him to bed. Truly:

Wine does not befuddle people, they
befuddle themselves.

Beauty does not delude people, they
delude themselves.⁸

Lai-pao succeeded in getting Hu Hsiu back to his room and putting him to sleep. But no more of this.

Han Tao-kuo was apprehensive lest the traveling merchants he was entertaining would laugh at him, so he and Lai-pao returned to the party where:

Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
and proceeded to offer wine to his guests and help them to amuse themselves. The three singing girls, the two sisters Lin Ts'ai-hung and Lin Hsiao-hung, along with Wang Yü-chih:

Played their instruments and sang and danced,
as the company enjoyed themselves:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,
until the third watch before the party broke up.

The next day, Han Tao-kuo wanted to give Hu Hsiu a beating, but Hu Hsiu protested, saying, "I don't remember a thing about it."

Lai-pao and Miao Ch'ing:

Resorting to both appeals and threats,⁹
succeeded in persuading him to desist.

To make a long story short, one day, when they had finished making their purchases of piece goods and had packed them up and loaded them onto their boat, Miao Ch'ing presented them with some parting gifts, and a copy of their accounts, and saw the two of them off, together with Hu Hsiu. Wang Yü-chih, along with Lin Ts'ai-hung and her sister, also saw fit to serve them with drinks at a farewell party on the dock. They set out on the tenth day of the first month, but of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell.¹⁰

One day, as they approached the Lin-ch'ing customs station, Han Tao-kuo was standing on the prow of the boat when he happened to see a neighbor of his named Yen the Fourth sitting on the deck of a boat that was coming downstream toward him on the way to pick up an official in Lin-ch'ing.

Upon catching sight of Han Tao-kuo, he raised his hand in greeting and shouted to him, "Han Tao-kuo, your master passed away during the first month."

By the time he finished speaking, his boat, which was moving fast, had shot past him.

When Han Tao-kuo heard these words, he kept the information to himself, keeping Lai-pao in the dark by not telling him about it.

It so happened that at that time the provinces of Honan and Shantung were suffering from a severe drought. The land was scorched for thousands of li, the cultivated fields and mulberry groves were unproductive, and the price of cotton goods had become temporarily inflated to the point that a bolt of cotton fabric cost a third more than its normal price.

The local merchants from the countryside were compelled to take their money with them and travel as far as the docks at Lin-ch'ing in order to buy directly from the itinerant merchants.

Han Tao-kuo consulted with Lai-pao, saying, "The piece goods on our boat are worth something over four thousand taels. At present, since the going price for such merchandise has gone up by one-third, we might as well sell off half our cargo. That would facilitate our payment of the duty at the customs station, and were we to wait until we get home to sell the goods, we would not do any better. Not to sell when the market is favorable would really be deplorable."

"Although what you say may be true enough," said Lai-pao, "I fear that if we proceed with the sale, when we arrive home it may elicit the disapproval of our master who is the owner of the goods. What would we do then?"

"If the master should object," responded Han Tao-kuo, "I will take responsibility for it."

Since Lai-pao was unable to dissuade him, they proceeded to sell off a thousand taels worth of piece goods on the dock.

At this point, Han Tao-kuo said, "Lai-pao, why don't you and Hu Hsiu remain on the boat to take care of paying the duty, while I and my young servant Wang Han pack the thousand taels into saddlebags and go home by the overland route in order to tell our master about the situation."

"When you get home," said Lai-pao, "whatever you do, get our master to send a letter to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh at the customs house asking him to reduce the transit duty on our cargo and let our boat through before the others."

Han Tao-kuo nodded in assent and, together with his young servant Wang Han, proceeded to pack their saddlebags and set out for Ch'ing-ho district. But no more of this.

One day, they entered the city through the protective wall outside the South Gate just as:

The sun was beginning its gradual descent.

Who could have anticipated that on the street they happened to encounter Chang An, the caretaker of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ancestral graveyard, who was propelling a pushcart full of wine, rice, and food boxes on his way out the South Gate.

When he caught sight of Han Tao-kuo, he called out, "Uncle Han, you have returned home."

Han Tao-kuo noticed that he was wearing mourning and asked him the reason for it, to which he replied, "His Honor has passed away, and tomorrow, the ninth day of the third month, is the day of the seventh weekly commemoration of his death. The First Lady has asked me to transport this load of wine, rice, and food boxes to the graveyard in preparation for the ceremony of burning paper money there tomorrow."

When Han Tao-kuo heard this, he remarked, "How regrettable! How regrettable! To be sure:

The mouths of the pedestrians on the road

are like memorial tablets.

The story is not untrue."¹¹

As he whipped up his donkey and proceeded into the city, it was already getting dark. Behold:

The teeming crossroads are all ablaze with

the light of burning lanterns;

The Temple of the Nine Stars is enhanced by

fragrant mist and tolling bells.

The wheel of the bright moon is suspended

above the sparse woodlands;

A handful of scattered stars¹² serves to

light up the azure firmament.

Within the camps of the Six Imperial Armies,

The wailing of painted bugles frequently resounds;

On the upper floors of the five drum towers,

Water drips in the bronze tanks of the clepsydras.

On all four sides the evening fog,

Darkly encompasses the dancing pavilions

and singing platforms;¹³

In the three markets a cloak of mist,

Faintly enshrouds the green gauze windows

and vermilion gates.¹⁴

Pair by pair, the strolling beauties

return to their boudoirs;

One by one, the young scholars close

the blinds in their studies.¹⁵

As Han Tao-kuo entered the crossroads of the city he debated with himself whether or not to go, as he had originally intended, straight to the house of Hsi-men Ch'ing. But since he had learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already dead, and it was also late in the day, he decided, instead, to go to his own home to spend the night and consult with his wife before going to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place the next day. Thereupon, he and Wang Han, whipped up their donkeys and proceeded straight to their house on Lion Street. The two of them dismounted their donkeys, dismissed the bearers that had come with them, and called for the door to be opened, after which Wang Han proceeded to carry their luggage and saddlebags

inside.

When the maidservant caught sight of them, she reported to Wang Liu-erh, saying, "Father has come home."

The woman welcomed him inside, where he paid obeisance to the Buddha and the spirit tablets of his ancestors, brushed the dust from the journey off his clothes, and saw to the disposition of the saddlebags and luggage in the parlor. Wang Liu-erh helped him off with his outer garments, and saw him into a seat, while the maid provided him with a serving of tea.

Han Tao-kuo first told her about the events of his journey and then went on to say, "I ran into Brother Yen the Fourth along the way, who told me that the master has died; and just now, as I arrived at the city wall, I also ran into Chang An, the caretaker of the master's ancestral graveyard, who was propelling a pushcart loaded with wine and rice on his way to the graveyard. He told me that tomorrow is the day for the seventh weekly commemoration of his death. So the report turns out to be true. He seemed well enough when I left, so tell me, how did he happen to die?"

Wang Liu-erh said:

"Weather is characterized by unexpected storms;

Man is subject to unpredictable vicissitudes.

Who can be sure that nothing will happen to him?"

Han Tao-kuo then proceeded to open up the saddlebags, which contained clothing and other valuables that he had purchased while in Chiang-nan, and emptied the two pouches containing the thousand taels of silver. One sealed packet at a time, he dumped them on the surface of the k'ang, and when he opened them, they were seen to contain nothing but glistening "snowflake" silver.

Turning to his wife, he said, "These are the thousand taels of silver that I realized by selling off part of the cargo on the road. In addition to which, there are two packets containing a hundred taels that I made for myself on the side. It's already late today, but I can deliver them to his place tomorrow morning."

He then went on to ask his wife, "After I had left, did he continue to patronize you or not?"

"While he was still alive," she said, "everything was all right. But are you really planning to deliver this silver to his place?"

"That's just what I want to discuss with you," Han Tao-kuo responded. "How would it be if we kept some of it for ourselves, and sent the other half to his place?"

"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a simpleton you are! It's time to stop being so foolish. Now that he's already dead, and no one from here is still over there, what further connection do we have with him? Rather than delivering half of the silver to his place and running the risk of their raising a ruckus over the whereabouts of the rest, it would be better to be:

Once ruthless, ruthless to the end,
and use this thousand taels of silver to hire mules for ourselves and abscond to our daughter's place in the Eastern Capital with it. There's no reason to worry that our kinsman's place in the grand preceptor's mansion will be unable to accommodate us."

"That would require us to abandon this house of ours," said Han Tao-kuo. "It won't be possible to dispose of it on such short notice. How about that?"

"What a feckless creature you are!" retorted his wife. "Why don't we get your younger brother Han the Second to move in, and leave him with some silver to look after the place? Then, if anyone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household comes looking for you, he can tell them that our daughter in the Eastern Capital has sent for the two of us. They would hardly have the:

Seven heads and eight galls,
to come looking for us in the grand preceptor's mansion. And even if they did, we would have no reason to be afraid of them."

"But I have always been favorably treated by His Honor," said Han Tao-kuo. "To exhibit such a change of heart would constitute a violation of Heavenly principle."

"It has always been the case that:

To abide by Heavenly principle is

to face starvation,"

responded his wife. "Given the way he has taken advantage of me in the past, for us to make use of these few taels of his silver is hardly wrong. I remember how, when his body was lying in state in the coffin chamber, I prepared an offertory table, replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals, and went with the best of intentions to burn paper money on his behalf. But his principal wife, that undutiful whore, refused to come out and greet me for what seemed like half a day, while she kept to her room insulting me egregiously, and putting me in a predicament in which I could neither leave, on the one hand, nor sit down, on the other. Later his third wife came out and offered to sit down with me, but I refused to stay and came home in my sedan chair. When I think of that situation, it seems only right that I should spend a few taels of his silver."

This single conversation had the effect of reducing Han Tao-kuo to silence. That evening the two of them settled on their plan. The next day, at the fifth watch, they summoned Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, arranged with him, thus and so, to look after their house, and provided him with ten or twenty taels of silver to cover his expenses.

This Trickster Han expressed himself to be:

Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times,

saying, "Elder brother and sister-in-law, go your way. You can leave everything to me."

Han Tao-kuo decided to take his young servant Wang Han and the two maidservants with them to the Eastern Capital and proceeded to hire two large carts, onto which they loaded their trunks and other valuables. After waiting until daybreak, they went out the West Gate of the city and headed for the Eastern Capital. Truly:

Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.

We will say no more at this point about how Han Tao-kuo and his wife set out for the Eastern Capital, but return to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang.

The next day, she took her son, Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, the wet nurse Ju-i, and her son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, and set out for their ancestral graveyard to burn paper money on behalf of Hsi-men Ch'ing. While they were there, the caretaker Chang An told Yüeh-niang how he had run into Han Tao-kuo the day before.

On hearing this, Yüeh-niang remarked, "If he is back, why hasn't he reported in at our place? No doubt he will do so today."

After burning the paper money at his grave site, and sitting there for a short time, they headed back home, and she sent Ch'en Ching-chi to Han Tao-kuo's house to ask him where he had left the boat.

The first time he knocked at the gate there was no response, but the second time, Han the Second came out and said, "My niece in the Eastern Capital has summoned my elder brother and my sister-in-law to come visit her. I don't know where the boat is located."

When Ch'en Ching-chi reported this to Yüeh-niang, she was not able to let it go at that and sent Ch'en Ching-chi on a donkey to ride along the side of the canal and try to locate the boat. Three days later, he arrived at the dock in Lin-ch'ing and found Lai-pao on the boat.

Lai-pao asked, "Hasn't Han Tao-kuo arrived yet? He set out for home ahead of me with a thousand taels of silver."

"Who has seen anything of him?" responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "Chang An encountered him on his way into the city, and the next day, after leaving the graveyard, the First Lady sent me to ask after him. It seems that the two of them have absconded to the Eastern Capital, taking their possessions and the silver with them. At present, Father is dead, and the seventh weekly commemoration of his death has been concluded, but the First Lady is unable to let it go at that and sent me out to look for the boat."



Han Tao-kuo Appropriates the Goods and Flees Far Away

As for Lai-pao, though:

From his mouth no word was uttered,

In his heart he thought to himself,

“That god-damned creature! It turns out he was deceiving me into the bargain. No wonder he sold off a thousand taels worth of goods along the way. He was up to his nefarious schemes. Truly:

Though our faces may be only inches apart,

Our hearts are separated by a thousand li.”

At this juncture, Lai-pao, on learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already dead, decided to take the same course as Han Tao-kuo. He therefore proceeded to entice the young scamp Ch'en Ching-chi into drinking with him in the various entertainment places on the dock and enjoying himself with the courtesans there. Meanwhile, he surreptitiously removed eight hundred taels worth of merchandise from the boat and arranged to store it under seal in a local inn.

One day, after the customs duty had been paid and the boat had been allowed to proceed through the barrier to the port on the New Canal, the remainder of the cargo was transhipped and loaded into carts to be transported to Ch'ing-ho district, where it was duly unloaded into an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard. At that time, after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, the silk floss store on Lion Street had been closed, and Kan Jun and Ts'ui Pen had sold off the remaining

merchandise in the silk goods store across the street from the Hsi-men residence, turned the proceeds over to Yüeh-niang, and returned to their homes. The house there was also sold, and only the pawnshop and the pharmaceutical shop at the front of the Hsi-men residence remained open, under the management of Ch'en Ching-chi and Fu Ming.

Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang had a four-year-old son named Seng-pao, and Han Tao-kuo's wife Wang Liu-erh had a niece who was three years old. The two families had betrothed them to each other by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses¹⁶ without Yüeh-niang knowing anything about it.

When Lai-pao had finished unloading the merchandise, he put the blame for the missing silver entirely on Han Tao-kuo, saying, "He first sold off two thousand taels worth of goods and then set out ahead of me to take them home."

Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged him to go to the Eastern Capital and question Han Tao-kuo about the whereabouts of the silver, but he adamantly refused, saying, "I can't do something like that. Who could presume to force his way into the grand preceptor's mansion, and:

Devote himself to stirring up trouble,
without running the risk of retaliation? You would do better to recite the Buddha's name, rather than:
Inviting lice onto your own head to scratch."

"But kinsman Chai Ch'ien is beholden to us for arranging his match with Han Tao-kuo's daughter," protested Yüeh-niang. "Surely he would be inclined to respond favorably to us."

"His daughter is now the favorite in his household," said Lai-pao, "and she is far more likely to side with her own parents than with us. We would do well to keep this matter to ourselves. If word of it should leak out, it would not redound to our credit. As for these few taels of silver, the best thing to do would be simply to write them off and forget about it."

Yüeh-niang, consequently, urged him to get together with the potential purchasers and dispose of the remaining piece goods to them. When he did so, Yüeh-niang had Ch'en Ching-chi take charge of the scales and bargaining, but the buyers rejected the proposed prices, took their money, and left.

Lai-pao then said to Ch'en Ching-chi, "Son-in-law, you don't yet understand the vicissitudes of trade, but I have considerable experience traveling on the rivers and lakes and understand how the markets work.

It is better to sell at a loss,
Than it is to forfeit the sale.

Now that these goods are here, we might as well settle for whatever price we can get for them. If you insist on:

Pulling your bow all the way taut,
You risk the loss of your customer,

and only show that you don't know how to conduct business. I'm not being pretentious, but you're still young, and:

Don't perceive the way things work.¹⁷

I'm not sticking my elbow into other people's business, but it seems to me that the best we can do is to sell off the goods and make an end of it."

Upon hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi, in a fit of pique, simply decided to wash his hands of the matter. Lai-pao, accordingly, without waiting for instructions from Yüeh-niang, reached over and grabbed the abacus out of his hands, called back the customers, and sold off the remaining goods for something over two thousand taels of silver. He then handed the proceeds, one packet at a time, to Ch'en Ching-chi to turn over to Yüeh-niang and saw to the removal of the merchandise from the premises.

Yüeh-niang offered to reward him with twenty or thirty taels of silver for his household expenses, but he ostentatiously refused to accept it, saying, "You had better keep it for yourself ma'am. Now that your husband is dead, you are like stagnant water, without any source of livelihood. What reason is there to dispose of your property this way? Keep it for yourself. I really don't need it."

One night, when Lai-pao had been outside drinking himself into a stupor, he walked into Yüeh-niang's room, leaned on the bedrail of the k'ang, and addressed her, saying, "Ma'am, you have lost your husband while still in the springtime of your youth and are left alone with no one to care for but your infant son. Do you not feel lonely?"

Yüeh-niang said not a word in response to this overture.

One day, a letter arrived from Majordomo Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital, indicating that he had learned of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death. He also said that Han Tao-kuo had informed him that there were four attractive young women left in the household who were adept at playing musical instruments and singing, and he offered to purchase them for whatever price might be asked so they could be transported to the Eastern Capital to wait upon the grand preceptor's elderly wife.

This letter reduced Yüeh-niang to a state of panic, and she summoned Lai-pao to consult with him about whether he thought it would be better to comply with this request or not.

When Lai-pao came into her room, he did not address her with appropriate respect but said, "You are only a woman, and don't understand how things stand. To fail to comply with this request would be to invite disaster. This is all due to the heedlessness of your dead husband, who was given to showing off his munificence. Whenever he invited people over for a drink he would call out the household musicians to entertain them, a fact that could not but become widely known. It is hardly surprising that Han Tao-kuo's daughter, in the course of waiting upon the elderly wife of the grand preceptor in her mansion, should mention it to her. The situation is just as I said it was the other day. And now, sure enough, this problem has come up. If you don't agree to his request, he'll have the prefectural or district yamen send people to demand them by name. By that time it will be too late for you to do anything but hand them over to him with both hands. The best thing to do at present, without having to surrender all four of them, is to compromise by sending off two

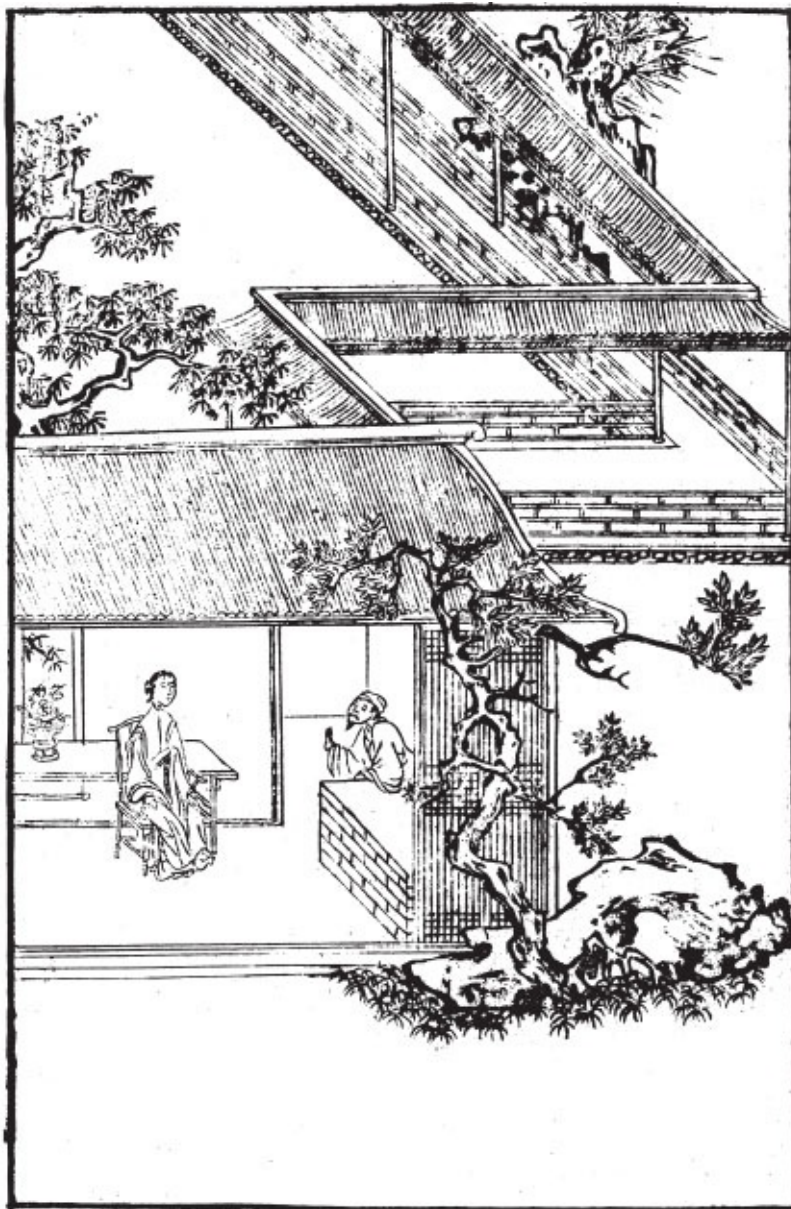
of them, as a means of saving your face.”

Yüeh-niang pondered this suggestion for some time and decided that Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters and Ch'un-mei from P'an Chin-lien's quarters could not be spared, and that Hsiu-ch'un, who was looking after Hsiao-ko, also could not be dispensed with. But when she asked Yü-hsiao and Ying-ch'un from her own quarters, they expressed a willingness to go. Consequently, she had Lai-pao hire a pair of vehicles to accommodate the two maidservants and accompany them to the grand preceptor's mansion in the Eastern Capital. What she could not have anticipated was that the rascal Lai-pao would seize the opportunity to rape the two girls en route.

One day, when they arrived in the Eastern Capital and met with Han Tao-kuo and his wife, Lai-pao filled them in on everything that had happened first and last.

Han Tao-kuo thanked Lai-pao, saying, “If my kinsman had not looked after our interests by dissuading them from pursuing us, even though we have nothing to fear, they might well have sent someone to the Eastern Capital to seek us out.”

When Chai Ch'ien saw that the two girls, Ying-ch'un and Yü-hsiao, were both attractive young women, one of whom was adept at playing the psaltery, and the other at playing the samisen, and that they were only sixteen or seventeen years old, he had them move into the mansion in order to wait on the grand preceptor's elderly wife and agreed to pay for them with two ingots of silver worth fifty taels apiece. Lai-pao pocketed one of these ingots for himself and turned only one of them over to Yüeh-niang when he arrived home.



Lai-pao Cheats His Master and Ignores His Benevolence

He also endeavored to intimidate Yüeh-niang, saying, "If I had not agreed to accompany them, not even this ingot of silver would have been forthcoming. You don't have any idea of what wealth and distinction Han Tao-kuo and his wife are enjoying in the grand preceptor's mansion. They are housed in a dwelling of their own where they have:

Slaves and maidservants at their beck and call, and

Are always waited on by five or three servants.

Majordomo Chai Ch'ien addresses Han Tao-kuo as Your Honor, and their daughter, Han Ai-chieh, goes into the mansion every day to wait on the grand preceptor's elderly wife:

Not straying by so much as an inch from her side.¹⁸

Whatever she asks for, she receives tenfold;

She is free to eat anything that she chooses,

And dress in whatever outfits she may prefer.¹⁹

At present, she has also learned how to write characters and do arithmetic, demonstrating that:

Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence.

She has grown up to be:

Large and tall in stature,²⁰

With an alluring demeanor.

When she came out to see me the other day, she was adorned as resplendently as:

A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster.

She is as clever as can be and insisted on addressing me as Uncle Pao. Now that these two household musicians of ours are there, they will be dependent on her for their needles and thread."

When he had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang felt as though:

Her gratitude knew no bounds,

and provided wine and delicacies for his consumption. She also offered him some silver, but he refused it as before, and she ended up rewarding him with a bolt of satin fabric for his wife, Hui-hsiang, to make a dress out of. But no more of this.

One day, Lai-pao, together with his wife's younger brother, Liu Ts'ang, went to the dock at Lin-ch'ing and sold off the piece goods that he had stored there in the inn for the sum of eight hundred taels of silver. With these proceeds he secretly bought a house for himself, some distance from the Hsi-men home, to the right side of Liu Ts'ang's residence, where he opened a general store and also used the premises to convene conclaves and tea gatherings every day. His wife Hui-hsiang, whenever she felt so inclined, took to asking Yüeh-niang for time off in order to visit her mother's family and would then go to their new house, where she would change her head ornaments and clothing, put on a pearl headband, and thus:

Studded with gold and decked with silver,

proceed to the home of Wang Liu-erh's sister-in-law, Sow Wang, to discuss the marriage alliance between the children in their families and exchange favors. After going to see Sow Wang's daughter, she would ride back to their new home in a sedan chair, change back into her everyday clothes, and return to the Hsi-men residence, without Yüeh-niang's knowing anything about it.

The rascal Lai-pao would often get himself drunk and then go right into Yüeh-niang's room, where he would engage her in:

Suggestive and flirtatious conversation.

This happened at least two or three times. If Yüeh-niang had not been the virtuous and honorable person that she was, she might well have succumbed to temptation and allowed herself to be seduced by his overtures.

Some of the household servants and gardeners also mentioned in Yüeh-niang's presence the fact that Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang, had been seen to venture abroad in order to arrange the betrothal of her son, Seng-pao, to Sow Wang's daughter, Wang Liu-erh's niece, and had been:

Studded with gold and decked with silver,

While attended by three or five servants,

for the occasion. P'an Chin-lien also reported this to Yüeh-niang a number of times, but Yüeh-niang did not believe it. When Hui-hsiang heard about this, she proceeded to kick up a storm in the kitchen:

Cursing the high and the low alike.

Lai-pao, thereupon:

Puffing himself up and playing the fool,

resorted to boasting about himself to the other servants, saying, "The rest of you can stay at home and engage in your bedtime gossip if you like. But it was I who took the trouble to brave the waters and bring all this silver and merchandise safely home. Had it not been for me, Han Tao-kuo, that:

Old ox with his rapacious snout,

would have made off to the Eastern Capital with the whole bundle.

With no more than a squeak,

it might well have:

Sunk softly into the water.

But so far, I have not received so much as a word of gratitude and have even been falsely accused of purloining the

master's money. Truly:

He who donates his flesh is not acknowledged,
He who furnishes incense is not acknowledged.

It has always been the case that:

To defer when you differ,
Is to give up the dipper."

His wife, Hui-hsiang, continued the diatribe, saying, "That lousy backbiting whore! She may claim that the two of us have purloined a large sum of money, and that I've been running around:

While attended by three or five servants,
attempting to arrange the betrothal of our son. The fact is that I merely went out to borrow some clothes and a few hair ornaments from my elder sister, but she alleges that I used money purloined from the master to buy them. She's just trying to get rid of the two of us, but it doesn't matter. Even if we are forced to leave:

Heaven will hardly prohibit a starving
crow from eating grass.

I'm going to rinse my eyes, the better to keep track of the lot of you whorish slaves, incarcerated as you are in the Hsi-men Ch'ing household."

When Yüeh-niang saw the way in which she was:

Cursing the high and the low alike,
seeking pretexts for quarreling with people, and threatening to hang herself, as well as the way in which her husband had, at least two or three times, approached her indecorously when no one else was about, she became so angry she scarcely knew what to do with herself and felt compelled to expel the two of them from the household. Consequently, Lai-pao, as cool as you please, proceeded to open up a piece goods store together with his brother-in-law and offer a variety of fine fabrics for sale, convening conclaves and forging connections on a daily basis. But no more of this. Truly:

When prestige is lost, slaves abuse their master,
When the times are bad, ghosts manipulate people.²¹

There is a poem that testifies to this:

I would implore the people of this world,²²
Never to conduct yourselves dishonorably.
To act dishonorably is to deceive Heaven,
Don't assume that Heaven will not see it.²³
Heaven is situated right above your head,
It sees precisely and cannot be deceived.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

P'AN CHIN-LIEN MAKES AN ASSIGNATION ON A MOONLIT NIGHT; CH'EN CHING-CHI ENJOYS TWO BEAUTIES IN A PAINTED BOWER

To the tune "Partridge Sky"

She remembers that time in the studio
when they had just met;
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together
were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate
alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp
shed only a half light.

Thinking of the past,
Her fragrant soul deluded;
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy
the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them
will never be separated.¹

THE STORY GOES that ever since P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi had made out in his antechamber while Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying in state nearby, the two of them, on a daily basis, still savoring the sweet taste of their encounter:

Felt the chill of love by day,
And the heat of ardor at dusk.

Either:

Leaning on shoulders and engaging in badinage,

or:

Sitting together and delighting in flirtation,

they pestered each other incessantly and carried on without any restraint whatever. If there were other people about so they could not communicate verbally, they would write their thoughts on strips of paper and drop them on the floor for each other to pick up.

When you have a message, transmit it to me;
If I have a message, I'll impart it to you.

One day, during the fourth month, P'an Chin-lien took out a handkerchief shot with silver thread that she customarily held in her sleeve and wrapped it around a jade-colored gauze drawn-work sachet in which she had placed benzoin, lysimachia, rose petals, and a lock of her hair, as well as some pine and cypress cones, and on the two sides of which she had stitched an inscription of eight characters that read:

The pine and the cypress are evergreen,²
Her human countenance is like a flower.

When she had finished preparing this keepsake, she intended to give it to Ch'en Ching-chi, but he did not happen to be in the anteroom where he lived just then, so she dropped it inside through the window. Later on, when Ch'en Ching-chi opened the door and went in, he saw the bulging sealed packet and opened it to find the handkerchief and the sachet, as well as a piece of paper on which there was inscribed a lyric to the tune "Mistletoe," which read as follows:

I'm making you a gift of this silver-threaded
handkerchief and this sachet.
In so doing, I have also cut off a lock of
my black tresses for you.
I hope you will carry these pine and cypress
cones with you at all times.
As my tears drip, I am putting in writing
my loving thoughts for you.
Late this evening, when the lantern light shines
on my lonely shadow,
Don't let me down as I wait for you under the

rose-leaved raspberry trellis.

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the lyric was proposing a secret assignation under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis, he immediately sealed up a gold-flecked fan of speckled bamboo,³ on which he had also written a lyric in reply to hers, tucked it into his sleeve, and headed into the garden. Who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang happened to be visiting in Chin-lien's quarters at the time.

No sooner did Ch'en Ching-chi, who was quite unaware of the situation, enter the postern gate than he called out, "Is my beloved at home, or not?"

Chin-lien recognized the sound of his voice and, fearing lest Yüeh-niang might also have heard it, and the cat be let out of the bag, hastily strode out, lifting the portiere aside, and seeing that it was he, waved him away with her hand, saying, "I wondered who it was, and it turns out to be our son-in-law, looking for his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh. She was here a little while ago, but she has gone into the garden with the others to pick flowers."

When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that Yüeh-niang was there, he surreptitiously handed his package to her to put in her sleeve and went away.

Yüeh-niang asked, "What did our son-in-law come here for?"

To which Chin-lien replied, "He came looking for his wife, and I told him that she had gone into the garden."

She thereby managed to pull the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes. Not long after this, Yüeh-niang got up and went back to the rear compound.

When Chin-lien pulled the package out of her sleeve and opened it, she saw that it contained a fan made of speckled bamboo and white gauze, on which was depicted a scene of green cattails beside a flowing stream, and that it was inscribed with a lyric to the tune "The Water Nymphs" that read as follows:

The speckled bamboo and white gauze create
a free and easy feeling;
The green cattails are skillfully depicted.
The gold sequins and silver threads
are truly enchanting,
Making it fit only for an enchanting person.
To fend off the heat of summer it will
create a gentle breeze;
But when people are about, it should ever
be kept in your sleeve.
When no one else is there, you can idly
wave it to and fro;
But don't ever let it fall into the hands
of any vulgar person.

Once the woman had perused this lyric, that evening, when the moon began to rise, she provided wine for her maidservants Ch'un-mei and Ch'iu-chü to drink and shut them into the side room with the k'ang to spend the night. She then saw to it that in her own room:

The green gauze window was half open,

While crimson candles blazed on high.

After preparing the bedding and pillows, she proceeded to:

Light incense and wash her private parts,

after which, she went outside to stand by herself under the banksia rose arbor and wait for Ch'en Ching-chi to appear for their evening assignation.

To resume our story, that night Yüeh-niang had invited Hsi-men Ta-chieh to go back to the rear compound in order to listen to Nun Wang recite a precious scroll, so the only other person in the room was the maidservant Yüan-hsiao.

Ch'en Ching-chi confidentially offered her a handkerchief and enjoined her to look after the place, saying, "I am going to the quarters of the Fifth Lady, who has asked me to play a board game with her. If your mistress should come in while I am gone, come and get me immediately."

Yüan-hsiao assented to this, thus enabling Ch'en Ching-chi to venture into the garden, where:

The moonglow was filtered by the flowers,⁴

Producing contrasting lights and shadows.

When he arrived under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis, gazing into the distance, he caught sight of the woman, who had:

Removed her headdress, and

Half-coiled her raven locks.

Above, she wore a blouse of pale lavender silk; below, she wore a skirt decorated with turquoise figures; and her feet were adorned with wave-tripping silk stockings, as she approached him from under the banksia rose arbor. Ch'en Ching-chi suddenly jumped out from his position under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis and embraced the woman with both arms, which gave her quite a start.

"Phooey!" the woman exclaimed. "You little short-life! You gave me quite a start by suddenly jumping out that way. Luckily, it may be all right for you to embrace me; but would you have the nerve to embrace anyone else that way?"

Ch'en Ching-chi, who was half inebriated, laughed and said, "Of course, I knew it was you. But even if I had embraced Hung-niang by mistake,⁵ what difference would it make?"

The two of them, thereupon:

Hugging and embracing each other,

held hands as they went into her room, which was ablaze with lamps and candles and contained a table laden with wine and appetizers. After seeing that the postern gate was securely locked, they:

Sat down shoulder to shoulder,
and fell to drinking together.

The woman then asked, "When you came out, did Hsi-men Ta-chieh know anything about it?"

"She is back in the rear compound listening to the recitation of a precious scroll," explained Ch'en Ching-chi. "I arranged for Yüan-hsiao to come get me if anything should come up, and I told her I would be here playing a board game with you."

The two of them indulged in amusing themselves and drinking together for some time. As the saying goes:

Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and
Wine is the go-between of lust.

Before they knew it, they:

Felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine, and
Peach blossoms bloomed upon their cheeks.
As one set about kissing with his lips,
The other rubbed her cheek against his.

After snuffing out the lamps, they:

Got into bed and engaged with each other.

The woman embraced Ch'en Ching-chi, and Ch'en Ching-chi fondled the woman, upon which she sang a song to the tune "The Sixth Lady from West of the River":

Upon coming in the door, he begins to
cuddle me on his lap,
And I respond by turning down
the brocaded coverlet.
My handsome lover makes love to me
in the strangest ways.
Ch'a!
He lifts my legs on high,
Legs on high.
And knocks the fret over my raven locks
completely awry.⁶

Ch'en Ching-chi responded by singing a song to the same tune:

The two of us feel an affinity that
binds us together.
Don't abandon me so that I will have
to sleep by myself.
We have sworn a thousand times to be as
faithful as the hills and seas.
Ch'a!
If we are inconstant, Heaven will observe it,
Heaven will observe it.
You're in the springtime of your life,
and I'm a youth.⁷

The two of them had barely finished their game of clouds and rain when they heard Yüan-hsiao calling to them from outside the gate, "Hsi-men Ta-chieh has come back to her quarters."

This threw Ch'en Ching-chi into such consternation that he hastily pulled on his clothes and went out the door. Truly:

Though distracted bees and wanton butterflies
are sometimes to be seen;
Once they fly into the pear blossoms
they disappear from view.

It so happens that of the three rooms on the upper floor of Chin-lien's quarters, the middle room was dedicated to the worship of Buddhist images, while the rooms to either side were used for the storage of pharmaceutical supplies and spices. From this time on, the two of them were inseparable.

Passion pervaded their breasts;
Their mutual love was like glue.

Not a day passed without their getting together.

One day turned out to be one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

That morning, P'an Chin-lien, after performing her toilet and getting dressed, went upstairs to burn incense before the image of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin. Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi happened to come upstairs at the same time, with keys in hand, to open the storerooms and get some pharmaceutical supplies and spices. When the two of them ran into each other, the woman desisted from the burning of incense, and, seeing that there was no one else about, the two of them embraced and fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues.

One of them said, "You're my darling, Fifth Lady."

The other exclaimed, "You're the love of my life."

She then went on to say, "Since there is no one else about, we might as well get down to business right here."
So saying, she proceeded to strip off her clothing, lay down on a broad bench, and let:

Her pair of wild ducks fly to his shoulders.
As the root of his organ half penetrated her,
They felt inseparably attached to each other.

There is a song that puns on the names of drugs to the tune "The Water Nymphs" that testifies to this:

Angelica, pinellia, and arnebia roots enhance
the pleasures of intercourse;
Finding him as tasty as betel nuts, she engages
in incest with her son-in-law.
His dangling member, sunk in her vagina, is as
potent as henbane or castor bean.
As his clove-shaped spike massages the two
sides of her receptacle,
She feels benumbed as though with cannabis,
and swoons completely away.
As her silvery vaginal secretions pour out,
like a gush of liquid mercury,
With the shrill stridulation of a red cicada,
she expresses the excitement,
She feels in her two labia, as rubicund
as mandarin orange peels.⁸

As always:

Without coincidences there would be no stories.

While the two of them were just in the thick of things, Ch'un-mei unexpectedly came upstairs with a box in hand to get some tea leaves. When she came into view, they were taken by surprise and became so flustered they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Ch'un-mei, not wishing to embarrass them, hastily turned around and started down the stairs. Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation that he could hardly get into his underwear, while Chin-lien was putting on her skirt.

The woman then called after Ch'un-mei, saying, "My good sister, come back upstairs. I have something to say to you."
Ch'un-mei, thereupon, reascended the stairs.

"My good sister," Chin-lien said to her, "our son-in-law is not an outsider. Let me explain the situation to you. As for the two of us:

Our feelings and thoughts are one,
We can never agree to be separated.

But, whatever you do, you must not reveal this to anyone, but keep it to yourself."

"Mother," responded Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? Having served you for all these years, how could I be unaware of your feelings, or reveal them to anyone else?"

"If you are actually willing to cover up for us," the woman said, "while our son-in-law is still here, you will have to come over and go to bed with him before I'll believe you. If you should refuse, it will show that you have no regard for us."

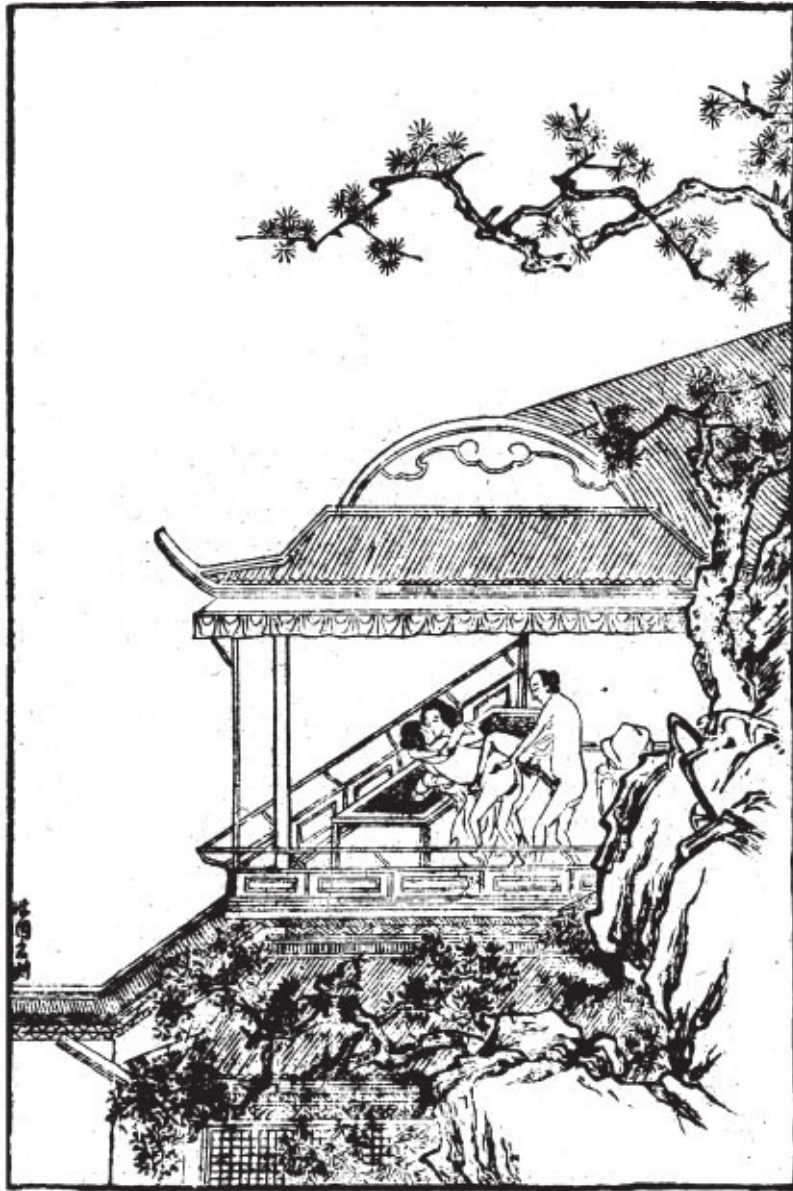
Ch'un-mei was so embarrassed by this proposal that her face turned alternately red and white, but she felt compelled to agree. Unfastening her beige skirt and loosening her pant strings, she lay down faceup on the bench and let the young scamp have his way with her. Can such things be? Truly:

Both of these two iridescent pearls
are without price;
Yet one lover gets to drill his way
into each of them.

There is a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers" that testifies to this:

Guilefully admitting her intimacy
with her son-in-law,
She lets him engage in intercourse
with his mother-in-law.
The affectation of human feelings
entails devilish deceit.
Feigning to heed the ritual proper
to brothers and sisters,
They secretly engage in the doings
of swallows and orioles.
The two of them can only serve as
blatant examples of this.⁹

On this occasion, as soon as Ch'en Ching-chi had finished his performance, Ch'un-mei collected the tea leaves and departed. From this time on, P'an Chin-lien and Ch'un-mei forged an alliance with each other and arranged secret assignments with the young scamp on more than one occasion, while keeping Ch'iu-chü in the dark. The woman listened to whatever Ch'un-mei had to say and presented her with some of her favorite articles of clothing and jewelry in order to secure her loyalty.



Ch'en Ching-chi Enjoys One Beauty and Makes Out with Two

On the first day of the sixth month, Chin-lien's mother, Old Mrs. P'an, died of sickness and old age. When someone came to report this, Wu Yüeh-niang purchased an offertory table, replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals and paper money for the use of the dead and sent Chin-lien to go outside the city gate with them, riding in a sedan chair, to participate in the obsequies and present the sacrificial offerings.

The day after she returned, which was the third day of the sixth month, Chin-lien got up early and went to Yüeh-niang's room, where she spent what seemed like half a day telling her about it. After taking her leave, as she skirted the wall of the courtyard in which the large reception hall was located, upon feeling an urgent need to urinate, she hitched up her skirt and squatted down to relieve herself.

It so happens that after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing there were few visitors any longer, so the ceremonial gate behind the large reception hall was normally kept closed. Ch'en Ching-chi, who resided in the anteroom on the east side of the courtyard, had just gotten up, when he suddenly heard the rustling noise made by someone urinating under the pomegranate tree on the other side of the wall.

Upon peeking surreptitiously out the window and realizing, to his surprise, who it was, he exclaimed, "Who is it that is uncouth enough to relieve herself here? You'd better hitch up your clothes or you'll get your skirt wet."

The woman promptly fastened up her skirt, moved over beside the window, and remarked, "So you're still at home and haven't even gotten up yet, have you? You're certainly taking it easy. Is Hsi-men Ta-chieh here too?"

"She's still in the rear compound," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "We didn't get to sleep until the third watch last night. The

First Lady dragged us back there to listen to a recitation of the *Hung-lo pao-chüan*, or *The Precious Scroll on the Red Silk Curtain*,¹⁰ and I had to sit up listening to it so late that I very nearly:

Came down with a crick in the back.

It was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."

"You inveterate louse!" Chin-lien responded. "Don't try to fool me with those lies of yours. Since when did you go back to the master suite to listen to the recitation of a precious scroll while I was away from home yesterday? The maidservants tell me that you went to eat in Meng Yü-lou's quarters yesterday."

"Luckily Hsi-men Ta-chieh can bear witness on my behalf," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "We were both there in the master suite. Since when did I venture into anyone else's quarters?"

As they bandied words with each other, the young scamp stood on the k'ang, manipulated his organ until it rose up as hard and straight as a stick, and stuck it out through the window.

When the woman saw what he was up to, she laughed heartily and affected to take him to task, saying, "You crazy louse of an incorrigible short-life! By suddenly letting your old fellow out that way, you've given me quite a start. You'd better pull it back inside at once, before I'm tempted, for better or for worse, to jab it with a needle and give you the shock of pain that you deserve."

"Venerable lady," Ching-chi responded with a laugh, "if you don't like the looks of it, you might as well stick it into a safe place, which would also be doing me a favor."

The woman continued to rail at him, saying:

"You're such a practiced old hand,

aren't you, you crazy jailbird!"

So saying, she groped out a miniature brass mirror that she carried at her waist, set it on the windowsill, and pretended to look into the mirror in order to redo her makeup, while actually engulfing his organ with her ruby lips and sucking away at it. She continued to suck at it until the young man felt that:

The tip of his magic rhinoceros horn¹¹

was being anointed;

While his heart melted with a panoply

of lustful feelings.

Truly:

Past mistress of the intimate arts,

she caters to her lover's whim;

How quick she is, and diligent,

to "play the purple flute."

It so happens that the woman resorted to this subterfuge so that if anyone caught sight of her, they would think that she was looking into the mirror while redoing her makeup and would not realize what she was really up to.

Her depravity was manifest,

Completely devoid of shame.

Just as she was engaged in sucking away for all she was worth, the sound of someone's footsteps was heard, and the woman promptly put the mirror away and stepped to one side, while Ch'en Ching-chi withdrew his organ.

It turned out to be the servant Lai-an, who walked over and said, "Manager Fu Ming out front is inviting you to go join him for lunch."

"Tell him to go ahead and eat," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I'll come as soon as I've finished combing my hair."

As soon as Lai-an had left the scene, the woman whispered to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "Don't go out anywhere tonight, but stay in your quarters and wait till I send Ch'un-mei after you. There's something I want to say to you."

Ch'en Ching-chi replied:

"I respectfully accept the invitation."

When she had finished speaking, the woman returned to her quarters.

When Ch'en Ching-chi had finished his morning ablutions, he went out to the shop to take care of business, as usual. But no more of this.

It was not too long after this that the daylight began to fade. That night:

The moon was dark, the stars barely visible,

and the weather was extremely hot. The woman told Ch'un-mei to heat water so she could bathe in her room and trim her toenails, after which she should prepare her bedding, drive away the mosquitoes, let down the gauze mosquito netting, and light some incense in a little burner.

"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you may not be aware of it, but today marks the beginning of the three ten-day periods of the hot season. Wouldn't you like to have some impatiens blossoms with which to dye your fingernails? I can go find some for you."

"Go ahead and look for some then," the woman said.

"The only place there are any," said Ch'un-mei, "is in the large courtyard. I'll go pick a few for you. You should tell Ch'iu-chü to get out the mortar and pestle and pulverize some garlic cloves for the purpose."¹²

The woman proceeded to:

Whisper into her ear in a low voice,

as she instructed Ch'un-mei, saying, "You must go by the anteroom where he lives and invite him to come visit me

tonight. I have something to say to him.”

When Ch'un-mei departed on her errand, the woman remained in her room where, by the time she had finished bathing her fragrant flesh and trimming her toenails, some time had passed. Ch'un-mei finally showed up with several impatiens blossoms, and Ch'iu-chü was put to work pulverizing them with the garlic cloves until it was nearly midnight. The woman also gave her several goblets of wine to drink and then sent her off to sleep in the kitchen. When the woman had dyed the nails of her ten slender fingers under the lamplight, she told Ch'un-mei to take a wide bench out into the courtyard and supply it with a cool bamboo bed mat along with a pillow and bedding, so she could cool herself off.

By this time, the night watches were nearly over. Behold:

Within red gates there is no sound;
The asterism “Jade Rope” hangs low.¹³
The stars of the Herd Boy and the Weaving Maid,
Are isolated on the two banks of the milky way.

Suddenly, one becomes aware of:

A whiff of floral fragrance, and
The glow of a few fireflies.

The woman, while:

Wielding a silken fan in her hand,

was:

Lying on her pillow as she waited.

Ch'un-mei had left the postern gate closed but unlocked. Truly:

Waiting by moonlight in the western chamber,
Welcoming the breeze, the door is half ajar.
As the flower shadows move outside the wall,
She anticipates the appearance of her lover.¹⁴

It so happens that Ch'en Ching-chi had agreed in advance that he would shake the branches of the woody hibiscus tree as a signal of his arrival, so when the woman saw the wavering of the flowery branches, she knew that he had come. When she had signaled her presence in the courtyard with a cough, he pushed open the gate and came in.

The two of them:

Sat down shoulder to shoulder,

and the woman asked, “Who was in your quarters when you left?”

“Hsi-men Ta-chieh has not come out from the rear compound today,” Ch'en Ching-chi replied. “I have already arranged for Yüan-hsiao to keep watch in our quarters and come to get me if anything should happen.”

He then went on to ask, “Has Ch'iu-chü gone to sleep yet?”

“She is already fast asleep,” the woman replied.

When they had finished speaking:

Hugging and embracing each other,

the two of them proceeded to:

Strip their bodies completely naked,¹⁵ and
Engage each other on pillow and mat;
Unable to overcome their excitement.

Behold, to the tune “Song of the South”:

In lascivious excitement the two are united.
Embracing each other's fragrant shoulders,
they rub their cheeks together.
With his hand he fondles her fragrant breasts,
as soft as cotton.
How truly amazing it is!
Lifting up her feet, she takes off
her embroidered slippers,
And snuggles her jade body into her lover's bosom.
As she sticks out her clove-shaped tongue,¹⁶
he opens his mouth.
When the tossing and tumbling mating phoenixes
finish with the clouds and rain,
She enjoins her talented lover,
“Tomorrow, whatever you do, try to
come a little earlier.”¹⁷

When they had finished their game of clouds and rain, the woman got out five taels worth of loose silver and gave it to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, “My mother, Old Mrs. P'an from outside the city gate, has died. A coffin was provided for her by your father-in-law while he was still alive. The First Lady sent me to take part in the third-day encoffining ceremony and burn paper money on her behalf. Tomorrow is the date for her burial ceremony, but the First Lady won't let me go, on the grounds that while we are still in mourning for Father it is not right for us to appear at public gatherings. I'm giving these five taels of silver to you in the hope that early tomorrow morning you will agree to go outside the city gate and help with the funeral arrangements for my mother, Old Mrs. P'an, reward her coffin bearers, and see that she is properly

buried. If you consent to do so, it will be just as though I were doing it myself.”

Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the silver with one hand and said, “That’s no problem. If you assign such a task to me:

Once one has acceded to someone’s request,

It is imperative to see the job through to the end.

I’ll go out the gate as early as possible tomorrow morning, and when my mission is accomplished I’ll come back and report to you.”

When he had finished speaking, fearing that Hsi-men Ta-chieh might come home during his absence, he promptly returned to the antechamber in which they lived. Of the events of that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day, he returned from his mission around lunchtime and found that Chin-lien had just gotten up and was still in her room combing her hair. Ch'en Ching-chi came inside to report to her and gave her two sprigs of jasmine blossoms that he had plucked on the grounds of the Chao-hua ssu, or Temple of Glorious Transformation, outside the gate for her to wear.

“Has the coffin been duly buried?” the woman asked.

“How could I have failed to see that the venerable lady’s:

Yellow gold is stored in the coffer?”

replied Ch'en Ching-chi. “Before coming home to report to you, I still had two taels and six or seven mace of silver in hand, which I gave to your adopted sister to take care of her daily expenses. She asked me to extend her greetings to you with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.”

When the woman learned that her mother had been buried in her grave, she shed a few tears and then instructed Ch'un-mei, saying, “Put the jasmine blossoms in a bowl of water, and bring some tea for our brother-in-law to drink.”

Before long, two boxes of steamed-shortcake pastries and four saucers of appetizers were brought out. When Ch'en Ching-chi had enjoyed these refreshments, he went back out to the front compound. From that time on, the woman and the young scamp:

Became closer by the day.¹⁸

One morning, during the seventh month, the woman said to him, “Don’t go out anywhere today, but stay in your quarters, so I can come to you there and we can have some fun together.”

Ch'en Ching-chi assented to this. Unexpectedly, however, he was invited by Ts’ui Pen and a number of his friends to join them in an all-day excursion outside the city walls. When he came home, he was quite drunk, and no sooner did he collapse onto his bed than he fell fast asleep and became oblivious to:

Heaven above and earth below.

At dusk, Chin-lien suddenly appeared in his quarters and saw that he was stretched out asleep on the bed. Forgoing any attempt at a greeting, she tried unsuccessfully to shake him awake and realized that he must have been out drinking somewhere. Who could have anticipated that:

Strange as it may seem,

when the woman groped into his sleeve, she hooked out a gold-plated hairpin in the shape of a lotus petal with two rows of characters engraved on it that said:

The horse with the golden bridle neighs
amidst the fragrant verdure;
The visitor to the jade tower is drunk
at apricot blossom time.

When she held it up to the light to examine it, she realized that it belonged to Meng Yü-lou and thought to herself, “How did this happen to end up in his sleeve? He must have been engaged in hanky-panky with Meng Yü-lou. Otherwise, how could her hairpin have ended up in his sleeve? No wonder that short-life has treated me at times as though he were:

Bereft of thought or feeling.

If I don’t leave a few words for him, he won’t even know that I’ve been here. I’ll inscribe a quatrain on the wall as a message to him and interrogate him about it the next time I see him.”

Thereupon, she took up a brush and wrote out a quatrain on the wall that read:

On her solitary excursion to his studio, she
is unable to awaken him;
Which means the Goddess has descended from
Witch’s Mountain in vain.
It would appear that King Hsiang of Ch’u has
become devoid of feelings;¹⁹
To so betray their morning after morning and
evening after evening love.

After inscribing her composition, the woman returned to her quarters.

To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi had slept for some time, the effects of the wine wore off, and he woke up.

As he got up and lit a lamp, he suddenly recalled, “The woman was going to come meet me here for a tryst, but I have let her down by getting drunk.”

On turning around, he caught sight of the four lines of poetry on the wall and noticed that the ink with which they

were written was still wet. Upon reading the poem, he realized that the woman had come as promised but had been obliged to return empty-handed; and that he had allowed the gift of a romantic assignation to slip through his fingers. The thought of this filled him with no end of remorse.

"The night watches are just beginning by now," he thought to himself. "Moreover, Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yüan-hsiao are still in the rear compound and haven't come out yet. If I go over to her place, the postern gate is likely to be locked."

He headed there and shook the branches of the woody hibiscus tree to signal his arrival but heard no response from within. By mounting onto the T'ai-hu rockery, he succeeded in climbing over the whitewashed wall.

The woman, upon finding her lover to be drunk and fast asleep, had returned to her quarters in a fit of high dudgeon, feeling deeply depressed, and gone to sleep herself, after sprawling across her bed without bothering to undress. She did not anticipate that, in the middle of the night, he would come climbing over the wall. On seeing that the courtyard was deserted, and assuming that the maidservants must be asleep, he proceeded with:

Skulking step and lurking gait,

to make his way to the door of her room, which he found to be closed but unlocked. When he slipped inside, he observed by the light of the moon shining through the window that the woman was lying sprawled on the bed, all by herself, with her face to the wall.

He whispered "My darling" to her several times, but she did not respond.

"Don't hold it against me," he went on to say, "but today Ts'ui Pen and a bunch of his friends invited me to join them in an excursion to the estate at Wu-li Yüan outside the city gate to enjoy practicing archery together. By the time I got home, I was drunk and was unaware that you had visited me. I am guilty of failing to keep our agreed upon assignation. Forgive me. Forgive me."

The woman still failed to respond to his plea.

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that she would not respond, he fell to his knees in a state of panic and pled with her, over and over again.

At this, the woman suddenly turned over and slapped his face with the back of her hand, as she railed at him, saying, "You lousy incorrigible fickle short-life! Keep it quiet or the maidservants will hear you. I know that you have someone else in your sights and no longer have a place for me in your heart. But where did you actually go off to today?"

"I was really dragged off by Ts'ui Pen to practice archery outside the city gate," replied Ch'en Ching-chi. "He managed to get me so drunk that I fell asleep on my return and failed to keep my date with you. Don't hold it against me. I saw the poem that you left on the wall and understand that you are annoyed with me."

"You crazy incorrigible trickster!" the woman retorted. "Stop shooting your mouth off that way, and shut up. Your tricks are as slippery as balls of mud. I won't let you get away with it. If it was really Ts'ui Pen who gave you too much to drink today, so that you came home drunk, how did this hairpin happen to end up in your sleeve?"

"That's something I picked up the other day in the garden," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "It was only two or three days ago."

"You're still ready to:

Outwit the spirits and confound the ghosts,

are you?" the woman exclaimed. "What garden did you pick it up in? You'd have to pick up another one just like it for me to take you seriously. This pin is one that Meng the Third, that pockmarked whore, wears in her hair. My identification of it is:

As certain as certain can be.

It even has her name engraved on it, yet you think you can pull the wool over my eyes. No wonder, the other day when I was away from home, she is said to have invited you into her quarters for a meal. The truth is you've been:

Playing at sevens and eights,

with her. When I taxed you with it, you refused to acknowledge anything. But if you haven't been engaged in hanky-panky with her, how did this pin of hers end up in your hands? You must have been revealing things about me to her. No wonder she smiled at me the way she did the other day. What you told her about me must have lain behind it. From now on:

You be yourself, and

I'll be myself.

Just as the mung bean loses its color when peeled:

You can get lost."

Thereupon, Ch'en Ching-chi became so disturbed that he began:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,

as he wept, saying, "If I've had:

So much as a thread's worth of commerce,

with her, I hereby invoke the numinous powers of the God of the Eastern Peak and the God of Walls and Moats, who will see that I do not live to the age of thirty; that I am afflicted with:

Boils as big as bowls, and

Three to five years of jaundice;

and such thirst that:

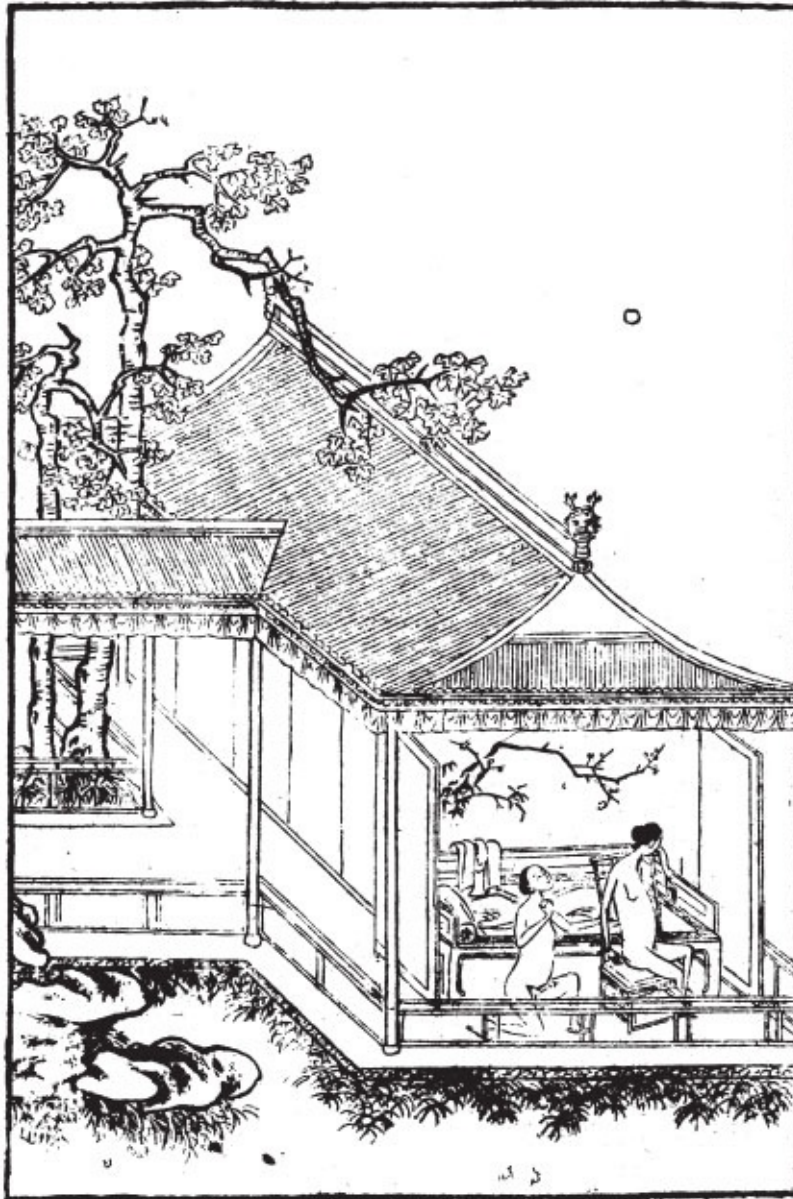
When I want soup, there will be none to be had;

When I want water, there will be none to be had."

The woman still refused to believe him and said, "You lousy nincompoop! Swearing such oaths, as though you were

suffering from a toothache! It's a wonder you're not ashamed of yourself."

The two of them continued to go at it for some time until, observing that it was late at night, they saw no alternative but to divest themselves of their clothes and lie down next to each other on the bed. The woman made a point of turning over with her back to him and venting her spite by refusing to pay him any attention. Allowing him to plead, "Sister this, and sister that," her only response was to reach back and scratch his face with her hand, which so unnerved Ch'en Ching-chi that he felt he had to suppress his anger without uttering a sound. They squandered the remainder of the night without his being able even to blunder his way into her cunt. When the day dawned, fearing that the maidservants would get up, he felt compelled to climb over the wall as before and return to his quarters in the front compound. There is a song to the tune "Helping the Drunkard Back Home" that testifies to this:



P'an Chin-lien Reveals an Ardent Heart but Cold Demeanor

My mouth rubs against the oily fret
on the top of her head;
Her back is pressed against the skin
of my chest and belly.
I am not able to nuzzle her fragrant cheeks
to left and right;²⁰
But can only breath into the hollows in the
back of her neck.
All night long I cannot catch even a
glimpse of her face,

But can only contemplate the back of
her ivory comb.²¹

Gentle reader take note: Subsequently, Chin-lien returned this hairpin to Ch'en Ching-chi; and later still, after Meng Yü-lou had married Li Kung-pi and moved to Yen-chou prefecture, Ch'en Ching-chi produced this pin as evidence for the claim that Meng Yü-lou was his elder sister, in the endeavor to consummate a surreptitious affair with her. Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou would not only evade this trick of his but coerce Ch'en Ching-chi into suffering the calamity of incarceration. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it. Truly:

The three luminaries cast shadows, but
who can catch them:
The ten thousand things have no roots, they
just arise of themselves.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

CH'IU-CHÜ, HARBORING RESENTMENT, REVEALS A CLANDESTINE AFFAIR; CH'UN-MEI TRANSMITS A NOTE TO FACILITATE A LOVERS' RENDEZVOUS

It is laughable, but Hsi-men Ch'ing's perception
leaves much to be desired;
This fact encourages his peach and plum blossoms
to smile in the spring breeze.
Under his layers of embroidered quilts
there sleeps a rogue;
With three meals of delicacies a day
he nurtures a tiger.
Enamored of her person, his son-in-law
covets his concubine;
Attracted by his wealth, he is prepared
to do his father-in-law in.
And there is yet another privilege
worthy of consideration;
Traversing rooms and entering chambers
he can dally as he likes.¹

THE STORY GOES that when P'an Chin-lien saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had climbed over the wall and departed at the crack of dawn, she felt regret over the way she had treated him.

The next day was the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and Wu Yüeh-niang rode in her sedan chair to the Ksitigarbha Nunnery where Nun Hsüeh resided in order to burn a coffer of paper money on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf in celebration of the Ullambana Festival.² Chin-lien and the others escorted Yüeh-niang to the front gate and then returned inside. Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all went back to the rear compound, but Chin-lien lagged behind and, on reaching the ceremonial gate to the front courtyard, ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who had gone up to the second floor of Li P'ing-erh's quarters to fetch some articles of clothing that had been pawned and was on his way out with the package in hand.

Chin-lien called him to a halt and questioned him, saying, "Although I criticized you with a few words last night, how come you jumped up and left in such a huff this morning? Are you really trying to break off your relationship with me?"

"How can you say such things?" retorted Ch'en Ching-chi. "Who got any sleep last night anyway? You gave me such a hard time all night as to nearly do me in. Just take a look at the scratch marks you left on my face."

"You lousy short-life!" the woman swore back at him. "If you haven't been engaged in hanky-panky with her:

The thief suffers from a sense of guilt.

Why did you run out on me that way for no good reason?"

Ch'en Ching-chi reached into his sleeve and pulled out a slip of paper. When the woman unfolded it and took a look, it turned out to be inscribed with a song to the tune "Mistletoe" that read as follows:

On the slightest pretext, she starts
to abuse me;
Even going so far as to scratch
at my face.
I humble myself and experience humiliation
in a thousand ways,
But whatever I say, she wants to call it
quits with me.
The word "quit" is enough to make me feel
consternation at heart.
"My cunning loved one, you are being both
ungrateful and unjust."³
When your eyebrows have lost their color,
who will repaint them for you?"⁴

When Chin-lien had finished reading this, she laughed, saying, "If you are really innocent, come to my place tonight and I will interrogate you further."

"You gave me such a hard time," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "that I didn't get a wink of sleep all night. I will have to catch up on my sleep during the daylight hours."

"If you fail to show up," said Chin-lien, "I'll hold you to account."

When she had finished speaking, the woman returned to her room while Ch'en Ching-chi took the pawned articles of clothing back to the shop and continued to conduct business for a while, after which he returned to his quarters, sprawled out on the bed, and went to sleep. He could hardly wait for night to fall so he could go over to Chin-lien's quarters. Unexpectedly, however, by twilight the sky grew dark, and outside the window the pitter-patter of falling raindrops became audible. Truly:

The rustling sound in the courtyard⁵
is made by evening rain;
The drip of raindrops upon plantain
leaves seems never-ending.

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the rain was falling heavily, he said to himself, "What unobliging weather. Just when she has asked me to come resolve things with her today, it has unexpectedly begun to rain. How depressing and debilitating."

Thereupon, he commenced:

Waiting for long periods as well as short,
for the rain to end, but it did not stop and continued to fall with a swishing sound until the night watches began, so copiously that the water poured off the eaves. The young man could not wait any longer for the rain to stop, so he wrapped himself in a madder red blanket. Wu Yüeh-niang was at home at the time, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yüan-hsiao were in the rear compound and had not come back out yet. Thereupon, he locked the door to his quarters, went into the garden in the pouring rain through the postern gate on the west side of the front courtyard, and gave a push to the gate into Chin-lien's quarters.

The woman, who was certain that he would show up that evening, had already instructed Ch'un-mei to befuddle Ch'iu-chü with several goblets of wine and go sleep with her in the room with the k'ang. For this reason, she had left the gate closed but unlocked. When Ch'en Ching-chi pushed at the gate and saw that it was ajar, he slipped inside and went straight into the woman's bedroom, where he saw that:

The gauze window was half open,
Silver candles were burning high,
while the table was spread with wine and delicacies, and
Golden goblets were filled to the brim.

When the two of them had sat down:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,
the woman asked him, "If you have not been carrying on with Meng Yü-lou, how did this hairpin fall into your hands?"

"It was something that I picked up in the garden under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis the other day," Ch'en Ching-chi replied. "If I am not telling the truth:

May I suffer death and annihilation."

"As long as you are innocent," the woman said, "I'll give this pin back to you to put in your hair. I don't want to confiscate anything of yours. But you must be sure to keep whatever pins, sachets, handkerchiefs, and keepsakes that I have given you safe and sound. If you lose track of a single one of them I'll take you to task."

The two of them drank wine and played board games together until the first watch before they:

Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

They then:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
and kept at it for fully half the night. The woman took all of the arts of the bedchamber that she had formerly practiced with Hsi-men Ch'ing and tried them out on her lover during a single night.

To resume our story, during the night, from her position in the adjacent room, Ch'iu-chü overheard what sounded like a male voice speaking but did not know who it was. When the cock crowed at dawn the next morning, she got up to urinate and suddenly heard the sound of the door being opened in the adjoining room. In the hazy moonlight, it had not yet stopped raining. On looking through the window, she saw someone draped in a red blanket on his way out the door.

"That looks like Ch'en Ching-chi," she said to herself. "So it turns out that he's been sleeping with my mistress, night after night. She is forever protesting her own virtue in front of other people, while all the time she's been carrying on an affair with her son-in-law."

That day, she went straight back to the kitchen in the rear compound and told Hsiao-yü, thus and so, all about what she had seen.

She did not anticipate that Hsiao-yü, who was on friendly terms with Ch'un-mei, would go tell her about it, saying, "That Ch'iu-chü from your place says that your mistress is carrying on an affair with her son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi. Yesterday, he spent the whole night in her room, and he only left this morning. His wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Yüan-hsiao did not spend the night in the front compound."

When Ch'un-mei returned to Chin-lien's quarters, she told her all about it, word for word, and concluded, "If you don't give that slave a few strokes of the rod, but allow her to carry on this way with her:

Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue,
you might as well be giving her the license to do you in."

On hearing this, Chin-lien became enraged, summoned Ch'iu-chü into her presence, and made her kneel down before

her, saying, "I told you to boil up some congee, but you only managed to break the pot. I dare say:

The hole in your bottom's so big:

Your mind has dropped out,

or something of the sort. Since I haven't beaten this slave for several days, her bones have begun to itch."

Thereupon, taking up a rod, she gave her thirty cruel strokes on the back with all her strength until she:

Howled like a stuck pig,

and the skin on her body was broken.

At this point, Ch'un-mei came over and said, "Mother, these few strokes that you've given her will do no more than scratch her where she itches. You ought to strip her naked, call in a page boy to give her twenty or thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo, and see if that will induce any fear in her. To merely touch her up with these few strokes, as if you were playing with a monkey, is:

Hardly enough to discolor the water.

Brazen as she is, do you really think she's afraid of you? As a slave, it is her duty to see that:

Words spoken inside do not get out, and

Words spoken outside do not get in.

To let her get away with such things is to nurture a talebearer in your own household."

"Who said anything anyway?" Ch'iu-chü protested.

"Still shooting off your mouth are you?" the woman said. "You home-breaking master-betraying slave! Don't you say another word."

With these imprecations she impelled Ch'iu-chü to flee back to the kitchen. Truly:

When a mosquito gets slapped with a fan,

It is for hurting people with its mouth.⁶

One day, on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Chin-lien secretly invited Ch'en Ching-chi to enjoy the moon and drink wine with her that evening, and join with Ch'un-mei in playing the board game called Turtle Pachisi with each other. That night, in the desire to get more rest, they overslept and had not yet gotten up by the time for their morning repast, thereby opening themselves to the risk of exposure. They did not anticipate that Ch'iu-chü would see what they were up to and promptly go back to the door of the master suite in the rear compound to tell Yüeh-niang about it. It so happened that she was engaged in combing her hair at the moment, and Hsiao-yü was standing in attendance by the door.

Ch'iu-chü drew her aside and told her, "Last night, our son-in-law, thus and so, once again spent the night in my mistress's room, and right now he hasn't even gotten up yet. The other day, when I informed you what they were up to, my mistress gave me a beating; but today I saw the evidence clearly with my own eyes. I am not traducing her. Ask your mistress to go over there quickly and see the situation for herself."

Hsiao-yü reviled her in response, saying, "You:

Open-eyed and brazen-faced,

slave! You're just trying to do your mistress in once again. My mistress is combing her hair. You'd better get out of here."

Yüeh-niang overheard them and asked, "What are you talking about?"

Hsiao-yü:

Could not conceal the situation,

but only said, "The Fifth Lady has sent Ch'iu-chü to ask you to go have a word with her," without mentioning anything else.

When Yüeh-niang had finished combing her hair, she:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,

and showed up all of a sudden at the door of Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound. No sooner did Ch'un-mei catch sight of her than she rushed inside to inform Chin-lien of her arrival. Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi were still ensconced under the bedclothes and had not yet arisen. On hearing that Yüeh-niang had shown up, the two of them suffered quite a start and were thrown into such consternation that they were barely able to extricate themselves in time for Ch'en Ching-chi to conceal himself behind the frame of the bedstead, in the hope of hiding the situation by:



Ch'iu-chü Resentfully Discloses a Clandestine Affair

Drawing an embroidered quilt over it.

Chin-lien had Ch'un-mei place a low table on the bed and bring her a beaded floral ornament which she could pretend to be working on.

In no time at all, Yüeh-niang came into the room and sat down, saying, "Sister Six, since you still hadn't ventured out the door, I wondered what you were up to, but it turns out that you've been in your bedroom working on a beaded floral ornament."

Picking it up in her hand and examining it, she complimented her, saying, "Your handiwork is really skillful. You've created a sesame flower design in the center, and a pattern of lattice-shaped interlocking lozenges on either side, surrounded with a motif of 'honeybees rifling chrysanthemum blossoms.' You've also fitted the beads neatly together, one after the other, to create the motif of 'joined hearts.' It really looks attractive. In the future, I hope you'll make a similar piece for me to wear as a headband."

Only after the woman saw that the words Yüeh-niang addressed to her were friendly, did:

The little fawn in her heart cease its hopping,
and she was able to order Ch'un-mei to pour some tea for her.

Soon afterwards, when Yüeh-niang had finished her tea and chatted for a while, she got up to go, saying, "Sister Six, as soon as you finish combing your hair, come back to the rear compound for a visit."

Chin-lien promised to come and saw Yüeh-niang out the door, after which she hurriedly urged Ch'en Ching-chi to get

on his way and return to the front compound. Ch'un-mei and her mistress had both broken into a sweat over the situation.

"The First Lady doesn't ordinarily come to my quarters without any reason," the woman said to Ch'un-mei. "If she didn't have any pretext for doing so, why should she have come here so early in the morning today?"

"In all probability it was because of something this slave of ours said to her," replied Ch'un-mei.

In a little while, who should turn up but Hsiao-yü, who told them, thus and so, "Ch'iu-chü came back to the rear compound and claimed that our son-in-law has been here in your room:

Sleeping from morning to night,

And then from night to morning.

I gave her a piece of my mind, but she wouldn't budge. When my mistress asked what was going on, I didn't reveal anything but said that the Fifth Lady had sent Ch'iu-chü to invite her to come have a word with her. That's why she came, but you must keep this to yourself.

A great person does not deign to notice

the faults of petty persons.

But you had better be on your guard against that slave of yours."

Gentle reader take note: Although Yüeh-niang did not believe the tales that Ch'iu-chü had told, she was apprehensive lest Chin-lien, who was still:

A young and delicate lass,

and who no longer had a husband, as time went on, might someday succumb to a momentary temptation. She feared that if word of this got out, it would lead gossipers to say, "Although Hsi-men Ch'ing was a person to be reckoned with during his lifetime, it did not take long after his death for the women in his household to end up:

All at sevens and eights."

"They may even suggest that this child of mine is:

Of questionable origin;⁷

with the result that, though:

Everything may remain sweet-smelling at home,

Our reputation will become malodorous abroad."⁸

In addition, out of affection for her stepdaughter, she told Hsi-men Tachieh not to venture outside the premises and had her move into Li Chiao-erh's vacant quarters, so that she and Ch'en Ching-chi could reside inside the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds. When it was the turn of Manager Fu Ming to go home, she arranged for Ch'en Ching-chi to take turns with him in staying overnight in the shop. She also ordained that when he had to come inside or go out in order to fetch articles of clothing or pharmaceutical supplies, he should be accompanied by Tai-an. All the doors were to be kept locked, and the maids and servants' wives were all prohibited from leaving the premises except on specific errands. Everything was to be strictly enforced.

As a result, the vibrant feelings that existed between P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi were frustrated. Truly:

Pleasing relationships in this world

are often interrupted;

The finest of prospects fail to last

as long as people like.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

How can he ever visit the T'ien-t'ai Mountains
in pursuit of immortal maidens?

The Three Isles of the Blest remain invisible,
hidden amid the waves of the sea.

To vanish inside a nobleman's gates is to be
as unreachable as the ocean depths;

From this point on, one's lover might as well
be a stranger along the highway.⁹

After P'an Chin-lien's clandestine affair had been exposed by Ch'iu-chü, although Yüeh-niang did not quite believe it, she saw to it that all the doors in the household were locked at night; that Hsi-men Ta-chieh moved into Li Chiao-erh's vacated quarters; and that whenever Ch'en Ching-chi had occasion to fetch pharmaceutical supplies or articles of clothing he would be accompanied by Tai-an or P'ing-an on the way in or out. As a result, the ardent feelings between the two of them were frustrated, and they were not able to get together for a month or more. Chin-lien found:

Each and every day increasingly insufferable,

Amid embroidered drapes upon a lonely pillow.

She could hardly endure:

The desolation of her painted chambers.

She couldn't help feeling affected by:

The eye alongside the wood, and

The heart beneath the field.¹⁰

She became:

Too indolent to rearrange her makeup;¹¹

Her intake of tea and food diminished;
The belt around her waist grew loose;¹² and
She started listlessly to wither away.

Every day:

All she wanted to do was to sleep, and
She could hardly keep her head up.¹³

Ch'un-mei approached her and said, "Mother, why is it that for the last few days you haven't gone back to the rear compound for a visit, or taken a stroll in the garden to relax yourself? Every day, you merely give vent to:

Long sighs as well as short.

Really, what's it all about?"

"You don't understand the intensity of the feelings between myself and our son-in-law," the woman replied.
There is a song to the tune "Wild Geese Alight" that testifies to this:

He and I are like a double-headed lotus blossom
growing on the same stem,
Or the inseparable fish that swim in pairs,
having only one eye apiece.
On first meeting, we became as ardent
as though glued together.
To be suddenly separated in this way
is difficult to endure.
How strange can things get?
For the last couple of days, he has
not come in to see me;
And the First Lady has taken to
locking the gate.
Even the dog in the garden is
acting queerly.
It's hard to guess why.
The maidservants are looking
askance at me.
It is hard to bear.
This yearning for him is hard
to eradicate.

"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you can relax. It's not a problem.

Even if the sky should be about to fall,

There are the four giants to hold it up.

Yesterday, the First Lady arranged to have the two nuns recite a precious scroll here this evening, so the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds will be locked early. Tonight, I'll claim that I have to go to the stable out front to get some straw with which to stuff a pillow, which will give me an opportunity to go summon him from the shop. If you will write a note to him and give it to me, whatever happens, I'll contrive to make it possible for our son-in-law to have a rendezvous with you. What do you think about it?"

"My good sister," the woman said, "if you are willing to take pity on me, and arrange for him to show up:

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never be able to forget it.¹⁴

When I recover from my indisposition, I'll make you a pair of shoes fully decorated with floral patterns."

"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? You and I are like one person. Moreover, Father is dead. In the days to come, no matter whether your circumstances improve or decline, I would like to share them with you, so that we can stay together."

"If you really feel that way," the woman said, "I could hardly ask for anything better."

The woman thereupon:

Lightly grasping the ivory tube, and
Gently spreading the flowered paper,¹⁵

proceeded to write out a note and seal it securely.

That evening, the woman was initially in the rear compound with Yüeh-niang, when she pretended not to be feeling well as an excuse for disappearing like:

A golden cicada molting its skin.

Upon returning to the front compound, she remained idly in her quarters with nothing to do. Early in the evening, Yüeh-niang saw to it that the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds was closed, after the maids and servant wives had been allowed out, and then settled down to listen to the nuns recite their precious scroll.

Meanwhile, Chin-lien enjoined Ch'un-mei to deliver her note, saying, "My good sister, go and invite him to come here as soon as possible."

There is a song to the tune "The Sixth Lady from West of the River" that testifies to this:

Enjoining Ch'un-mei, she says,
"My good sister,
Be so good as to release your
oceanic generosity.
This night is our only chance
to get together.

Ch'a!
Step along as fast as you can,
As fast as you can.
Under my piles of embroidered quilts,
I await him here."¹⁶

Ch'un-mei said, "Wait until I get that slave Ch'iu-chü drunk with a few goblets of wine and lock her into the kitchen; after which, I'll make the excuse that I'm taking a basket to the stable out front in order to fetch some straw for stuffing a pillow, which will give me an opportunity to summon him."

Thereupon, she poured out two large bowls of wine, saw to it that Ch'iu-chü drank them, locked her in the kitchen, and went out the door with the woman's note in hand. There is a song to the tune "Wild Geese Alight" that testifies to this:

"I'm off to the stable on the pretext
of fetching straw.
Once I get out front, I'll be able
to summon him.
On my way back, I'll get the dog
out of the way,
And see that the lock is left
hanging on the door.
The goblets will be filled with wine;
The lamps by the bed will be covered.
The bed curtains will be warm in the spring night;
Ready for the mating of male and female phoenixes.
I will not let anybody know about it;
And will see that Ch'iu-chü is drunk.
When you see the waving of the flower shadows,
you'll know that he has come.
This evening, I guarantee that the two of you
will have a successful tryst."

Ch'un-mei went out to the front of the residence, filled a basket with straw, and then proceeded to the door of the pawnshop and called to be let in. At the time, Manager Fu Ming was not in the shop, having gone home for the night. Only Ch'en Ching-chi was there, having just sprawled out on the k'ang. On suddenly hearing that someone was calling at the door, he asked who it was.

Ch'un-mei responded by saying, "It's your mother from a former incarnation, the one of the Five Plague Spirits whose job it is to dispel lovesickness."¹⁷

When Ch'en Ching-chi opened the door and saw who it was, his face broke into a smile, and he laughed, saying, "So it's you, young lady. There's no one else here. Come inside and sit down."

On coming into the room, she noticed a candle burning on the table, and asked, "Where are the page boys?"

"Tai-an and P'ing-an are sleeping in the pharmaceutical shop," Ch'en Ching-chi replied. "I'm here all by myself. The one who is:

Enduring loneliness, and
Suffering desolation,

is none other than your humble servant."

"My mistress wishes me to convey her greetings to you," said Ch'un-mei, "saying, what a fine person you are, not to have come near her door for all these days, or paid a visit to our quarters. She claims you must have set your eyes on another target, and no longer care for the likes of us."

"How can she say such a thing?" Ch'en Ching-chi protested. "Ever since she was exposed to that idle gossip the other day, the First Lady has seen fit to:

Secure the doors and secure the gates,
so that my movements have been restricted."

"All on your account," said Ch'un-mei, "during these last few days, my mistress has been as unhappy as can be. Every day she is:

Disconsolate and inconsolable,"¹⁸

doesn't feel like eating or drinking, and is far too distracted to work. Today, the First Lady asked her to stay in the rear compound and listen to the recitation of a precious scroll, but she refused and came back to her quarters. She is wholeheartedly obsessed with longing and begged me to deliver this note to you, in the hope that, whatever happens, you will come to her as soon as possible."

Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the note and noticed that it was carefully sealed. When he opened and read it, it turned out to be a song to the tune "Mistletoe" that read as follows:

This peach blossom face of mine,
All on your account, has become emaciated.
It is not because, pitying the flowers and loving
the moon,¹⁹ I suffer from spring ennui;
But rather because, this spring's regrets are no
less than those of earlier springs.²⁰
It is merely a case of my pearly tears having run
dry,²¹ on account of my lovesickness.
What I regret is that, as the lamp shines on my

embroidered bed curtains, I am alone.
Though I long to have him in my studio,
He is so far away the horizon is closer.²²

When Ch'en Ching-chi had read the text of this song, he bent his body and made a deep obeisance to Ch'un-mei, saying, "I have put you to a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble. I didn't know that she was suffering so. It is true that I have failed to visit the two of you. Pray, don't take it amiss. Don't take it amiss. You can go ahead. As soon as I get myself together, I'll come after you."

He then opened the door of the wardrobe and took out a white satin handkerchief, and a silver chatelaine with three pendant toothpicks, and gave them to her as a reward for her efforts. Thereupon, he embraced Ch'un-mei and laid her on the k'ang, after which the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each others' tongues, unable to contain their delight. Truly:

Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying;
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.

There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:

Her eyebrows lightly penciled,
her comb stuck askew;
She has no heart to continue
doing her embroidery.
Deep within cloudy windows,
in misty chambers;
Quietly seated in her study she
practices calligraphy.

Beautiful as can be,
Ever more lovely;
She is a goddess incarnate,
unknown to this world.
At first glance, one might say she
resembles a plum blossom;
But on closer examination, the plum
blossom is not her equal.²³

At the time, after the two of them had played with each other for a while, Ch'un-mei took the straw and returned to Chin-lien's quarters, where she told the woman, word for word, about what had happened, saying, "I summoned him, and he will be here momentarily. Upon reading that note of yours, he was as pleased as could be and bowed deeply to me, rewarding me with a handkerchief and a set of silver toothpicks."

"You go outside and take a look," the woman said. "He may be on his way in. Don't let the dog bite him."

"I've already put the dog out of the way," said Ch'un-mei.

It so happens that it was the sixteenth or seventeenth day of the eighth month at the time, just after the Mid-Autumn Festival, so the moon was shining brightly.

To resume our story, after Ch'en Ching-chi had gone over to the pharmaceutical shop next door and called on P'ing-an to come take his place, he took off for the garden so fast that his feet:

Beat out a festive paradiddle as he went.

Finding the front gate to the garden locked, he made his way in through the postern gate, headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters, and shook the branches of the woody hibiscus tree as a signal of his arrival. When Ch'un-mei saw the flowery branches moving on the other side of the wall, she promptly responded with a cough and told the woman he had come. Ch'en Ching-chi pushed open the gate, slipped inside, and proceeded straight to her room.

The woman greeted him at the door with a smile, saying, "A fine person you are, not to have visited me for so long!"

"I was concerned not to make trouble for either of us," he said, "so I chose to stay away for a few days. I didn't know that you were so unhappy about it.

I have been remiss about keeping in touch with you."²⁴

The woman said, "There is a song to the tune 'Four Variations' that testifies to this:

Simply because of some idle gossip,
You have let our love, as deep as the sea,
suddenly go awry.
For these several days, you have not even
approached my door;
Keeping my heart on tenterhooks.
My tenderhearted lover,
How can you thus forsake me?"²⁵

The two of them sat down together, while Ch'un-mei secured the postern gate, set up a table in the room, and laid out an array of wine and delicacies on it. The woman and Ch'en Ching-chi sat down:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.

Ch'un-mei seated herself to one side and poured the wine.

With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,

Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
they drank for a time, while the three of them set out the pieces for the game of Turtle Pachisi and proceeded to play it together. As they began to become inebriated, the woman, with:

Her captivating eyes all a blur,
Her raven locks somewhat askew,

got out Hsi-men Ch'ing's bag of sexual implements, including the "Ladies Delight," the aphrodisiac called "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties," the silver clasp, and the "Titillating Bell," a full complement of sexual aids, and instructed Ch'en Ching-chi in how to use them.

Under the gleam of lamplight, the woman then:

Stripped her body completely naked,
and reclined faceup on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair. Ch'en Ching-chi also stripped himself so that not a stitch of silk remained on his body, above or below, sat down on a chair facing her, took up an album illustrating the twenty-four positions²⁶ for sexual intercourse, and set out to emulate the behaviors depicted.

The woman then said to Ch'un-mei, "You get behind our son-in-law and give him a push when he needs it. I'm afraid he's worn himself out."

Ch'un-mei actually went behind him and proceeded to push as Ch'en Ching-chi's organ penetrated the woman's vagina and he:

Moved back and forth, retracting and thrusting,²⁷
Producing a pleasurable sensation,
That was completely indescribable.²⁸

To resume our story, Ch'iu-chü slept in the kitchen at the rear of the premises until the middle of the night, when she got up to relieve herself. Finding herself unable to open the door into the courtyard because it was latched shut on the other side, she managed to reach around with her hand and detach the latch. Under the brightly shining moon, she proceeded with:

Skulking step and lurking gait,
to make her way up to the front window, where:

Moistening a hole in the paper,²⁹
with her saliva, she was able to look inside.

Within the room, illuminated by lamps and candles shining ever so brightly, she saw the three persons, all quite drunk and stark naked, carrying on for all they were worth. The three of them were clustered together, two of them going at it while seated on facing chairs, while Ch'un-mei stood behind Ch'en Ching-chi propelling him forward like a cart. Behold:

One of them shows total disregard
for the status of her husband;
The other does not discriminate between
above and below, exalted or humble.
One of them, panting for all he is worth,
Sounds like an ox snoring in the willow's shade.
The other, as her coy cries reverberate,
Resembles an oriole warbling among the flowers.
One of them, seated on his chair, shows off
the passions evoked by clouds and rain;



Ch'un-mei Transmits a Note to Facilitate a Lovers' Tryst

The other swears into her partner's ears
to be as faithful as the hills and seas.
One of them, in her widow's chamber,
transforms it into a pleasure ground;
The other, before his mother-in-law,
turns things into a realm of lechery.
One of them takes all Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual aids
and bestows them on her son-in-law;
The other, emulating Han Shou's stealing of perfume,³⁰
conveys it all to his light of love.³¹

Truly:

Signing a compact never to be separated
during this lifetime;
They agree to be happily bound together
in the life to come.³²

At the time, all of this was clearly observed by Ch'iu-chü.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,
“She still persists in protesting her own virtue in front of other people and intends to beat me, but today I have seen the truth of the matter with my own eyes. Tomorrow, I’ll report it to the First Lady, and she can hardly claim that I am falsely accusing them with my:

Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue.”

Thereupon, after spying on them until she might well have ejaculated:

“Is it not delightful?”

she returned to the kitchen and went to sleep.

The three of them kept at it until the third watch before finally going to sleep.

The next morning, before dawn, Ch’un-mei got up before the others and went to the kitchen, where she found the door to be ajar, and interrogated Ch’iu-chü about it.

“You might well ask,” responded Ch’iu-chü. “I had an urgent need to urinate and went outside to piss. I had to unlatch the door in order to get into the courtyard to relieve myself.”

“You preternatural slave!” said Ch’un-mei. “Why didn’t you use the chamber pot in the room?”

“I didn’t know there was a chamber pot in the room,” responded Ch’iu-chü.

The two of them continued to bicker there at the rear of the premises, while Ch’en Ching-chi got up at dawn and vanished into the front compound. Truly:

With two hands he tore open the road
between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through
the gate to perdition.

Chin-lien subsequently asked Ch’un-mei, “What was that fuss out back about?”

Upon Ch’un-mei telling her, thus and so, how Ch’iu-chü had managed to open the door during the night, the woman was enraged and planned to give Ch’iu-chü a beating.

Ch’iu-chü, meanwhile, had gone back to the rear compound once again to report to Yüeh-niang about what she had seen, but Yüeh-niang responded with a shout and cursed her, saying, “You lousy slave, you’re just trying to do your mistress in! The other day, you came back here for no good reason and started:

Talebearing and embroidering on the facts,
saying that your mistress was hiding our son-in-law, Ch’en Ching-chi, in her room, where they were:

Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning.

You urged me to go see for myself, but when I arrived your mistress was sitting in front of a bed table, stringing beads for a floral ornament, and Son-in-law Ch’en was nowhere to be seen. Later on, he came in from the front compound. You’re nothing but a slave who is bent on destroying her mistress. How could she have hidden a full-grown man in her room? Even a sugar figurine or a wooden doll would turn up, no matter where you concealed them. You can hardly suggest that she managed to secrete him in her cunt. If word of this should get out, those who know the truth of the matter will say that it was you slaves who did in your mistress; but those who don’t will say that in the past Hsi-men Ch’ing managed to subdue any number of women, but it did not take long after his death for the women of his household to end up:

All at sevens and eights.

They may even go so far as to question the paternity of this child of mine.”

Thereupon, she threatened Ch’iu-chü with a beating, but she was so intimidated that she fled back to the front compound:

Running as fast as though she had wings,³³
and no longer dared to report anything to the rear compound.

When Chin-lien heard that Yüeh-niang had expelled Ch’iu-chü from her presence, and refused to believe her allegations, she became even bolder than before and amused herself by composing a song for Ch’en Ching-chi’s benefit, to the tune “Red Embroidered Slippers,” that testified to her feelings:

When we meet to enjoy the clouds and rain,
don’t let any word leak out.
As for idle gossip, it’s not worth paying
more attention to than a fart.
What reason is there to be deterred by the
securest lock or tightest knot?
Those who wield spades to unearth the facts
will only hurt their wrists;
Those who seek to expose what we are up to
will wear out their throats.
The ardor of our feelings for each other will
only end up being enhanced.³⁴

When Hsi-men Ta-chieh heard about this episode, she privately interrogated Ch’en Ching-chi about it.

“How can you believe that delirious slave?” Ch’en Ching-chi responded. “Yesterday it was my turn to sleep overnight in the shop, so how could I have gone into the garden? Besides, the gate to the garden is kept locked all the time.”

“You lousy jailbird!” retorted Hsi-men Ta-chieh. “You had better stop shooting off your mouth. As for your doings:

 If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,
and word of it comes to my ears, or causes Mother to criticize me, while you continue to carry on:

 As free as you please,
you can give up any idea of continuing to share these quarters with me.”

Ch'en Ching-chi replied:

 “Gossip about pros and cons goes on all day;

 If you pay no heed to it, it will disappear.³⁵

No wonder talebearing slaves like her never come to a good end. It is clear that the First Lady doesn't take her seriously.”

“That's enough of that!” responded Hsi-men Ta-chieh. “As long as you're telling the truth, everything will be all right.”
Truly:

 Who could know that the heart of the young man

 is as flighty as a willow catkin,

 Or anticipate that the mind of his mistress is

 as capricious as tangled silk?

 If you want to know the outcome of these events,

 Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

WU YÜEH-NIANG CREATES A STIR IN THE TEMPLE OF IRIDESCENT CLOUDS; SUNG CHIANG UPRIGHTLY FREES HER FROM THE CH'ING-FENG STRONGHOLD

Winter and summer forever green, such phenomena
are seldom seen in this world;
The marvelous transformations wrought by Heaven
and Earth have created them.
Her virtuous example is not besmirched by the
grime of the mundane world;
She is chastely resolved to abide by her oath to
be united in the world below.
Her conspicuous rectitude has a numinous quality
that is utterly incomparable;
The patience with which she bears her widowhood
generates a lingering fragrance.
If the people of this world are curious about the
secret of everlasting life;
The truth of the matter is that virtuous behavior
is conducive to longevity.

THE STORY GOES that, one day, Wu Yüeh-niang invited her elder brother Wu K'ai to come and consult with her about her wish to make a pilgrimage to the summit of Mount T'ai in T'ai-an prefecture in order to burn incense in the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds.¹ When Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his last legs, she had sworn an oath to do so. Wu K'ai agreed to escort her on this mission and took care of procuring the incense, candles, paper money, and sacrificial offerings that she would need. Tai-an and Lai-an were also to accompany her, and donkeys were hired for them to ride.

Before taking her seat in her curtained sedan chair, she enjoined Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh to look after the house and instructed the wet nurse Ju-i, and the maidservants, to look after Hsiao-ko.

She went on to say, "The ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds is to be locked early if there is no reason to do otherwise, and you are not to venture outside the premises. Ch'en Ching-chi also must be instructed not to go out, and to look after the front gate along with Manager Fu Ming. I will probably be able to return home by the end of the month."

On the morning of the fifteenth day of the ninth month, she burned paper money to convey her intentions to the gods, and that evening, after announcing her departure before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, shared a farewell drink with her fellow wives. She also turned the keys to the master suite and the storerooms over to Hsiao-yü and enjoined her to look after the premises carefully.

The next morning, she got up at the fifth watch and prepared to depart. The whole entourage led out the mounts they had hired, and her sister wives came out to the front gate to see her off.

It was late autumn, and the weather was cold and the days short. They traveled two stages each day, covering sixty or seventy li, and sought out village inns before dusk in order to spend the night, resuming their journey early the next morning. On their way:

The autumn clouds were austere,
The frigid geese were desolate,
The trees were shedding leaves,
The landscape had turned bleak,²
Their gloom was insurmountable.³

There is a poem that testifies to the way Yüeh-niang traversed the distant mountains and passes in order to fulfill the vow she had made on her husband's behalf:

For her entire life her determined fidelity
will rival ice or frost;
Her little specimen of an immaculate heart⁴
is able to move Azure Heaven.⁵
For her husband's sake she promised to go as
far as the sacred mountain;
Along the thousand li of mountains and passes
her name exudes fragrance.

To make a long story short, of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell. After traveling for several days, they arrived at T'ai-an prefecture and were able to contemplate Mount T'ai. In truth, it is:

The number one famous mountain under Heaven.⁶
Its coiling base is rooted in the earth;
Its peak rises into the heart of Heaven.⁷
It lies between the ancient states of Ch'i and Lu;
And emanates an atmosphere of precipitous majesty.

When Wu K'ai saw that it was getting late, he conducted them into an inn to spend the night.

The next morning, they got up early in order to begin their ascent and headed toward the Tai-yüeh Temple, or Temple of the Eastern Peak, which is located at the foot of the mountain.

Sacred rites were observed here dynasty after dynasty;
Feng and Shan Sacrifices were held here age after age.⁸

It was the premier temple in the realm. Behold:

The temple is located at the Eastern Peak,
The mountain that rules over the universe.
It is the most venerable of all mountains,
The presiding director of the myriad gods.
If you lean on a balustrade at the summit,
You can see as far as the River of Weak Water
or the Isles of the Blest;⁹

If you climb the evergreens on the crest,
You will find yourself to be enveloped by the
thick clouds and thin fog.

Towers and terraces soar aloft,¹⁰
As though ready for the gold raven to spread
its wings and fly there;

Halls and galleries rise steeply,
As if prepared for the jade rabbit to leap
aloft and come to visit.¹¹

The temple features carved rafters and painted beams,¹²
And is enhanced with azure tiles and vermilion eaves.¹³

The translucent latticework on phoenix gates
brightens the yellow silk;
From the tortoiseshell-patterned embroidered
drapes hang brocade tassels.

Gazed at from afar, the sacred images,
With their nine-tasseled crowns, show the eyes
of Shun and the eyebrows of Yao;¹⁴
Seen close up, the aspects of the gods,
Dressed in dragon robes, display the shoulders
of T'ang and the back of Yü.

The Lord of Destiny of the Nine Heavens,¹⁵
Is adorned with a hibiscus cap, enhancing his
robe of crimson silk;

Ping-ling, Duke of Awesome Transcendence,¹⁶
Is clad in a yellow robe, set off by a girdle
of Indigo Field jade.

To their left are arrayed officers wearing
jade pins and pearl-studded shoes;¹⁷

To their right stand officials with purple
sashes and golden seals of office.¹⁸

The whole edifice exhibits an air of gravity,
Defended by three thousand armor-bearing generals;
The two corridors exude a martial atmosphere,
Protected by a hundred thousand ironclad soldiers.

Underneath the Hao-li Hill,¹⁹

The Assessor presides over the seventy-two
bureaus of the underworld;

Within the White Mule Shrine,²⁰

The tutelary god regulates the twenty-four
 terms of the solar year.
 The iron-faced Defender-in-chief of the
 lakes of fire,
 Day after day, shows off his powers;
 The General of the Five Ways who rules
 life and death,
 Year after year, reveals his potency.
 The burning of sacred incense never ceases,
 As the celestial spirits on their flying steeds
 convey their vermilion texts;
 The sacrifices are celebrated on schedule,
 As both old and young express their hopes for
 the granting of good fortune.
 Within the Chia-ning Hall,
 Propitious clouds hover densely;
 Outside the Southern Gate,
 Auspicious vapors swirl around.²¹

Truly:

A myriad citizens come to worship in the
 Temple of Iridescent Clouds;
 Within the four seas, all pay homage to
 the God of the Eastern Peak.²²

Wu K'ai conducted Yüeh-niang to the Tai-yüeh Temple, where she proffered incense in the main hall and paid obeisance before the sacred image of the God of the Eastern Peak. A Taoist head priest stood beside her and intoned the text of her declaration. She then went on to burn paper money before the images in the two corridors and eat a vegetarian meal, after which, they embarked on the climb to the summit, ascending the forty-nine switchbacks, and:

Grabbing the vines and grasping the creepers,²³ to help them on their way up. The golden edifice of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds seemed to be suspended in space, shrouded in clouds and mist, forty-five li above the foot of the mountain. From its vantage point, one could look down upon the wind-blown clouds and thunderstorms below. Yüeh-niang and her entourage had set out from the Tai-yüeh Temple at 8:00 that morning, and after climbing the switchbacks and reaching the summit it was after 4:00 P.M. before they arrived at the Golden Edifice of the Goddess, which was adorned with a vermilion plaque, with the three characters Temple of Iridescent Clouds inscribed in gold. They entered the temple and paid obeisance to the gilded image of the goddess. What did it look like? Behold:

On her head is coiled a nine-dragon
 flying-phoenix coiffure;
 Her body is clad in a gown of red silk
 enhanced with golden threads.
 From her girdle of Indigo Field jade
 is suspended a lengthy flap;
 She lifts a white jade scepter between
 her variegated sleeves.
 Her face resembles a lotus blossom,²⁴
 Her natural-looking eyes and brows
 enhance her cloudy locks;
 Her lips are like gilded vermilion,
 Her euphoric demeanor embellishes
 her snow-white physique.
 She looks like the Queen Mother of the West
 feasting at the Jasper Pool;
 It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down
 from her palace in the moon.
 The majestic quality of her immortal demeanor
 is impossible to depict;
 The dignified bearing of her figure would be
 difficult to delineate.²⁵

When Yüeh-niang had finished paying her obeisance to the image of the goddess, she noticed that the head priest of the temple was standing beside her. He looked to be about forty years old, was short in stature, and sported a three-forked beard, bright eyes, and white teeth. On his head he wore a Taoist cap, held in place with a pin, his body was clad in a crimson robe, and on his feet he wore a pair of shoes with cloud-patterned toes. Stepping forward, he proceeded, on

her behalf, to intone the text of the declaration she had prepared in fulfillment of her vow, ignite the incense in a gilded brazier, and burn the paper money and imitation gold and silver ingots, after which, he told a young acolyte to accept the sacrificial offerings she had brought.

It so happens that this Taoist head priest was not the sort to abide by his lot. He was the principal disciple of Abbot Chin of the Tai-yüeh Temple at the foot of the mountain, and his name was Shih Po-ts'ai. He was an extreme example of:

The sort who are covetous of wealth
and given to lust;
The kind who pander to the powerful
and broker events.

In this area there was a character known as Year Star Yin, whose real name was Yin T'ien-hsi, who was the younger brother of the wife of Kao Lien, the prefect of T'ai-an. He was accustomed to leading a bunch of vagrants:

Sporting bows and flaunting arrows,
Along with their falcons and hounds,

to engage in scrutinizing the hordes of female pilgrims from all quarters who were visiting the two temples, above and below. His reputation was such that no one dared to cross him. The Taoist priest Shih Po-ts'ai endeavored to curry favor with him by:

Disguising his iniquitous intent,
and luring females into his abbot's quarters, where Yin T'ien-hsi was free to slake his lust on them in whatever way he liked.

When Shih Po-ts'ai saw that Yüeh-niang possessed:

An unusually attractive countenance,
and was wearing a mourning cap, indicating that she must either be a woman from an official's family or a female member of a powerful household, and that she was accompanied by an elderly man with a gray beard, and two domestic page boys, he came forward and saluted them in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, expressed his thanks for their offerings, and said, "Will you two benefactors not come into my abbot's quarters for a cup of tea?"

"Don't bother to trouble yourself," responded Wu K'ai. "We are about to go down the mountain."

"Even though you plan to descend the mountain," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "there is time enough yet."

In no time at all, he succeeded in persuading them to come into his abbot's quarters. The walls of the chamber were covered with snow-white plaster. At the head of the room stood a couch with a sesame flower design and willow-yellow brocaded curtains. Above an incense stand in a position of honor there was suspended a scroll painting that depicted the scene of Lü Tung-pin flirting with the courtesan White Peony.²⁶ To either side of it there hung scrolls with the two lines of a parallel couplet written in large characters of varying vividness that read:

Raising two sleeves swelled by a clear breeze
we posture like cranes;
Facing a chamber suffused with bright moonlight
we expound the scriptures.

When Shih Po-ts'ai asked Wu K'ai his name, he replied, "My surname is Wu, and my given name is K'ai. This is my younger sister, née Wu, who has come to fulfill a vow that she made on behalf of her deceased husband. But we should not impose on your exalted establishment."

"Since the two of you are related," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "be good enough to sit down together in the seats of honor."

He then sat down himself in the position of host and directed his disciples Shou-ch'ing and Shou-li to serve the tea.

It so happens that he had two disciples, one of them named Kuo Shou-ch'ing and the other Kuo Shou-li, both of whom were fifteen years old and naturally endowed with good looks. They wore black satin Taoist caps on their heads, their topknots were held in place by red cords with two floating ribbons dangling behind, on their bodies they wore black silk Taoist robes, and their feet were clad in sandals and white socks. From their bodies:

A fragrant aroma assailed the senses.

When guests arrived, they were there to:

Serve tea or serve water,
Pour wine and serve food;

while at night, they were available for Shih Po-ts'ai to hump from behind like a carrier hugging a trunk, using them to:

Assuage his lust and gratify his hunger.

Although ostensibly they were the disciples of the head priest, in actuality they were nothing more than the master's concubines. And there is yet another feature that is hardly mentionable, which is that each of them, when they took down their trousers, had a large sanitary napkin strapped over his crotch to prevent the leakage of urine.

Gentle reader take note: All families with good boys and good girls should be sure never to deliver them to Buddhist monasteries or Taoist temples to leave the family and become monks or priests, Buddhist nuns or Taoist priestesses. Once exposed to those:

Male thieves and female whores,
nine out of ten of them are likely to be victimized. There is a poem that testifies to this.

For what purpose are Taoist sanctuaries and
Buddhist temples established?
The Taoists worship their Heavenly Worthies,

the Buddhists worship Buddha.
They are beautifully landscaped in order to
give a false sense of purity;
Providing for visitors and welcoming guests
they engage in perverse doings.
Accountering their disciples with attractive
clothes and handsome outfits;
They make use of wanton wine and leisured tea
in ravishing female beauties.
How sad that the tenderly nurtured offspring
of respectable families;
Should be entrusted to such monastics only to
serve as their concubines.

Before long, the two disciples, Shou-ch'ing and Shou-li, set up a table in the room and laid out a vegetarian repast including mouth-watering sweetmeats, pastries, steamed and fried vegetarian dishes, and an assortment of other delicacies that filled the entire surface of the table. The first-class Sparrow Tongue tea, brewed with sweet water, was served in cups of white Ting-chou porcelain, with silver teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves. When they finished their tea and the utensils had been cleared away, a selection of delicacies to go with the wine was served in:

Large platters and large bowls,
consisting of chicken, goose, fish, duck, and other such nonvegetarian fare.
Pouring amber-colored wine,
Into chased silver goblets,
The wine flowed in golden ripples.²⁷

When the wine was served, Yüeh-niang wished to take her leave and called for Tai-an to come forward with a bolt of muslin and two taels of silver on a red lacquer tray and present them to Shih Po-ts'ai as an expression of their gratitude.

"We ought not to put your esteemed temple to so much trouble," said Wu K'ai. "These paltry gifts are merely an expression of our gratitude to Your Reverence. There is no need for you to offer us wine and food. It is growing late, and we must set out to descend the mountain."

This threw Shih Po-ts'ai into such consternation that he expressed no end of thanks, saying, "Untalented as I am, it is only thanks to the generous patronage of the Goddess that I am serving as the head priest of the Temple of the Iridescent Clouds here on the sacred peak, where I am dependent on the contributions received from the four quarters. Were I not to use these funds to entertain the donors from the four quarters, what should I use them for? And now, having offered merely these meager refreshments, I have put you to the trouble of presenting me with these generous gifts. You put me in a position in which it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept."

Only after repeatedly refusing to accept the proffered gifts did he finally direct his disciples to put them away.

Endeavoring to detain Yüeh-niang and Wu K'ai, he said, "Be so kind, whatever else you do, as to return to your seats for a little while, and imbibe three cups of wine. By so doing you would allow me to fully express my humble feelings."

When Wu K'ai saw how assiduously they were being pressed to stay, he felt obliged to sit down again with Yüeh-niang.

In no time at all, some heated delicacies were served, and Shih Po-ts'ai said to his disciples, "This wine is hardly worth drinking. Go and open that jug of lotus blossom wine with its penetrating fragrance that His Honor Prefect Hsü gave me the other day so we can share it with His Honor Wu."

Before long, his disciples brought in another heated flagon and poured out the warm wine, the first cup of which Shih Po-ts'ai offered to Yüeh-niang with both hands, but she refused to accept it.

"My younger sister is not accustomed to drinking wine," said Wu K'ai.

"My lady," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "You may encounter wind and frost along the way. Have a little. What harm can it do. Just drink a moderate amount."

So saying, he poured out half a cup for Yüeh-niang and another cup for Wu K'ai, saying, "Your Honor Wu, take a taste of this wine to see how you like it."

Wu K'ai drank a mouthful, and finding it to be:

Fragrant, sweet, and delicious,
With a robust and lingering flavor,
said, "This is indeed a fine wine."

"I would not deceive you, venerable sir," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "but this wine was given to me by His Honor Prefect Hsü of Ch'ing-chou. His elderly lady, his daughter, and his son come to the Temple of the Eastern Peak every year to burn incense and sponsor a performance of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal.

Their relationship with me is extremely close.

Both his daughter and his son were brought here to undergo the ceremony of having religious names bestowed upon them under the aegis of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds. On seeing that I:

Possessed a placid disposition,
Was devoted to burning incense,
And was invariably trustworthy,

they have shown me both respect and affection. In the past, half the resources of these two temples at the foot and the

summit of the mountain have been subject to taxation, but in recent years, thanks to the benevolent patronage of His Honor Prefect Hsü, who has memorialized the throne to suspend these exactions, these resources are no longer taxed but are allowed to remain in the possession of the temples to be expended first of all on the worship of the goddess and secondly on the entertainment of incense-burning pilgrims from the four quarters."

While this parley was taking place in the abbot's quarters, down below, Tai-an, Lai-an, and the chair bearers who had brought them were provided with a place to sit down and were served soup, rice, and other snacks along with wine and meat in:

Large platters and large bowls,
until they had eaten their fill.

Gentle readers take note: Since Shih Po-ts'ai had concealed Yin T'ien-hsi on his premises and inveigled Yüeh-niang into his quarters with a view to giving him an opportunity to consummate a secret liaison with her, he could hardly fail to do whatever he could to play up to her.

After drinking several cups of wine, Wu K'ai saw that it was getting late and wanted to get up and go, but Shih Po-ts'ai said, "The sun is about to set, and it is already too late for you to make your descent of the mountain. If you are not unwilling to stay overnight in my quarters, it would be easier for you to go down the mountain tomorrow morning."

"It so happens that we have left some luggage in the inn," said Wu K'ai, "and I fear that our absence might give petty people an opportunity for mischief."

Shih Po-ts'ai laughed at this, saying, "There is no reason to worry about that. If anything untoward should occur, and it became known that you were on a pilgrimage to our temple, the inhabitants of the villages and inns would be scared to death. How do you suppose they would like it if the innkeepers were dragged into the prefectural yamen and given a taste of the squeezers to induce them to uncover the whereabouts of the culprits?"

Upon hearing this, Wu K'ai continued to sit in his place while Shih Po-ts'ai poured him another large goblet of wine. When Wu K'ai became aware how potent the wine was, he concealed it under his clothing, pretended to be drunk, and asked to be escorted to a bathroom, after which he expressed a desire to be given a tour of the temple sanctuary. Shih Po-ts'ai, accordingly, directed his disciple Kuo Shou-ch'ing to accompany him, gave him the keys needed to open the doors, and sent Wu K'ai off to explore the premises. Wu Yüeh-niang was physically exhausted and wanted to lie down on the bed for a nap. Shih Po-ts'ai responded by going outside to sit down and locking the door behind him.

This turned out to be one of those occasions on which,

Something was destined to happen.

No sooner had Yüeh-niang sprawled out on the bed than she suddenly heard the sound of a clatter as a man jumped out from inside the paper partition behind the bed. He had a pink complexion with a three-forked beard, was about thirty years old, wore a dark black hat on his head, and was dressed in a blouse and trousers of purple brocade.

Embracing Yüeh-niang with both arms, he said, "My name is Yin T'ien-hsi, and I am the younger brother of Prefect Kao Lien's wife. I have long heard that you are the spouse of a prominent official and are endowed with looks that entitle you to be called a national beauty. I have:

Thought about you for a long time,
And thirsted for a glimpse of you,
But have lacked a way to meet you.²⁸

Now that I have encountered your memorable person:

Such good fortune would suffice for three lives;
I will find it hard to forget either dead or alive."

So saying, he forced Yüeh-niang back down on the bed and proposed to take his pleasure with her.

Yüeh-niang was panic-stricken at this and called out in a loud voice:

"The world is at perfect peace;
The universe is shining bright."²⁹

How can you bring yourself to manhandle a decent person's wife this way?"

She attempted to make her escape, but Yin T'ien-hsi would not let her go and knelt down before her, saying, "My lady, pray be quiet, and favor me by complying with my urgent request."

Yüeh-niang responded to this by calling out for help, again and again, in an even more strident voice than before.

When Lai-an and Tai-an heard this, and recognized it to be Yüeh-niang's voice, they ran back to the sanctuary in a state of obvious agitation to look for Wu K'ai, calling out, "Brother-in-law, bestir yourself. Our mistress is in the abbot's quarters engaged in an altercation with someone."



Wu Yüeh-niang Shakes Up the Temple of Iridescent Clouds

Wu K'ai promptly made his way:

Covering two steps with every one,
back to the abbot's quarters and tried to push open the door but was unable to do so.

He heard Yüeh-niang shout out in a loud voice:

"The world is at perfect peace,
what do you think you're doing trying to imprison a female pilgrim here?"

At this, Wu K'ai called out, "Sister, don't panic. I'm here."

So saying, he picked up a piece of rock and used it to smash open the door. When Yin T'ien-hsi realized that someone was on his way in, he promptly let go of Yüeh-niang and disappeared in a cloud of dust behind the bed. It so happens that Shih Po-ts'ai had set things up so that there were escape routes behind all the beds on the premises.

When Wu K'ai managed to smash open the door to the abbot's quarters, he asked Yüeh-niang, "Sister, did that rascal succeed in defiling you, or not?"

"He did not manage to defile me," said Yüeh-niang, "but the rascal got away from behind the bed."

Wu K'ai went out to look for Shih Po-ts'ai, but he had hidden himself away, merely sending his disciples out to deal with the situation. Wu K'ai was infuriated by these developments and ordered the servants who had accompanied him, including Tai-an and Lai-an, to smash up the doors, windows, and walls of the abbot's quarters. He then escorted Yüeh-niang outside the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds, where they got into their sedan chairs and set off to

descend the mountain.

It was dusk when they started out, and it took half the night before they reached their inn at the foot of the mountain before dawn and told the innkeeper, thus and so, what had happened.

The innkeeper:

Repeatedly expressed his dismay,³⁰

saying, "You ought not to have done anything to disturb that Yin T'ien-hsi. He is the younger brother of the wife of the prefect of T'ai-an and is known as Year Star Yin. After you have gone, he will take out his resentment by making trouble for us innkeepers. He will never be willing to call it quits."

Wu K'ai responded by giving him a tael more than the charge for their lodgings, collected their luggage, and, escorting Yüeh-niang's sedan chair, set off as fast as they could go. Behind them, Yin T'ien-hsi, who was reluctant to let them get away, came down the mountain in hot pursuit, at the head of a bunch of twenty or thirty idlers, armed with broadswords and short sticks.

Meanwhile, Wu K'ai and his entourage:

Covering two stages in the time for one,³¹

arrived during the fourth watch at a hollow in the hills, where they saw a light glimmering in the distance. When they approached closer, they found that it was a cavern in the rock in which an old monk was reading a sutra by candlelight.

Wu K'ai addressed him, saying, "Master, we had gone to the summit to burn incense when we were driven away by some ruffians and forced to flee down the mountain.

In the murky darkness of the night,³²
we have arrived here after having:

Missed the track and lost our way.³³

Permit me to ask you, Master, what is the name of this place, and how can we get home from here?"

"You are on the eastern spur of Mount T'ai," the elderly monk responded, "and this cave is known as the Snow Stream Cave. I am called Ch'an Master Snow Cave, and my religious name is P'u-ching.³⁴ I have been engaged in religious practice here for twenty or thirty years. You have been fated to encounter me here, and you ought not to proceed any further tonight. There are innumerable:

Wild animals, tigers, and leopards,³⁵

on the lower slopes of the mountain. If you continue on your way early tomorrow morning, there is a highway leading straight to your home in Ch'ing-ho district."

"I fear those ruffians may still be pursuing us," said Wu K'ai.

P'u-ching took a look outside and said, "There is nothing to fear. Those ruffians, after coming halfway down the mountain, have already gone back where they came from."

He then asked Yüeh-niang her name, and Wu K'ai said, "This is my younger sister, the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing. We came here in order to present incense on behalf of her deceased husband and have been fortunate enough to be rescued by you.

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

We will never dare to forget it."

Thereupon, they proceeded to spend the rest of the night in the cavern.

The next day, during the fifth watch, Yüeh-niang got out a bolt of muslin and offered it to the priest, but P'u-ching refused to accept it and said, "Instead of that, why don't you allow me to induct a son of yours into the religious life so he can serve me as a disciple. How would you feel about that?"

"My younger sister," said Wu K'ai, "has only a single son and expects him to succeed to the family inheritance. If she should bear another son, she might be willing to let him leave the family and become a disciple of yours."

"My son is still an infant," said Yüeh-niang, "and is less than a year old. He is scarcely ready for anything like that."

"All you need to do is promise him to me," said P'u-ching. "I have no need for him at present, but ten years from now I may ask you for him."

As for Yüeh-niang:

From her mouth no word was uttered,



Master P'u-ching Recruits an Acolyte in Snow Stream Cave

but she thought to herself, "Ten years from now, I can decide what to do then."

Consequently, she agreed to promise her son to P'u-ching.

Gentle reader take note: She should never have promised to let her son leave the family and enter the religious life as a disciple of the priest. Ten years later, when:

The empire was in a state of disorder,³⁶

Yüeh-niang took Hsiao-ko and fled to Honan province to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou, but she lost her way and encountered P'u-ching in the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where he spirited her son away into a life of Buddhist celibacy:

Taking the tonsure and becoming a priest.³⁷

Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.

That day, Yüeh-niang and her entourage said good-bye to P'u-ching and proceeded on their way. After traveling all day, they came to a mountain that obstructed their path. This mountain was called Ch'ing-feng Mountain and presented a formidable appearance. Behold:

From all eight sides it appears towering;
From all four angles it looks precipitous.
Curious-looking pines adorn its summit
with their coiled greens;

Branches of ancient trees are tangled
 amid their hanging vines.
 Waterfalls fly through the air,
 Assailing the senses with their chill³⁸ and
 causing hairs to stand on end;
 Cliffs descend straight down,
 Reflecting bright light into the eyes and
 awakening the dreaming soul.
 The gurgling of the streams is audible;
 The sound of the woodman's axe is heard.
 Peaks and summits rise up in profusion;
 The cries of the mountain birds are sad.
 Deer congregate in their swarming herds,³⁹
 Foxes connive together in their cliques;
 Traversing the brambles as they leap
 their way back and forth,
 Seeking their prey with howls as they
 run forward and backward.
 Standing on the grassy slopes,
 As far as the eye can see there are
 no travelers' inns;
 Traversing the mountain paths,
 On every side there are merely the
 graves of the dead.
 If this is not a place where Buddhist
 monks practice religion,
 It must be a lair from which outlaws
 commit their atrocities.⁴⁰

It so happens that this Ch'ing-feng Mountain had a stronghold called the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold located on it that housed three outlaw chieftains, one of whom was called the Brocade Tiger, Yen Shun; one of whom was called the Short-legged Tiger, Wang Ying; and one of whom was called the Palefaced Gentleman, Cheng T'ien-shou.⁴¹ They had a troop of five hundred followers serving under them who devoted themselves solely to:

Housebreaking and highway robbery,⁴²
 Setting fires and killing people,

so that no one dared to interfere with them.

On this occasion, as Wu K'ai and his entourage, riding their donkeys and escorting Yüeh-niang's sedan chair, proceeded to make their way into the mountain, the sun had already set, and:

In the darkness of the night,

there were no villages or roadside inns to be seen. Just as they were becoming apprehensive about the dangers of their situation, a horse-tripping rope was thrown out that snagged Wu K'ai's mount and tumbled him into a pit.

It so happens that the brigands at the foot of the mountain had seen Yüeh-niang's sedan chair and Wu K'ai's entourage coming up the mountain slope and reported it to the three outlaw chieftains, who dispatched a bunch of brigands to seize their luggage and escort them all up to their stronghold. At the time, the three outlaw chieftains were having a drink with Sung Chiang, the hero from Shantung whose cognomen was Opportune Rain, and who had taken refuge there after slaying the singing girl Yen P'o-hsi.⁴³ The three outlaw chieftains had invited him to stay at their stronghold for a few days.

When Sung Chiang saw that Yüeh-niang wore a mourning cap over her chignon, was clad in plain white mourning garments, and that:

Her deportment was upright and correct,
 And her countenance exquisitely shaped,⁴⁴

he concluded that:

She was surely not the spouse of an ordinary person,
 But must be the dependent of a well-to-do household.

He therefore proceeded to ask for her name.

At this, Yüeh-niang stepped forward, bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations," and then addressed him with the words, "Your Highness, my maiden name is Wu, and I am the wife of the deceased Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing, for whom I am maintaining a chaste widowhood. When my husband became seriously ill, I swore an oath to come offer incense on his behalf at Mount T'ai; but when I was on the summit just a while ago I was assaulted by Yin T'ien-hsi, and we have been fleeing from him, all day and all night, in the attempt to make it safely home. How could we have anticipated that in the dark of night we would make the error of traversing the foot of this mountain of yours? We dare

not expect to retrieve the saddlebags containing our luggage, but would plead with you to spare our lives. If we should succeed in returning safely home we will feel fortunate indeed.”

When Sung Chiang observed the sad and moving tone of Yüeh-niang’s words, he felt a degree of compassion for her and, bowing to Yen Shun, said, “This lady is the wife of an official who once presided over some colleagues of mine, and:

With whom I was slightly acquainted.⁴⁵

She came here in order to offer incense on behalf of her husband and, because she was pursued by Yin T’ien-hsi, made the mistake of trespassing on the precincts of this mountain of yours. She is a woman of courageous virtue. If you will only consent to let her go for my sake, it will allow her to preserve her integrity.”

To this plea Wang Ying responded, saying, “Brother, since I am so unfortunate as not to have a wife of my own, you should let me take her to serve as the matron of the stronghold.”⁴⁶

So saying, he directed his subordinates to seize Yüeh-niang and escorted her back to the interior of the stronghold.

At this, Sung Chiang turned to Yen Shun and Cheng T’ien-shou, saying, “Despite what I said, Brother Wang Ying is refusing to let me perform a good deed.”

“This brother of ours,” said Yen Shun, “is fine enough in most respects, but he is guilty of this one fault. Whenever he sees a woman possessed of feminine beauty, he lusts after her with fire in his eyes.”

Sung Chiang refused to drink any more wine and accompanied the other two to the interior of the stronghold, where they found Wang Ying in the act of embracing Yüeh-niang and attempting to take his pleasure with her.

Sung Chiang strode right up to Wang Ying and, seizing him with one hand, dragged him back to the front of the stronghold, saying, “Worthy Brother, if you wish to play the role of a hero, to exhaust the very marrow of your bones⁴⁷ in sexual indulgence is not the way to enhance your stature. If you wish to seek a wife, let me act as a go-between on your behalf, and I’ll secure a virtuous virgin for you, observing all the standard ritual practices, who will come and be your wife. What reason is there for you to lust after remarried goods?”

“Brother,” responded Wang Ying, “why not let me have my way, for better or for worse, in this matter?”

“That won’t do,” said Sung Chiang. “I, Sung Chiang, will certainly undertake to provide my worthy brother with a suitable bride in the future. The fact is that if you insist on taking this woman today, you will become a laughingstock to the denizens of the rivers and lakes. As for that rascal Yin T’ien-hsi, should I fail to be accepted by the bandit lair in Liang-shan Marsh, that will be that; but should I be accepted at Liang-shan, I will see to it that his treatment of this woman is avenged.”

Gentle reader take note: In later days, when Sung Chiang had arrived at Liang-shan and been chosen as the chieftain of the outlaw band there, because Yin T’ien-hsi tried to appropriate the garden of Ch’ai Huang-ch’eng, the Black Whirlwind Li K’uei was dispatched to deal with the situation and not only killed Yin T’ien-hsi but went on to wreak havoc at Kao-t’ang prefecture.⁴⁸ Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.

On that day, when Yen Shun heard what Sung Chiang had to say, he did not even ask for Wang Ying’s consent but ordered the chair bearers to approach and carry Yüeh-niang down the mountain.

When Yüeh-niang saw that she was being set free, she stepped up to Sung Chiang and bowed in appreciation, saying, “Your Highness has done me:

The favor of saving my life.”

“Ai-ya!” exclaimed Sung Chiang. “I am not the ruler of this mountain stronghold but am merely a sojourner from Yün-ch’eng district. It is these three chieftains to whom you should pay your respects.”

When Yüeh-niang had finished paying her respects, with Wu K’ai escorting her, she left the mountain stronghold, got into her sedan chair, and proceeded past Ch’ing-feng Mountain along the highway to Ch’ing-ho district. Truly:

Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In this world the heart of man alone
remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven
show him favor.⁴⁹
If the square inch of one’s heart is
devoid of evil;
Even amid wolves and tigers⁵⁰ one can
achieve success.⁵¹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

WU YÜEH-NIANG SURPRISES CHIN-LIEN IN THE ACT OF ADULTERY; AUNTIE HSÜEH AGREES TO SELL CH'UN-MEI ON A MOONLIT NIGHT

The trouble of bringing up daughters is
bound to be disillusioning;¹
To admit their husbands into the family
is even more inappropriate.
They may address their in-laws as parents,
but without genuine feeling;
They may choose to play the part of sons,
but their acting is specious.
On entering your home they will complain
of receiving inadequate love;
On leaving your household they are more
likely than not to hate you.
If they feel that they are not receiving
the treatment they deserve;
They can be counted upon to abuse their
spouses at least once a day.

THE STORY goes that Wu K'ai escorted Yüeh-niang on her way back until the day that she arrived home. But no more of this.

To return to our story, ever since Yüeh-niang had left home, P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi:

In both the front and rear compounds,
carried on with each other at home as though engaged in:

The mating dance of a cock and a hen.

Not a single day elapsed without their getting together.

One day, Chin-lien noticed that:

Her eyebrows were drooping, and

Her waistline was expanding;

all day long she suffered from:

Lassitude and drowsiness, and

Had no desire to eat anything.

Calling Ch'en Ching-chi into her room, she said to him, "I've got something I need to tell you. For the last several days:

My eyelids are reluctant to open,

My midriff is gradually expanding,

My belly feels quivering motions,

I don't feel like eating anything, and

My body feels extremely lethargic.

While your father-in-law was still alive I asked Nun Hsüeh for a fertility potion containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that would enable me to conceive, but nothing ever came of it. Now that he is dead, even though I haven't been involved with you for very long, I am already pregnant. It was in the third month that I last menstruated, and it has been only six months since then, but I already have half a bulge in my belly. In the past I have been quick to criticize the faults of others, but now it looks as though I am likely to become a target of criticism. You'd better not remain:

Still asleep in dreamland, but take advantage of the fact that the First Lady is away from home to go procure an abortifacient of some kind for me so that I can dispose of this fetus and be able to appear in public without embarrassment. Otherwise, if I have no alternative but to give birth to some benighted creature, I might as well commit suicide, for I won't be able to:

Raise my head and look people in the eye."

On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi said, "We have all kinds of pharmaceutical ingredients in our shop, but I don't know which of them might serve as abortifacients, and I lack any recipe for their concoction. But you can relax. It's not a

problem. That Dr. Hu who lives on Main Street is proficient at prescriptions, both great and small, palpation of the pulse, and the treatment of female disorders and has been called upon by our household in the past. I'll go and obtain a couple of prescriptions from him which you can take in order to abort the fetus."

"My good brother," the woman responded, "you'd better get a move on if you want to save my life."

Ch'en Ching-chi, thereupon, wrapped up three mace of silver and went straight to the gate of Dr. Hu's house and called to be let in. Dr. Hu was at home and came outside, where he greeted him with a bow.

Recognizing Ch'en Ching-chi as the son-in-law of the prominent official Hsi-men Ch'ing, he offered him a seat, saying, "I haven't seen you for some time. May I ask what brings you to my humble abode, and:

What it is you would have me do for you?"²

"There is nothing else I would trouble you with," said Ch'en Ching-chi as he withdrew the packet of silver from his sleeve and offered it to him. "This is to defray the cost of the drugs. If I might prevail upon you to prepare a prescription or two for me:

It would serve to affirm your goodwill."

"In my family's practice of medicine," responded Dr. Hu, "with regard to the preparation of complex prescriptions, palpation of the pulse, gynecology, pediatrics, internal or external medicine, the *Chia-chien shih-san fang* (Thirteen alterative prescriptions), the *Shou-yü shen-fang*, (Divine prescriptions for the realm of longevity), the *Hai-shang fang* (Overseas panaceas [from the Isles of the Blest]),³ and the various prescriptions for miscellaneous disorders, there is little that I have not mastered. I am also a specialist in the treatment of women both:

Before conception and postpartum.

Now blood is the fundamental element in female physiology. It is stored in the liver and flows out of the viscera, moving upward to form breast milk and moving downward to form menstrual emissions. It combines with semen to create the fetus. When a woman reaches her fourteenth year menstruation begins,⁴ her conception vessel begins to flow, and her menses start to occur at their monthly intervals, which are normally thirty days apart. If her blood and vital energy are out of harmony, there will be an imbalance between her yin and yang. If there is an excess of yang, her menses will occur earlier than usual. If there is an excess of yin, her menses will occur later than usual. It is the nature of blood that if it is hot it will flow, while if it is cold it will stagnate. Either an excess or a deficiency may induce disorder. Cold tends to produce white, and heat tends to produce red. When cold and heat are out of harmony, it is likely to result in red and white vaginal discharge. Generally speaking, when the blood and vital energy are appropriately balanced, the yin and the yang will be in harmonious accord; the semen and blood will converge with each other; and the fetus will be conceived in the uterus. The two pulses emanating from the heart and the kidneys can be palpated to monitor this development. Should the semen predominate, the fetus will be male. Should the blood predominate, the fetus will be female.

This is a self-evident principle.

In the early stages of pregnancy the most important thing is to tranquilize the fetus. Unless suffering from some other ailment, the pregnant mother should avoid taking any drugs or medications. After the ten months of pregnancy, when the time for parturition approaches, special care should be taken lest postpartum problems should develop. Beware! Beware!"

Ch'en Ching-chi laughed at this disquisition, saying, "I am not looking for a prescription to tranquilize the fetus, but for an abortifacient."

"Between Heaven and Earth,

Love of life is paramount,"

opined Dr. Hu. "Nine out of ten people only seek prescriptions that facilitate conception. How can you be looking for an abortifacient instead? I don't have any. I don't have any."

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that he was objecting to his request, he added another two mace of silver to the sum he was offering and said, "There is no reason for you to concern yourself about it. Individuals have their individual needs. The woman in question does not expect to have a safe delivery and consequently wishes to abort her fetus."

Dr. Hu accepted the silver, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll give you the prescription for a potion known as the Safflower Clean-Sweeper. If she takes it, in the time it would take her to walk five li the fetus will be discharged."

There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:

Take Radix Achyranthis, Eriocher Sinensis,
and Radix Euphorbiae,
As well as Magnetite, Radix Knoxiae, and
Daphnes Genkwa Flos,
Together with Cantharides, Hematite, and
Sal Ammoniacum,
And dissolve them in a mixture of mercury
and saltpeter.

Also add Semen Persicae, and Tetrapanax
Papyriferus,
Secretio Moschi, Adenophora Tetraphylla,
and Campsis Grandiflora,
And decoct them all in strong vinegar to
make the Safflower Potion.
You can be certain that the fetus of the
child will be discharged.

Ch'en Ching-chi, accordingly, purchased two doses of the Safflower Clean-Sweeper, bade farewell to Dr. Hu, and turned them over to the woman on returning home, explaining to her, word for word, what the doctor had said. That

evening, she decocted the Safflower Potion and proceeded to swallow it. Almost immediately her entire abdomen became filled with pain and, lying down on the k'ang, she had Ch'un-mei press and massage her belly. Who could have anticipated that:

Strange as it may seem,
in no time at all, when she sat down on the commode, the fetus was excreted. Claiming it to be only a menstrual discharge, she had Ch'iu-chü wrap it up in grass paper and discard it in the privy. The next day, when the workman came to empty the contents of the privy, he observed that it contained the plump white remains of a little male fetus.

As the saying goes:

Good deeds seldom become known beyond the gate;

Bad deeds are quickly transmitted a thousand li.

Before many days had passed, the members of the entire household, both high and low, were all aware that Chin-lien had been carrying on an incestuous affair with her son-in-law and had aborted her illegitimate fetus.

One day, Wu Yüeh-niang arrived home after having been away for half a month on her journey to and from T'ai-an prefecture. It was already the tenth month when she came home, and the members of the entire household, high and low, came out to greet her, feeling:

Just as though she had fallen from Heaven.

Upon arriving home, Yüeh-niang first burned incense to the gods of Heaven and Earth and the Buddha and then paid obeisance before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, after which, she told Meng Yü-lou and her other sister wives, as well as the members of the household, high and low, all about what had happened to her at the temple on the summit of Mount T'ai and in the mountain stronghold. When she had finished, she couldn't help weeping profusely. When the members of the household, high and low, had finished paying their respects to her, Yüeh-niang saw that the wet nurse Ju-i had brought Hsiao-ko with her so that mother and son were reunited. After she had finished burning paper money and serving wine to entertain Wu K'ai before he left, that evening her sister wives provided a feast in Yüeh-niang's honor to welcome her home. But no more of this.

The next day, Yüeh-niang, having braved:

The wind and the frost on her journey,
and been exposed to hardship and frightening events, found herself to be suffering from feelings of pain and lethargy throughout her body and continued to be indisposed for two or three days.

Meanwhile, Ch'iu-chü, having been exposed to:

An earful and a bellyful,
of gossip about what Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi had been up to, decided to go to the master suite and tell Yüeh-niang how the two of them had conspired to abort an illegitimate fetus and dispose of it in the privy, and how it had been discovered by the workman who came to empty the privy and consequently become public knowledge.

Because of the way her mistress had beaten and abused her, she could not contain her resentment, but when she went to the door of the master suite, Hsiao-yü, once again, spat in her face, boxed her ears, and cursed her, saying, "You lousy tale-telling slave! Get out of here. My mistress has just returned from a long journey and is feeling so unwell that she has not even gotten up yet. Get out of here at once. The last thing she needs is to hear something to upset her."

This abusive reception caused Ch'iu-chü to:

Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,

Nodding in assent and choosing to withdraw.⁵

One day it was one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

Ch'en Ching-chi came into Chin-lien's quarters to pick up some clothes that had been stored there by the pawnshop, and he and the woman proceeded to fall to it together in the Flower-viewing Tower on the second floor.

Ch'iu-chü took the opportunity to go back to the rear compound and summon Yüeh-niang to come see for herself what was going on, saying, "I have told you what they are up to at least two or three times, but you have not believed me. While you have been away the two of them have been getting together here at home:

Sleeping from morning to night,

And then from night to morning,

and now they have actually smuggled out an illegitimate fetus. She and Ch'un-mei have forged an alliance with each other, and today he and she are up to their evil shenanigans once again on the second floor. I have not been telling lies to you. You should come see for yourself as quickly as possible."

Yüeh-niang promptly set out for the front compound. The two of them were just in the thick of things and had not yet come downstairs.

Who could have anticipated that the parrot in a cage hanging under the eaves in Chin-lien's room was capable of speech and called out in a loud voice, "The First Lady is here."

Ch'un-mei, who was in the room at the time, heard this and came outside where she saw that it was Yüeh-niang. Before she could call the woman down from the upper floor, Ch'en Ching-chi, with the clothes he had come to fetch in hand, came downstairs and headed for the door.

Yüeh-niang took him strongly to task, saying, "My child, have you lost your memory? What have you come barging in here for:

As if you didn't know any better?"

"A customer is waiting in the shop," explained Ch'en Ching-chi, "and there was no one else available to come get his clothes for him."

"I left clear instructions," said Yüeh-niang, "that in that case you should send a page boy in to fetch things. What excuse could you have to invade a widow's quarters for no good reason:

As if you didn't know any better?

Such conduct is utterly shameless."

These accusations caused Ch'en Ching-chi to flee outside, as though:

Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,

There was no place for him to hide.

Meanwhile, the woman was so embarrassed that she did not venture to come downstairs for what seemed like half a day.

When she finally did come down, Yüeh-niang gave her a real dressing down, saying, "Sister Six, from now on you had better not continue to carry on so shamelessly. You and I are now widows, and our status is not what it was when we had a husband. Though:

Everything may remain sweet smelling at home,

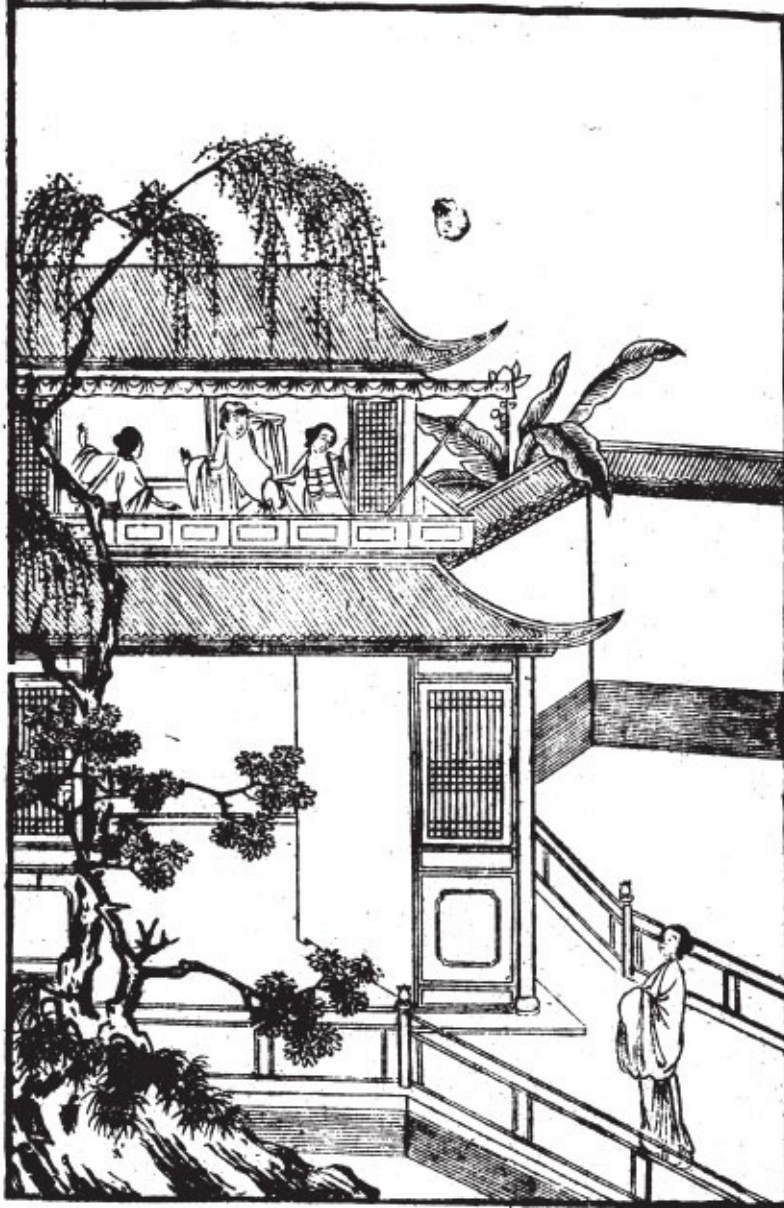
Our reputation will become malodorous abroad.

Even basins and jugs have ears.

What sort of shenanigans have you been up to with this youngster:

As if you didn't know any better?

You have given our servants reason to make unspeakably obscene allegations about you behind your back. As the sayings go:



Wu Yüeh-niang Catches Chin-lien in the Act of Adultery

If a man is untrustworthy,
 He's as weak as untempered steel;
 If a woman is unfaithful,
 She's as pliable as sesame candy.
 If one is upright,
 One will achieve one's aims without giving orders;
 If one is not upright,
 Though one may give orders they will not be obeyed.⁶

If you were resolute and straightforward in your conduct, you would not give the servants any reason to criticize you behind your back. They have complained to me about you several times in the past, and I did not believe them. But today, I have seen what you are up to with my own eyes, and it is unspeakable. As I have admonished you today, you must form a resolution to protect our husband's good name in the future. Take my own case; while I was away on my incense-burning pilgrimage I was threatened with violence and coercion by those ruffians two or three times. If I had not been rigorous in protecting my honor, I might never have been able to make my way home."

When Chin-lien was subjected to this tirade of criticism from Yüeh-niang, she was so embarrassed that her face became a patchwork of red and white blotches, and she denied the charges a thousand times over, saying, "I was on the

second floor burning incense, while our son-in-law Ch'en was in the storeroom nearby collecting his clothes. Whoever said so much as a word to him?"

At this juncture, Yüeh-niang, after disputing with her for some time, returned to the rear compound.

That evening in their quarters, Hsi-men Ta-chieh also took Ch'en Ching-chi to task, saying, "You lousy jailbird! You can hardly deny that you were caught red-handed with:

Irrefutable proof of your guilt,

yet you continue to babble on about it. What sort of shenanigans were the two of you up to on the second floor? It goes without saying that the two of you have been up to mischief together while keeping me in the dark just as though you had:

Put a water crock over my head.

That whore has stolen my husband while still trying to keep me entrained with her specious words.

Like the bricks in the privy:

She is both hard and smelly,

and seems to think she can still continue to ride herd on me. She's just like:

The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall:

The longer it stays there the hotter it gets.

And you seem to think that you can still go on scrounging for food in this household."

"You whore!" retorted Ch'en Ching-chi. "While your family has hold of my money, you have the nerve to accuse me of scrounging for food off them."

So saying, he headed off for the front compound in a fit of pique.

From this time on, Ch'en Ching-chi kept to the front compound, no longer daring to enter the rear compound without some legitimate excuse. When it was necessary to get anything from the storeroom, either Tai-an or P'ing-an would come inside and go up to the second floor to fetch it. Food for the midday meal was no longer brought out to the shop from the rear compound, leaving Manager Fu Ming in his hunger no recourse but to take money and go out on the street and purchase ready-made noodles to eat. Truly:

When the dragon battles the tiger,

The one hurt is the innocent fawn.

All the doors and gates were closed while the sun was still high in the sky. As a result, the amorous relations between Ch'en Ching-chi and Chin-lien were interrupted once again. Ch'en Ching-chi's original family home had been looked after and occupied for some time by his maternal uncle, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, who had forfeited his office and was residing there in retirement. Ch'en Ching-chi resorted to going there for his meals, both early and late, and Yüeh-niang did not even bother to inquire about it.

The two of them were separated for as much as a month without even seeing each other. For the woman, all by herself:

Each day was like three months of autumn;

Each night seemed like half a summer.

How could she endure:

The seclusion of her deserted chamber,

Or the scorching flames of her desire?

To even catch a glimpse of him was:

As difficult as difficult could be,

and between the two of them:

All communication had been cut off.

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:

There was no way he could gain access to her.⁷

Suddenly one day, he caught sight of Auntie Hsüeh as she passed by outside the gate, and it occurred to him that he might be able to prevail upon her to deliver a note to Chin-lien on his behalf that would:

Express his concern about their separation,

And serve to reveal his innermost feelings.

One day, on the pretext of going to settle accounts with a creditor outside the city gate, he rode his mount straight to the home of Auntie Hsüeh, tied up his mule, raised the hanging screen, and asked, "Is Auntie Hsüeh at home?"

Her son Hsüeh Chi's wife, Chin Ta-chieh, was sitting on the k'ang with her baby son in her arms, in the company of two girls that people had entrusted to Auntie Hsüeh to offer for sale as maidservants. When she heard someone calling for Auntie Hsüeh, she came out and asked who it was.

"It's only me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, and asked, "Is Auntie Hsüeh at home, or not?"

"Uncle, please come inside and have a seat," responded Chin Ta-chieh. "My mother-in-law has gone to someone's place to collect payment on a few items of costume jewelry that she is offering for sale. What have you got to say to her? I'll send someone to call for her."

So saying, she hastened to pour out a serving of tea for Ch'en Ching-chi.

After he had sat there for a little while, who should appear but Auntie Hsüeh, who came in and greeted Ch'en Ching-chi with a bow, saying, "Uncle, what wind has blown you to my home here?"

Turning to Chin Ta-chieh, she said, "Pour out some tea for Uncle to drink."

"He has just finished a serving of tea," said Chin Ta-chieh.

"I would not have bothered to come for no reason," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but I have been entangled, thus and so, with the Fifth Lady for some time, and now, thanks to the wagging tongue of that maidservant Ch'iu-chü, our liaison has been disrupted, and both the First Lady and my wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, have decided to turn a cold shoulder to me. My relationship with Sister Six is such that:

We can never agree to be separated,
but the two of us have been kept apart for some time now, and:

All communication has been cut off.

I would like to send a few words to her, but there is no one able to get inside for this purpose. That is why I have felt compelled to appeal to you in the hope that you might find some way, thus and so, to transmit a message on my behalf."

Reaching inside his sleeve, he brought out a tael of silver, and said, "This paltry gift is merely offered in the hope that you can use it to purchase some tea for yourself."

No sooner did Auntie Hsüeh hear him out than she fell to:

Clapping her hands and beating her palms,
as she laughed out loud, saying, "Whoever heard of a son-in-law making out with his mother-in-law? Such conduct is unheard of in this world. Uncle, tell me the truth. Really, how did you ever accomplish such a thing?"

"Auntie Hsüeh," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "pray keep your voice down, and stop scoffing at me. I have brought a sealed note here with me, and I hope that, for better or for worse, you will be good enough to deliver it to her for me tomorrow."

Auntie Hsüeh took the note with one hand, saying, "Ever since your First Lady returned from her pilgrimage I haven't gone to pay a call on her, so if I go do so now I can kill two birds with one stone."

"Where can I expect to hear back from you," asked Ch'en Ching-chi.

"I'll go look for you in the shop and report to you there," replied Auntie Hsüeh.

When they had finished their conversation, Ch'en Ching-chi mounted his mule and returned home.

To resume our story, the next day, Auntie Hsüeh took her box of trinkets and made her way first to the master suite in Hsi-men Ch'ing's house to pay a call on Yüeh-niang. After sitting with her for a while, she also went to visit Meng Yü-lou, and only then went to Chin-lien's quarters.

Chin-lien, at the time, had set up a table and was eating her congee.

When Ch'un-mei saw that the woman was:

Feeling depressed and unhappy,
she said, "Mother, you ought not to be so upset. Even the immortal maiden Ho Hsien-ku⁸ was falsely accused of having daily trysts with a lover.

When gossip over pros and cons is overheard,⁹

If you pay no heed to it, it will disappear.

But even the immortals of ancient times were sometimes guilty of:

The moral deficiencies of petty persons,¹⁰

not to mention the likes of you and me. Moreover, at present, Father is dead, and the First Lady has given birth to a posthumous son, who may also be said to be:

Of questionable origin.

Consequently, she is in no position to exert control over our private affairs. You might as well relax.

Even if the sky should be about to fall,

There are the four giants to hold it up.

For humans living in this world:

Every day that you enjoy is another day."

Thereupon, she poured out some wine and handed a goblet of it to the woman, saying, "Mother, drink a cup of this warmed wine in order to dissipate your depression."

Then, happening to notice that there were two dogs engaged in copulation beneath the steps, she said, "Since even animals enjoy this kind of pleasure, how can humans be expected to do otherwise?"

As they were drinking their wine, who should appear but Auntie Hsüeh, who came in, bowed in greeting, and said, "The two of you, mother and daughter, are certainly having an easy time of it."

Then, catching sight of the two copulating dogs, she laughed, saying, "What an auspicious omen for your house. As the two of you enjoy the sight, how could it help but relieve your depression?"

So saying, she proceeded to bow to them once again.

"What wind has blown you here today?" the woman asked. "And why has it been so long since you paid us a visit?"

So saying, she offered Auntie Hsüeh a seat.

"I don't know what has kept me so busy all day long," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but I just haven't had any spare time. When the First Lady returned from her pilgrimage to the summit of Mount T'ai I failed to visit her, and she expressed her disappointment to me just now. I also visited the Third Lady on the west side of the rear compound and she decided to purchase two pairs of turquoise ornaments and a pair of decorative pins to hold her chignon in place. She is inclined to handle things promptly and weighed out eight mace of silver for me on the spot. Unlike that Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound, who bought two pairs of velvet artificial flowers from me in the eighth month, which were worth two mace of

silver, but claims that she is short of cash and refuses to pay me. She is really a stingy sort. But may I venture to ask, why were you not anywhere to be seen?"

"I have not been feeling too well the last few days," the woman replied, "and have not been up and about."

Ch'un-mei proceeded to pour out a goblet of wine and offer it to Auntie Hsüeh, who promptly bowed in response, saying:

"If one drinks a cup of wine on entering the door."

At which, the woman interrupted her, saying:

"You'll bear a bonny baby someday."

"I'm no longer able to do so," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "but my daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, gave birth to a son only two months ago."

She then went on to say, "Since the death of your husband, you must have been feeling lonely for some time now."

"Needless to say," the woman responded, "if he were only here everything would be fine. But at present, the two of us are being:

Alternately broken up and ground down.¹¹

I won't deceive you, Auntie Hsüeh, but right now in this household:

When people are many, tongues are many.

Ever since the First Lady produced that son of hers, her attitude has changed, and our sisterly feelings are no longer as warm as they used to be. For the last few days, both because I have been feeling depressed and because I have been the target of malicious gossip, I have not gone back to the rear compound."

"It's all due to that slave of ours, Ch'iu-chü," explained Ch'un-mei. "While the First Lady was away from home, she made up an invidious story about my mistress out of thin air and dragged me into it as well, creating quite a disruption."

"So it was all the doing of that maidservant of hers," said Auntie Hsüeh. "How could she bring herself to betray her mistress that way? It goes without saying that:

If you don the black livery of a servant,

You must cling to even the blackest post.

That kind of conduct will never do."

At this, the woman turned to Ch'un-mei and said, "Go see what that slave is up to. I fear she may be eavesdropping on us."

"She's back in the kitchen picking up some rice," said Ch'un-mei. "That ruptured vessel of a slave serves in these quarters as:

Nothing but a leaky trough.

She habitually takes our private affairs and peddles them abroad."

"Since no one else is present," said Auntie Hsüeh, "we can hold a frank conversation. Yesterday, your son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi came to my place and told me, thus and so, what has been going on. So it turns out that she was the one responsible for exposing your affair. Ch'en Ching-chi told me that the First Lady has taken him severely to task, seen to it that all the doors are tightly secured, and prohibited him from coming inside to fetch clothes or pharmaceutical supplies. And that she has even gone so far as to move his wife Hsi-men Ta-chieh into the rear compound to reside in Li Chiao-erh's former quarters on the east side of the courtyard, and stopped sending food out to the shop for his lunch, so that he has been compelled to go to the home of his maternal uncle Chang Kuan for his meals. What sense does it make for her to refuse to trust her own son-in-law, but to put her trust in those page boys instead? He said that it has been some time since he has seen you and pleaded with me to deliver a note to you. He sends you his ardent regards and suggests that you should not allow yourself to be upset. After all, since your husband is dead, you might as well determine to go flat out and do what you want, no matter how much of a commotion it may cause. What is there to be afraid of?

Rather than fearing that a stick of incense

may produce smoke,

You might as well simply set it on fire and

let it go at that."

Thereupon, she took out the sealed note that Ch'en Ching-chi had entrusted to her and handed it to the woman. When she opened it and took a look she found that it contained nothing but a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers" that read as follows:

The fire in the Zoroastrian Temple¹²
burns my skin and flesh;

The Blue Bridge is flooded with water¹³
right up to my throat.

Though we try to repress it, the word
has been spread abroad.

Even if we should call it off, the
damage is already done.

If we should consummate the affair
it would be romantic;

But if we should not, they will still

contend that we did.¹⁴

After the words to the song, it read: "Addressed to the dressing table of Sister Six," followed by the inscription,

“Presented with a hundred salutations by Ch'en Ching-chi.”

When the woman had finished reading it, she tucked the note into her sleeve.

Auntie Hsüeh said, “He wants you to send a token of some kind back to him, along with a few words, so that he will know that I actually delivered his message.”

The woman told Ch'un-mei to share a drink of wine with Auntie Hsüeh while she retired into her room. After some time, she came out with a white satin handkerchief along with a gold ring. She had inscribed a song to the tune “Red Embroidered Slippers” on the handkerchief that read as follows:

On your account, I have had to anticipate
surprise and suffer fear;
On my account, you have gone so far as
to neglect your spouse.
On your account, I have stopped putting
on my rouge and powder;
On your account, I have had to disguise
my intentions before others;
On your account, I have had to resort to
deception with my servants.

As a consequence, the pair of us have both
become utterly distraught.¹⁵

When the woman had sealed these things up securely and handed them to Auntie Hsüeh, she said, “Convey my regards to him, and tell him that he ought not to let his temper get the better of him and persist in going to eat his meals at the home of his maternal uncle Chang Kuan. By so doing, he runs the risk of annoying his uncle to the point that he may complain, saying, ‘You conduct your business at the home of your father-in-law but come to my place to eat your meals, thereby giving people the impression that both households are hard up.’ If he doesn’t have anything to eat, tell him to take some money from the shop and use it to buy snacks for himself and Manager Fu Ming. If you continue to let your temper get the better of you and refuse to come inside, who have you got to blame but yourself? It seems he is just an example of the adage that:

The thief suffers from a sense of guilt.”

Auntie Hsüeh said, “I’ll convey your message to him.”

After the woman had also given her five mace of silver, Auntie Hsüeh said farewell, went out the door, and headed for the shop at the front of the compound to look for Ch'en Ching-chi.

The two of them went to a secluded spot where they could talk in private, and Auntie Hsüeh handed the sealed package to him and told him that the Fifth Lady had enjoined him not to let his temper get the better of him or express his resentment, but find a way to come inside when he wanted to; and to refrain from going to eat his meals at his uncle Chang Kuan’s place, lest he give him cause for annoyance.

She then showed him the five mace of silver, saying, “This is the reward given me by the lady inside.

The holes in the water clock let it all spill out.¹⁶

There is no reason to doubt that the two of you will get together again in the future, and if she were to mention it to you without my having revealed it, I would be embarrassed.”

“Auntie Hsüeh,” said Ch'en Ching-chi, bowing deeply to her, “I am greatly indebted to you.”

Auntie Hsüeh took a few steps on her way but then came back and said, “I almost forgot something. Just now, as I was leaving, the First Lady sent the maidservant Hsiu-ch'un to intercept me and invite me back to the rear compound. She asked me to return this evening and take Ch'un-mei away with me because she intends to sell her. She said that she had acted as a go-between for the two of you and colluded with her mistress in facilitating your adulterous affair. That is the reason she wants to get rid of her.”

“Auntie Hsüeh,” said Ch'en Ching-chi, “go ahead and take her to your place. I’ll come pay you a visit someday soon, because there is something I want to ask her.”

When their conversation was concluded, Auntie Hsüeh returned home.

Sure enough, that same evening, as the moon was rising, she came back to take Ch'un-mei away but went first into Yüeh-niang’s quarters.

“Originally,” said Yüeh-niang, “I purchased her from you for sixteen taels of silver, and now you can have her back for the same sum of sixteen taels of silver.”

She then turned to Hsiao-yü, and said, “You go out front with her to take care of things, and see that she leaves empty-handed. Don’t let her take any clothing with her other than what she has on.”

Auntie Hsüeh then proceeded out front and told the woman, thus and so, “The First Lady has sent me to take Sister Ch'un-mei away. She told me that you and she had been:

Colluding in chicanery,

in order to facilitate your clandestine adultery, and that she:

Didn’t care about the rights and wrongs,

of the situation, but only wanted to recover the original price she had paid for Ch'un-mei.”

When the woman heard that she was going to take Ch'un-mei away in order to be sold, she opened her eyes wide and was unable to say a word for what seemed like half a day.

Before she knew it, her eyes brimmed over with tears, and she said, “Auntie Hsüeh, you can see how hard it has been on the two of us to be without a man in our lives. And now, when our husband has been dead for such a short space of

time, she wants to get rid of his former bedmates. How can the First Lady be so bereft of human-heartedness, benevolence, and righteousness? Only because she has given birth to this piddling bladder's spawn of hers, she feels she can ignore the rest of us, and:

Trample us into the mud.

That child of Li P'ing-erh's lived for less than a year and a half and had not even come down with smallpox, measles, chicken pox, or rubella yet. Who knows what Heaven may have in store for her, yet her self-confidence is great enough to block out the sun."

"Has her son developed smallpox, or not?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.

"No he hasn't," the woman responded. "After all, he's not even a year old yet."

"Ch'un-mei tells me," said Auntie Hsüeh, "that when Father was alive he took his pleasure with her."

"Took his pleasure with her indeed!" responded the woman. "That dead devil treated her as though she were as important to him as his vital organs.

She had but to say one thing,

And he would comply with ten.

Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold.

As a result, his legitimate wife who was in charge of the household had to take a back seat. If she wanted him to give a page boy ten strokes with the cane, Father would not venture to give him even as many as five."

"It's outrageous!" exclaimed Auntie Hsüeh. "The First Lady is making a mistake to act this way. To send off an attractive young woman who has been favored by her husband without allowing her to take a trunkful of her belongings with her, or even an outfit of clothing, but requiring her to leave empty-handed, will not seem right in the eyes of the neighbors."

"Did she actually tell you not to let her take even an outfit of clothing with her?" the woman asked.

"The First Lady," replied Auntie Hsüeh, "told Hsiao-yü to come with me and see to it that she does not take any clothes with her, other than those she has on."

When Ch'un-mei, who was standing to one side, heard that she was being sold, she did not shed a single tear; but when she saw that her mistress was weeping, she said, "Mother, what are you crying about? Once I am gone, try to get on as patiently as you can. Don't injure yourself by worrying too much. If you worry yourself to the point of falling ill, there will be no one to sympathize with you. Let me go if I must. If I am not permitted to take any extra clothes with me, so be it. It has always been true that:

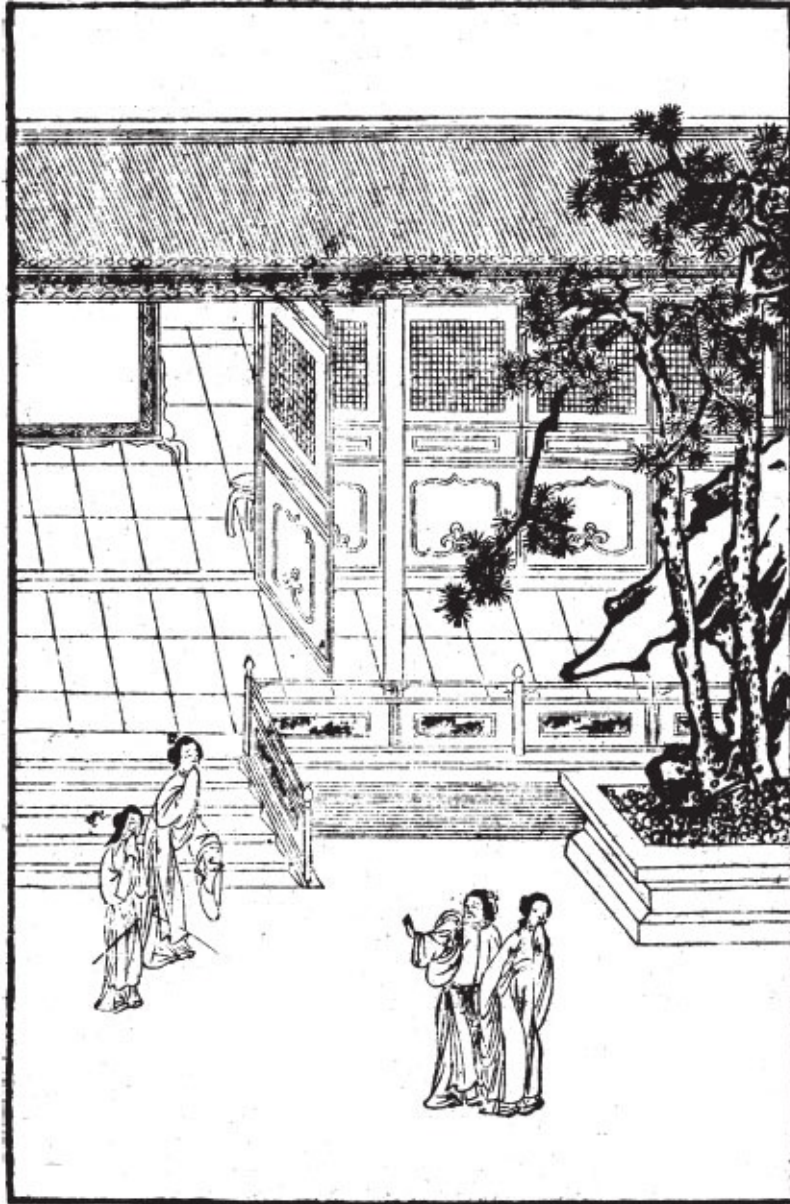
A decent man does not consume

his inheritance;

A decent woman does not wear

her bridal clothes."¹⁷

As they were speaking, who should appear but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "Fifth Lady, you need not comply with the topsy-turvy instructions of my mistress. After all, the young lady has served you faithfully for all this time. I am prepared to:



Ch'un-mei Refrains from Shedding a Single Parting Tear

Deceive my superiors but not my inferiors.

You ought to select two of the best outfits from her trunk, wrap them up, and entrust them to Auntie Hsüeh to take along for her, both as a memento of her years with you, and to assist her as she embarks on her new life."

"My good sister," exclaimed the woman, "you are actually exhibiting a trace of benevolence and righteousness."

"After all," responded Hsiao-yü:

"Who can be sure that nothing will ever happen to them?

Both the toad and the cricket,

Inhabit the same spadeful of earth.

When the hare dies, the fox is sad;

Creatures grieve for their fellows."

They then brought out Ch'un-mei's trunk and told her to pick out the kerchiefs and turquoise hairpins that she was accustomed to wear and take them with her. The woman selected two outfits of top-grade silk and satin garments, together with shoes and foot-bindings, and wrapped them up in a large package for her. She also gave her several of her own hairpins, combs, clasps, pendants, and rings. Hsiao-yü, too, pulled two pins out of her hair and gave them to Ch'un-mei. The remaining pearl necklaces, frets of silver filigree, and skirts and blouses of variegated and figured brocade, were all left undisturbed and carried back to the rear compound.

Ch'un-mei then bowed good-bye, and the woman and Hsiao-yü bade her farewell with tears in their eyes. As she was about to go out the gate, the woman wanted her to go pay a farewell obeisance to Yüeh-niang and the others, but Hsiao-yü stopped her with a negative wave of her hand. Ch'un-mei then proceeded to follow Auntie Hsüeh, without even turning her head, as she nonchalantly and resolutely marched out the main gate.

After the woman and Hsiao-yü had returned from seeing her out the gate, Hsiao-yü went back to the master suite to report to the First Lady, saying, "She left empty-handed, and her wardrobe has been retained, so she was not allowed to take anything with her."

Chin-lien made her way back to her quarters, where she was used to having Ch'un-mei's company. The two of them had been on intimate terms and were accustomed to sharing their innermost feelings with each other. But now that she had gone, her quarters seemed cold and desolate, and she felt so lonely that she commenced to weep out loud. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Her intimate words remain,
But now their love is severed;
In her room she is not seen,
In silence her soul melts. ¹⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

SUN HSÜEH-O INSTIGATES THE BEATING OF CH'EN CHING-CHI; DAME WANG MARRIES OFF CHIN-LIEN TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

Since there's no such thing in this life
as complete satisfaction;
In one's way of coping with the world
do not be too demanding.
It's a good thing always to pay heed
only to the words of superior men;
When disputes arise never listen
to the words of petty persons.
Only regard the customs of the age
as illusory performances;
While respecting the intentions of others
by keeping them at a distance.
If one were to address perceptive women with
a word to the wise;
It would be, "Don't ever confide your troubles
to your sweetheart."¹

THE STORY GOES that from the time that Ch'un-mei left the household, P'an Chin-lien suffered from depression in her quarters. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after breakfast the next day, Ch'en Ching-chi went out on the pretext of settling accounts with a creditor and rode his mount to Auntie Hsüeh's house, where she happened to be at home. She invited him in, and Ch'en Ching-chi tied up his mule, came inside, and sat down. Tea was served to him, and he drank it, but Ch'un-mei, who was in an inner room, did not come out.

Auntie Hsüeh knowingly questioned him, saying, "Son-in-law, what have you come here to talk about?"

"I am on my way to settle accounts with a creditor up the street," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and just happened to pass by here. 'Is the young lady that you came to take away last night here with you?'"

"Yes, she is here," replied Auntie Hsüeh, "but I haven't found a purchaser for her yet."

"If she's here," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I would like to be able to see her, and say a few words to her."

Auntie Hsüeh deliberately put on a meretricious act, saying, "My dear son-in-law, yesterday your mother-in-law was insistent in telling me that because the two of you had been:

Colluding in chicanery,

and produced this ugly scandal, as soon as I have taken her away, I must take precautions to prevent the two of you from meeting or speaking to each other. You had better leave at once. I'm afraid that she might send a page boy here who, on seeing you, would go home and tell her about it, with the result that I would no longer have access to the household."

Ch'en Ching-chi merely responded with an ingratiating smile as he groped a tael of silver out of his sleeve, and said, "You can buy yourself some tea with this for the time being. If you accept it, I will reward you further on another day."

As for Auntie Hsüeh:

Her eyes opened at the sight of money, and she said, "My good son-in-law, short of money as you are, you are willing to spare some for me, are you? The fact is, though, that during the twelfth month of last year I pawned someone's two pairs of embroidered pillow ends in your shop. It has been almost a year since then and, including interest, it would probably cost me some eight mace of silver to redeem them. Could you retrieve them for me by any chance?"

"That's not a problem," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "I'll retrieve them for you tomorrow morning."

Auntie Hsüeh, on the one hand, invited Ch'en Ching-chi into the inner room to get together with Ch'un-mei and, on the other hand, told her daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, to prepare a meal, saying, "I'll go buy some tea things and snacks, and pick up a jug of wine, some potted meat, and the like, for the two of them to eat."

When Ch'un-mei caught sight of Ch'en Ching-chi, she exclaimed, "Son-in-law, a fine man you are! You're just:

An executioner who likes to play with his victims, leaving my mistress and me in such a predicament that we are at a loss for what to do in any direction. You have been responsible for putting us in this situation in which:

The exposure of misbehavior arouses disapproval.”²

“My sister,” responded Ch’en Ching-chi, “you have already been expelled from their household, and I do not intend to remain there much longer myself.

He and his wife, Chao Ying-ch’un,
Will each go their separate ways.”³

You must urge Auntie Hsüeh to find a good place for you. As far as I’m concerned:

Marinated leeks cannot be replanted
in the vegetable bed.

I plan to go to the Eastern Capital to consult with my father, and when I come back I’ll not only divorce that daughter of theirs, but also demand the return of those boxes of valuables that my family entrusted to them.”

Not long after he had finished speaking, Auntie Hsüeh came back with the tea things, wine, and other foodstuff that she had purchased, set up a bed-table on the k’ang, and laid out a repast so the two of them could drink wine and chat with each other. She also joined them for a cup or two. They carried on an animated dialogue for some time about Yüeh-niang’s hard-heartedness.

Auntie Hsüeh said, “For her to expel such an attractive young lady as she is from the household without even allowing her to take any clothing or jewelry with her will not serve to enhance her value in the eyes of a future purchaser. And she asked for no more than the return of her original purchase price. Even when you pour clean water from one bowl into another, some of it is likely to be spilled. How mean-spirited can you get? When Ch’un-mei was about to leave, the maidservant Hsiao-yü did her a favor by inducing the Fifth Lady to provide her with two outfits of clothing. If she had not done so, what would she have had to wear when being looked over by a prospective purchaser?”

By the time they began to feel the effects of the wine, Auntie Hsüeh told her daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, to take her baby with her and go visit for a while with a neighbor so that the two of them would be at liberty to enjoy themselves in the inner room. Truly:

Just like male and female phoenixes amid
the misty clouds,
Or like sporting mandarin ducks, diving
beneath the waves;⁴
Signing a compact never to be separated
during this lifetime;
They agree to be happily bound together
in the life to come.⁵

When the two of them had finished their encounter, they prepared to part but found it:

Difficult to separate and difficult to split.⁶

Auntie Hsüeh was afraid that Yüeh-niang might send someone to spy on them and hurriedly urged Ch’en Ching-chi to get on his way, so he proceeded to mount his mule and return home.

Less than two days later, Ch’en Ching-chi came to present two gold lamé handkerchiefs and two pairs of ankle leggings to Ch’un-mei and also returned the pawned pillow ends to Auntie Hsüeh. He then spent some silver to purchase wine and proceeded to share a drink with Ch’un-mei in Auntie Hsüeh’s quarters. Unbeknownst to them, while they were drinking together, Yüeh-niang sent the page boy Lai-an to find out why Auntie Hsüeh had not yet found a buyer for Ch’un-mei, and he happened to notice the mule tethered outside the gate.

When he got home, he reported this to Yüeh-niang, saying, “Your son-in-law is also there.”

Upon hearing this, Yüeh-niang became enraged, sent people to summon Auntie Hsüeh again and again, and criticized her severely when she showed up, saying, “You took that slave away with you:

Promising today that you would do it tomorrow,

And tomorrow that you would do it the next day,

while refusing to do your best to dispose of her as I commissioned you to do. It would seem that you are harboring her in order to exploit her propensity to engage in sexual affairs and thereby make some money for yourself. If you refuse to dispose of her, bring her back here. I’ll get Old Mother Feng to sell her for me and will no longer patronize you in the future.”

When Auntie Hsüeh heard this, with the loquaciousness of a go-between:

Wishing she had seven or eight more mouths
than nature had provided,

she exclaimed, “My Heavens! Venerable lady, you are mistaken in blaming me that way. Would you have me go after the God of Wealth with a stick? Under your patronage, venerable lady, how could I fail to do my best to dispose of her for you? Just yesterday, I took her to visit two or three potential purchasers, but none of them was willing to come up with the requisite sum. You asked me for the return of the original purchase price of sixteen taels of silver. But, as a mere go-between, how could I come up with such a sum out of my own pocket?”

“My page boy tells me,” said Yüeh-niang, “that that seedling of the Ch’en family was drinking wine with her at your place today.”

“Ai-ya! Ai-ya!” protested Auntie Hsüeh in consternation. “Here we go again. During the twelfth month of last year, I pawned someone’s two pairs of pillow ends at your shop on Lion Street, which they have now paid to redeem. Today, your son-in-law brought the pillow ends back to me, and I offered him a drink of tea, but without even drinking it, he

hurriedly mounted his mule and went his way. Since when did he come into my place to drink wine with anybody? It seems that this servant of yours is prone to:

Making up lies and telling tales."

This speech reduced Yüeh-niang to silence for a time, after which she said, "I am merely concerned that that seedling of the Ch'en family may have:

Developed ideas that induce depravity, and

Allowed his thoughts to be led astray."

"Do you take me to be a three-year-old child?" expostulated Auntie Hsüeh. "If any such thing were taking place, how could I have been unaware of it? In view of your instructions to me, do you think that I am indifferent to the relative merits of:

Long-term profits, and

Short-term gains?

When he came to my place he did not:

Stick around or sit down for any time,

but simply handed me the pillow ends and then departed without even drinking his tea. Since when did he have a chance to see the young lady from your household?

The only thing that ought to matter is the truth, yet you have seen fit to subject me to these accusations. The fact of the matter is that, at present, Commandant Chou Hsiu would like to purchase her in the hope of obtaining a son but is only willing to offer twelve taels of silver for her. If I can get him to come up with thirteen taels, I could then weigh out the silver and turn it over to you. It is said that His Honor Chou Hsiu, on previous occasions, when attending parties at your place, has seen the young lady and been impressed by the repertoire of songs she could sing, as well as her demeanor, and that is why he is willing to spend these few taels of silver for her, despite the fact that she is not a virgin. As for the other potential purchasers, none of them will offer to put up that much."

Auntie Hsüeh thus succeeded in hammering out an agreement with Yüeh-niang on the purchase price.

Early the next day, she got Ch'un-mei's things together and saw to it that she was properly dressed and made up. She sported a cloud-shaped chignon to hold her hair in place;

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets;

she wore a blouse of red chiffon over a skirt of blue chiffon; and her feet were clad in a pair of shoes with upturned toes. Auntie Hsüeh then hired a sedan chair and escorted her to the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu. When Chou Hsiu observed that Ch'un-mei's countenance was:

Both redder and whiter,

than it was before; that her stature was:

Neither short nor tall;

and that she had a pair of tiny bound feet; he was as delighted as could be and weighed out an ingot of fifty taels of silver as her purchase price. Auntie Hsüeh took this home with her, where she chiseled off a piece worth thirteen taels, took it to the Hsi-men residence, and gave it to Yüeh-niang.

She also brought out an additional tael of silver to show her, saying, "This was given to me by His Honor Chou Hsiu as a reward for my efforts. Venerable lady, will you not also give me a little something?"

Wu Yüeh-niang felt compelled to accede to this request and weighed out five mace of silver for her. As a result, Auntie Hsüeh made a profit of thirty-seven taels and five mace of silver out of the transaction. The fact is that nine out of ten go-betweens make the money to support their households this way.

To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi now found himself in a situation in which Ch'un-mei had been sold, he no longer had access to Chin-lien, and Yüeh-niang refused to pay any attention to him. She saw to it that the doors were tightly locked, personally came out every evening to check them by lantern light, and closed and locked the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds before going to bed at night. Because of this, he felt himself to be helpless and was extremely frustrated.

This led him to quarrel with Hsi-men Ta-chieh more than once, calling her a whore time after time, and saying, "Since I married into your family as a son-in-law I have scarcely been guilty of eating you out of house and home, and your family has possession of trunkloads of my family's gold and silver. You are my wife after all, but you not only fail to look after my interests but accuse me of scrounging for food off your family. Since when have I been eating off your family for nothing?"

He attacked Hsi-men Ta-chieh so severely that he reduced her to tears.

The twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month was Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and she prepared several saucers worth of hors d'oeuvres and snacks to go with the wine and told Ch'un-hung, with the best of intentions, to take them out to the shop on the street front of the residence for Ch'en Ching-chi and Manager Fu Ming to enjoy.

Yüeh-niang objected to this, saying, "There's no need to cater to that worthless creature. If you want to provide something for Manager Fu Ming, go ahead and provide something for him to enjoy, but there is no need to cater to that creature."

But Meng Yü-lou rejected this advice, and Ch'un-hung took what she had prepared out and set it down on the counter in the shop. The jar of wine she had provided was large but was soon emptied, and Ch'en Ching-chi told Lai-an to go back and ask for more.

Manager Fu Ming objected to this, saying, "Son-in-law, there is no need to ask for more wine. This amount is adequate, and I am not going to drink any more."

But Ch'en Ching-chi rejected this advice and insisted on sending Lai-an back to get some more.

They had to wait for quite a while, before Lai-an came back and reported, "There is no more wine to be had."

Ch'en Ching-chi was already half drunk on the wine he had consumed and tried to send him back again, but when Lai-an refused to budge, he went out and bought some wine with his own money.

He then berated Lai-an, saying, "You lousy little slave, you just wait. Since your mistress is unwilling to countenance me, you slaves have also started to defy me, refusing to do so much as move when I tell you to do something. Since I entered your household as a son-in-law, it can hardly be said that I have eaten enough to deplete your supply of wine or meat. When your master was alive, how did you treat me? But now that your master is dead, you've had a change of heart and begun to ignore me, doing whatever you can to get rid of me. My mother-in-law has paid heed to the slanders of you slaves and started to act defensively toward me, entrusting everything to you slaves, and nothing to me. But let her do as she pleases. I'm:

Quite inured to such alarms."

"My good son-in-law," expostulated Manager Fu Ming, "don't continue to talk that way. If they don't respect you, who do they respect? I imagine they must be too busy in the rear compound, or they would scarcely have refused to supply you with wine. It's no big deal that you should scold them that way, but:

Walls have cracks,

Fences have ears,

and someone is likely to say that you have been drinking too much."

"Venerable manager," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you don't know what's going on. As for me:

Though wine is in my belly,

My concerns are on my mind.⁷

My mother-in-law is credulous enough to believe the slanders that petty persons have lodged against me and treats me as though I have been guilty of intercourse with someone who is not guilty of intercourse with me. What if I were to have carried on affairs with every woman in the household? If I were taken to court, it would only be a case of intercourse with my stepmothers-in-law, which would result in no more than a charge of misconduct.⁸ At present, I might as well divorce that daughter of yours and then draft a complaint and take you to court. Or else, I may go to the Eastern Capital and submit a memorial to the throne inside the Myriad Years Gate. Your family has possession of trunkloads of my family's gold and silver, all of which were originally ill-gotten gains accumulated by Yang Chien and are subject to confiscation by the state. How would you like it if I were to succeed in getting these several damned houses of yours confiscated, and the women of the household all sold into servitude by the judiciary? It's not as though:

I were not out to catch fish,

But only to muddy the waters,

for the fun of it. If she had any sense, she'd acknowledge me once again as her son-in-law and treat me as she did before, which would be for the benefit of all those concerned."

When Manager Fu Ming heard these threatening words, he said, "Son-in-law, you're drunk.

Wang Ten-plus-nine,

Let's sip our wine,

and set these wanton allegations aside."

At this, Ch'en Ching-chi opened his eyes wide and glared at Manager Fu Ming, saying, "You lousy old dog! How can you accuse me of making wanton allegations, or allege that I am drunk? It's not as though I've been drinking any wine of yours. Unworthy though I may be, I am the favored son-in-law in her family, and you are no more than a cashier employed by her household. Are you also trying to get rid of me? Don't worry, you old dog. You have made more than enough money off my father-in-law over the years, and have had more than enough to eat, and yet you want to join the cabal that is seeking to drive me out, do you? No doubt, you hope to be given sole charge of the business so you can skim off the cash to support your family. In the future when I lodge a complaint and take her to court I'll be sure to include your name in the indictment."

Manager Fu Ming was not a courageous man. When he saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, he put on his outer garments and, surreptitiously heading for home, disappeared in a cloud of dust. A page boy came out to collect the utensils and take them back to the rear compound, after which Ch'en Ching-chi collapsed onto the k'ang and fell asleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, early in the morning, Manager Fu Ming went into the rear compound to see Yüeh-niang and told her everything that had happened the night before. Weeping and wailing, he said that he wanted to quit his job and return to his original home, turn over his account books, and engage in trade no longer.

Yüeh-niang endeavored to dissuade him, saying, "Manager Fu, just relax and carry on your business as before. Don't pay any attention to that worthless piece of goods. He is as expendable as a piece of stinking shit. Originally, on account of the fact that his family was implicated in a legal proceeding, he was sent to seek temporary refuge in our household. There were no such things as gold and silver or other valuables involved. There were only several items from Hsi-men Tachieh's dowry, and the luggage that they brought with them. Meanwhile, his old man went into hiding in the Eastern Capital, while the members of our household were left in fear, day and night, that some petty person might inform on him and get us into trouble. When he came here he was no more than fifteen or sixteen years old, a mere fledgling, and

he has had the good fortune to be supported by his father-in-law's family for all these years, and trained to be proficient in various enterprises. But now that:

His wing feathers are dry enough for flight,
he is:

Requiting kindness with enmity,
and:

Trying to sweep it all under the rug with a
single stroke of the broom.

He's just a youngster whose words cannot be trusted. What does he understand of Heavenly principle? But, in the future, Heaven will not fail to observe his conduct. Manager Fu, just relax and carry on your business as before. Don't pay any attention to him. He will surely come to feel ashamed of himself."

In this way, Yüeh-niang succeeded in placating Manager Fu Ming. But no more of this.

One day it was one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

The pawnshop was crowded with customers who had come to redeem their belongings, when who should appear but the wet nurse Ju-i, carrying Hsiao-ko, who had come to deliver a kettle of tea for Manager Fu Ming to drink. As she set it down on the table Hsiao-ko, in the wet nurse's arms, began to cry for all he was worth.

On seeing this, Ch'en Ching-chi, in front of the crowd of customers, addressed himself to the baby, saying:

Half facetiously but in earnest,⁹

"Little brother, my precious child, you stop that crying."

He then turned to the customers, and said, "This child behaves just as though I were his father, in that he does what I tell him to do. When I tell him to stop crying, he stops crying."

This remark stunned the customers, and Ju-i admonished him, saying, "Son-in-law, what kind of talk is that? You even went so far as to address him as your son. Just see if I don't report this to the First Lady when I go back inside."

At this, Ch'en Ching-chi ran up to her and gave the wet nurse a couple of kicks, saying in a jocular but abusive manner, "Why you crazy louse of a stinker! Go ahead and report it; but if you do, I'll kick your ass hard enough to produce a sounding fart."

The wet nurse, with the baby in her arms, promptly went back to the rear compound and wept as she told Yüeh-niang, thus and so, what Ch'en Ching-chi had said about the child in front of the crowd of customers.

If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it, while she was combing her hair in front of her mirror stand, she was rendered speechless for what seemed like half a day, and then:

Fell to the floor in a faint,¹⁰

Oblivious to human affairs.

Behold:

The jade from the Ch'u mountains is damaged;

Much to be lamented is Hsi-men Ch'ing's

lawfully wedded wife.

The bloom in the jeweled mirror is withered;

Despite the ninety days of spring given

by the Lord of the East.

Her flowery countenance looks dispirited;

Like the herbaceous peony in the West Garden

clinging to the red railing.¹¹

Her sandalwood mouth remains speechless;

Like the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of the South

Seas engaging in meditation.

In the little garden last night the spring

wind was disastrous;

Scattering the blossoms of the river plums

all over the ground.¹²

This threw Hsiao-yü into such consternation that she called together the members of the household, high and low, to help Yüeh-niang up into a sitting position on the k'ang. Sun Hsüeh-o then jumped onto the k'ang, administered artificial respiration for some time, and poured a dose of ginger extract into her throat, but it seemed like half a day before she regained consciousness. Yüeh-niang's breathing was obstructed at first, so that all she could do was choke, without being able even to sob out a sound.

The wet nurse Ju-i told Meng Yü-lou and Sun Hsüeh-o about the facetious remarks Ch'en Ching-chi had made about Hsiao-ko in front of the customers in the pawnshop and went on to say, "I endeavored to admonish him with the best of intentions, but he chased after me and kicked me a couple of times, nearly causing me to faint with anger on the spot."

Sun Hsüeh-o continued to support Yüeh-niang in an upright position until the others had left and then, while they were alone together in the room, quietly said to her, "Mother, there is no need to get angry. If you allow yourself to get so upset that:

Anything untoward should happen to you,
that would be an even greater calamity. That youngster, because Ch'un-mei has been sold, and he can no longer have his way with that whore from the P'an household, has been frustrated enough to give vent to such allegations. Right now, one must either:

Refuse to do something;
Or not stop at anything.

Since Hsi-men Ta-chieh has already been married off, she is like a plot of land that has been sold, and there is not much we can do for her. As the saying goes:

All you get for raising toads is dropsy.

What's the point of keeping that youngster around the house anyway? Tomorrow, we ought to inveigle him into coming back to the rear compound, give him a real beating, and then drive him out the door to return to his own family. After that, we ought to summon Dame Wang. Since:

She is the one who produced this problem,
She should be the one who eliminates it.

We should get her to take that whore away from here and sell her off, just as one would dispose of dog shit or stinking piss. In this way the whole problem could be solved in a single day. What's the point of letting them continue to reside here, and thereby run the risk of their dragging us into the soup in the future?"

"What you say makes sense," responded Yüeh-niang.

They decided upon their plan there and then.

The next day, after the morning meal, Yüeh-niang arranged to have seven or eight maids and servants' wives lie in wait, armed with sticks and cudgels, and then sent the page boy Lai-an to trick Ch'en Ching-chi into coming into the rear compound for a talk.

Once he was inside, and the ceremonial gate had been closed behind him, she ordered him to kneel down in front of her and demanded, "Do you acknowledge your crime?"

Ch'en Ching-chi refused to kneel and exhibited as haughty an air as ever, while Yüeh-niang proceeded to interrogate him. There is a long set piece of parallel prose that testifies to this.

At the outset, Yüeh-niang did not offend him,
but now her countenance altered.

After this, Ch'en Ching-chi, responding to her
dressing down, raised his head,

Saying, "You need not waste your breath
with this incessant bickering.

I've got to arrive at some sort of an
understanding with you."

Yüeh-niang said, "This is your father-in-law's
private dwelling place;

It is not a Verdant Spring Bordello, or a Nest
of Orioles and Swallows.

How can you have the effrontery to flirt with
one of his womenfolk?

As your father-in-law's beloved concubine, she
is living as a widow.

How can you feel yourself entitled to engage in
flirtation with her?

And there is also that shamelessly wanton slave
who has ensnared you.

From of old, if the bitch does not wag her tail,
dogs will not engage her.

These are all offenses that besmirch the family,
and are hard to forgive."

Ch'en Ching-chi cried, "By unleashing a horde of
witches to bind Chung K'uei,¹³

You have sprung a trap so you could beat this
culprit to your heart's content.

The cheeks of my bottom find this flagellation
almost impossible to endure.

You maidservants, cease your agitation; First
Lady, forgo your perturbation.

If you don't watch out, these pitiless sticks
will end up breaking my back."

Yüeh-niang retorted, "You lousy nincompoop! Do
you dare to give me your lip?
As they say, when the ice is three feet thick,
it is not due to one day of cold.¹⁴
You are guilty of such unpardonable acts that
they are difficult to forgive.
You are lucky to be subjected merely to this
flailing with stalks of reed.
But if you should have the temerity to think
of doing any such thing again,
I'll cut off this perishable prick of yours
and leave you celibate for life."

Yüeh-niang, at this juncture, directed the squad of women, including Sun Hsüeh-o, Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu, Lai-chao's wife "The Beanpole," Chung-ch'iu, Hsiao-yü, and Hsiu-ch'un, to proceed, hugger-mugger, to hold Ch'en Ching-chi down on the floor and give him a drubbing with their sticks and cudgels. Hsi-men Ta-chieh saw what was going on but merely withdrew and did nothing to save her husband.

They beat the young scamp until, in desperation, he tore off his pants and exposed his organ, which was standing up as straight as a stick. This so startled the women that they dropped their sticks and cudgels and fled in all directions.

Yüeh-niang, for her part, was both annoyed and amused by this display and berated him, saying, "What a fine phony of a cuckold's spawn you are!"

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,

"Had it not been for this ploy of mine, how could I have escaped?"

Thereupon, he crawled to his feet, pulled up his pants with one hand, and fled out to the front compound. Yüeh-niang deputed a page boy to follow him and tell him to settle his accounts and turn them over to Manager Fu Ming. Ch'en Ching-chi realized that, under the circumstances, he could no longer remain there. After gathering up his clothes and bedding, without even saying good-bye, he proceeded to walk out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in a huff, and head for his family's old home, now occupied by his maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, to find a place to stay. Truly:

It has always been true that gratitude for kindness
and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand years or ten thousand years
will never be allowed to gather dust.

When P'an Chin-lien heard that Ch'en Ching-chi had been beaten and expelled from the household, she felt:

Worry piled upon worry, and
Depression augmented by depression.

One day, Yüeh-niang, inspired by Sun Hsüeh-o's suggestion, sent Tai-an to summon Dame Wang. Ever since Dame Wang's son Wang Ch'ao returned home from his apprenticeship to a merchant in the Huai River region, from whom he had purloined a hundred taels of silver entrusted to him for the purchase of stock, she had felt affluent enough to give up her business of selling tea. Her son had purchased two donkeys, a set of millstones, and a sieve frame, and set himself up as a miller. When she heard that she was being summoned to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, she promptly donned her outer garments and started off.



Sun Hsüeh-o Instigates the Beating of Ch'en Ching-chi

Along the way, she said to Tai-an, "Brother, I haven't set eyes on you for a long time, but I see that you're old enough to have started wearing your hair in a bun. Have you taken a wife already?"

"No I haven't," replied Tai-an.

"Since your master is dead," said Dame Wang, "which member of your household is it who is calling for me, and what am I wanted for? No doubt the Fifth Lady is about to bear a son and would like me to help with the delivery."

"The Fifth Lady is not bearing a son," responded Tai-an, "but she has been caught carrying on an affair with her son-in-law. The First Lady would like you to take her away and marry her off to someone."

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Dame Wang. "You see, it is just as I thought, that whore, on losing her husband, could not be expected to maintain her chastity. Just as:

Dogs cannot be trained not to eat shit,
she's reverted to practicing her dirty tricks again. So it was with that son-in-law of yours, was it? What's his name?"

"His surname is Ch'en and his given name is Ching-chi," said Tai-an.

"I remember the occasion last year," said Dame Wang, "when I came to ask your master's help in that affair involving the younger brother of Ho the Ninth. Your master was not at home at the time, and that lousy whore not only failed to invite me to stay for a chat in her quarters but refused to come up with so much as a broken needle for me. All she did was to tell a maidservant to pour me a cup of plain tea, after drinking which, I left. I had thought that she would remain a member of his household for:

A thousand if not ten thousand years.¹⁵

Who could have anticipated that she is now going to be sent away. What a home-breaker of a whore she is. Quite aside from the fact that it was I had who arranged her marriage into such a prestigious household; even if it had been any ordinary person, she should not have been treated so skimpily.”

“Because of the chaos she and our son-in-law have created,” said Tai-an, “the First Lady almost died of anger yesterday and has already expelled him from the household. And now, she wants you to take her away as well.”

“When she entered the household, she came in a sedan chair,” said Dame Wang. “And she should be allowed to leave in one as well. She brought a trunkful of belongings with her when she came, and she should also be allowed to take one with her now.”

“That goes without saying,” said Tai-an. “The First Lady will decide what is appropriate.”

As they engaged in this discussion, they arrived at the door of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s residence, and Dame Wang went back to Yüeh-niang’s quarters, where she bowed in greeting and sat down.

After they had finished the tea served by a maidservant, Yüeh-niang said, “Dame Wang, I would not have invited you here for no reason.”

She then proceeded to spell out, thus and so, all of the preceding events involving P’an Chin-lien and concluded by saying, “Since:

You are the one who produced this problem,

You should be the one who eliminates it.

One guest does not trouble two hosts.

I would, therefore, prevail upon you to take her away again and either marry her off to someone else, or dispose of her in a way that allows her to continue:

Eating the bread of idleness.

Now that my husband is dead, I can no longer afford to maintain such people as this. Needless to say, that dead devil of mine spent vast sums of money on her; enough to cast a silver figurine to match her dimensions. If you give me back whatever you manage to marry her off for, I can use it to hold a sutra recitation for my husband, so some good may come of it.”

“Venerable lady,” said Dame Wang, “I understand that it is not the money that you are really concerned about, but the need to rid yourself of this troublemaker. I will not let you down.”

She then went on to say, “Today is a propitious day for such an undertaking. I might as well take her away forthwith. But there is another issue. She brought a trunkful of her belongings with her and arrived in a sedan chair. She ought to be provided with a sedan chair for her departure.”

“I’ll let her take a trunk of her belongings with her,” said Yüeh-niang, “but I won’t allow her to go in a sedan chair.”

“My mistress talks that way at the height of her rage,” said Hsiao-yü. “But she will not fail to provide a sedan chair when the time comes for her to leave since:

Exposing her face to the public gaze,
would only cause our neighbors to laugh at us.”

Yüeh-niang did not say anything in response to this but sent the maidservant Hsiu-ch’un to the front compound to summon Chin-lien. When Chin-lien saw that Dame Wang was there in the room, her eyes opened wide with surprise, and she bowed in greeting before sitting down.

Dame Wang opened the conversation, saying, “You had better get your things together right away. The First Lady has instructed me just now to take you away with me today.”

“How long has it been since my husband died?” said Chin-lien. “As for me:

What fault have I committed;

What offense am I guilty of?

Why should I be driven away for no good reason?”

Yüeh-niang¹⁶ responded, “Don’t you:

Feign being more silly than you are,¹⁷

Pretending to be both dumb and deaf.¹⁸

It has always been true that:

When a snake makes a hole for itself
it knows where it is.¹⁹

Whatever a person sees fit to do,
Is clear in the mind of the doer.

Chin-lien, you had better not:

Disguise your perfidy by playing dumb,²⁰

Showing an innocent face to both sides.²¹

Praising here and faultfinding there.

In my hands you can dispense with your:

Clever words and deceptive phrases,

Apple polishing and favor currying.²²

It has always been true that:

There is no party that does not come to an end.
The beam that projects is the first one to rot.²³
Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow.
Flies don't cluster on eggs
unless they're cracked.

You had better not assume that you can continue to support yourself by committing adultery. And right now, I'm going to send you off to oblivion."

Chin-lien responded:

"If you hit someone, avoid hitting his face,
If you berate him, don't expose his faults."²⁴

As the sayings go:

If one cock dies, another will crow in its stead.
He who works a sieve will have some grain to eat.²⁵
Who can ever defend his head with an iron helmet?
Who can ever shield his eyes with bamboo matting?
Human beings are likely to meet each other again,
Just as fallen tree leaves return to their roots.

You ought not to:

Drive people out with bare hands and naked fists.²⁶
In arguing don't heed the words of petty persons.

Truly:

A decent woman does not wear
her bridal clothes;
A decent man does not consume
his inheritance.
It is useless to complain that
the weather is cold."

There and then, after Chin-lien and Yüeh-niang had wrangled for a while, Yüeh-niang accompanied her to her quarters and agreed to let her take with her two trunks worth of belongings, a table with drawers in it, four outfits of clothing, a number of clasps, combs, hairpins, and rings, and a set of bedding. She also stuffed the shoes and foot-bindings she was accustomed to wear into one of the trunks. She then ordered Ch'iu-chü to move back into the rear compound and put a lock on the door to Chin-lien's quarters.

Chin-lien proceeded to don her outer garments, bade farewell to Yüeh-niang, and wept profusely in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet. She also paid a visit to Meng Yü-lou's quarters. The two of them had been like sisters to each other, but now:

One fine day they were fated to part,²⁷
and they could not help shedding tears together.

Meng Yü-lou also gave her a pair of gold hairpins with bowl-shaped ends, a jacket of kingfisher-blue satin, and a red skirt, without Yüeh-niang's knowledge, saying, "Sister Six, from now on, you and I must:

Spend more time apart than together.

I hope you can find a good home, and go on to enjoy a good life. It has always been true that:

Though you erect a thousand li marquee,
There is no party that does not come to an end.

If you find a home, send someone to tell me, so when I go out I may be able to come see you, and thus fulfill our sisterly feelings."

Thereupon, they bade each other farewell with tears in their eyes.

As Chin-lien was about to go out the gate, Hsiao-yü escorted her and surreptitiously presented her with two gold-headed pins.

"Sister," Chin-lien responded, "it would seem you actually have some human feelings for me."

By the time Chin-lien got into the sedan chair at the gate, Dame Wang had already hired workers to carry off her trunks and the table that Yüeh-niang had allowed her to take. Only Meng Yü-lou and Hsiao-yü saw Chin-lien off in her sedan chair, after which they went back inside. Truly:

Of the ten thousand things that create
grief in this human world;
Nothing exceeds the severance of death
and separation of the living.

To resume our story, when Chin-lien arrived at Dame Wang's home, Dame Wang put her into her inner chamber, where she slept together with her at night. Dame Wang's son, Wang Ch'ao, had grown up to be a tall young man and had started to wear his hair in a bun, although he had not yet taken a wife. A bed had been provided in the outer room for

him to sleep on.

The next day, P'an Chin-lien made herself up as usual with:

Exaggeratedly painted eyebrows and eyes,
and stood behind the hanging door-blind gawking at the passersby. When she had nothing else to do, she sat on the k'ang, either:

Painting her brows and making up her eyes,

Or idly strumming her *p'i-p'a*.

When Dame Wang was not at home, she spent her time playing at cards or board games with Wang Ch'ao. Dame Wang, for her part, went about her business as usual, sweeping up the flour from the mill, or feeding the donkeys, without paying any attention to them. It was not long before, as:

The mornings and evenings came and went,²⁸

she succeeded in seducing Wang Ch'ao. At night, after waiting till Dame Wang had fallen asleep, the woman would get off the k'ang, on the pretext of needing to urinate, go into the outer room, and get into bed with Wang Ch'ao.

As the two of them went at it together one night, they shook the bed until the creaking became audible enough to wake up Dame Wang, who asked, "Where is that noise coming from?"

"It's only the cat chasing a rat under the counter," replied Wang Ch'ao.

In her half dreaming state, Dame Wang muttered, "It must be because there is some bran and flour lying about the room that this annoying creature is keeping us awake during:

The third watch in the middle of the night."

Later, on hearing the sounds of movement as the bed continued to creak, Dame Wang asked again, "Where is that noise coming from?"

Wang Ch'ao replied, "The cat has caught the rat and is making a noise as he chews at it in the hole under the k'ang."

Dame Wang bent her ear to listen and, sure enough, it sounded like a cat worrying its prey in the hole under the k'ang. Only then did she cease asking about it. As soon as the woman and the young scamp had finished their business, she quietly climbed back onto the k'ang and went to sleep as before.

There are several lines of double entendre that describe this rat very well:

Your body is small, but your daring

is great;

Your muzzle is pointed, and prone to
mischief.

On seeing anyone, you hide yourself
away;

But the squeaks you create can still
be heard.

You disturb one's sleep in the middle
of the night.

Unwilling to follow the rules of good
behavior;

You are given to boring your way into
cracks.

And there is another symptom of your
knavery;

You can never abandon your taste for
stolen sweets.

One day, Ch'en Ching-chi, upon learning that Chin-lien had been expelled from the household and was temporarily lodged in Dame Wang's home while being offered in marriage, took two strings of copper cash, along with some silver, and made his way to Dame Wang's home. When he arrived there, Dame Wang was engaged in sweeping up the donkey droppings in front of her door.



P'an Chin-lien Agrees to Relieve Wang Ch'ao's Thirst

Ch'en Ching-chi stepped forward and greeted her with a deep bow, upon which Dame Wang inquired, "Brother, what do you want?"

"Would you please allow me to speak to you inside?" said Ch'en Ching-chi.

Dame Wang, accordingly, ushered him inside, whereupon Ch'en Ching-chi took off his eye shades and asked, "Is not the woman named P'an the Sixth from the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing lodging here while being offered in marriage?"

"What is your relationship to her?" asked Dame Wang.

Ch'en Ching-chi replied with an ingratiating smile, "I would not deceive you ma'am. I am her younger brother, and she is my elder sister."

Dame Wang appraised him by:

Looking him over from top to bottom,²⁹ for a while and then said, "Since when does she have any younger brother? I know nothing of such a one. Don't try to deceive me. I imagine you must be the son-in-law of the household, surnamed Ch'en, who has come here in the hope of pulling the wool over my eyes; but I won't let you get away with it."

Ch'en Ching-chi laughed at this and then pulled the two strings of copper cash out from his waist and laid them before her, saying, "These two strings of cash can serve you temporarily to defray the cost of a cup of tea. If you will only consent to let me see her, I will reward you more generously on another day."

When Dame Wang saw the money, she reacted more meretriciously than ever, saying, "Don't talk about rewarding me. The First Lady of the household ordered me not to let any riffraff look her over. But I'll demean myself so far as to make you a proposition. If you want to have a single interview with this woman, give me five taels of silver. If you want to see her a second time, give me ten taels of silver. If you decide to marry her, it will cost you a hundred taels of silver, in addition to which there will be a go-between's fee of ten taels of silver. I don't go in for idle negotiations. What's the point of offering me these two strings of cash that are:

Hardly enough to discolor the water?"

When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that the procuress was adamant in refusing the little he had offered, he plucked a pair of gold-headed, silver-shafted, pins out of his hair that were worth five mace of silver, knelt down on the ground:

Dragging his legs like a chicken

on the chopping block,

and said, "Dame Wang, pray accept what I am offering. I will bring you another tael of silver another day, without fail. Let me meet with her, and allow us to exchange a few words, that's all."

Dame Wang, thereupon, after accepting his hairpins and silver, said, "You go inside and see her, say what you have to say, and then come out again. I won't allow you to just sit there:

Ogling her with your hungry eyes.

And you must be sure to bring me the extra tael of silver you have promised tomorrow."

Thereupon, she lifted aside the portiere and let Ch'en Ching-chi into the inner room, where the woman was sitting on the k'ang engaged in stitching a shoe.

When she saw Ch'en Ching-chi, she put down the shoe vamp she was working on and complained to him, saying, "A fine man you are! Leaving me betwixt and between:

Unable to reach the village ahead,

Or make it back to the inn behind.

You may have what it takes to get started,

but you don't carry through.

You put me in a predicament in which:

The exposure of misbehavior arouses disapproval,

while you disappeared without leaving a shadow behind and didn't even come back to see how I was doing. Ch'un-mei and I have been forcibly separated:

You to the east and I to the west.³⁰

And whose fault was that?"

As she spoke, she clutched at Ch'en Ching-chi and began to weep bitterly. Dame Wang objected to her weeping, fearing that it would be overheard.

"My sister," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "on your account, I have been:

Skinny alive and cut to the quick;

while, on my account, you have:

Endured anger and suffered disgrace.

It is not that I have refused to come see you. Yesterday, I went to Auntie Hsüeh's place, where I learned that Ch'un-mei has already been sold to the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu. I also learned that you had been expelled from the household and were staying at Dame Wang's place, waiting to be married off. Today, I made a point of coming to see you in order to discuss matters together.

Our feelings are hard to disregard;³¹

We can never agree to be separated.

So what are we to do about it? At present, I have made up my mind to divorce my wife, the daughter of that household, and demand that the trunks of gold and silver that my family entrusted to them in the past be returned to me. If they refuse to do so, I will go to the Eastern Capital and submit a memorial, together with a legal complaint, to the Emperor inside the Myriad Years Gate. If they propose to return them to me after that, it will be too late. I can then, surreptitiously, using:

An assumed name and appropriated identity,

pop you into a sedan chair and take you into my household, so that:

We can remain forever reunited,

as husband and wife. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."

"Right now," said the woman, "my godmother Dame Wang is asking a hundred taels of silver for me. Do you have such a sum of silver to give her?"

"Why is she demanding so much?" asked Ch'en Ching-chi.

"Your mother-in-law," said Dame Wang, "says that your father-in-law, in the past, expended more than enough money on her to cast a silver figurine to match her dimensions. She insists upon the price of a hundred taels of silver. Not a bit less will do."

"I will not deceive you," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but the warm feelings between myself and Sister Six are such that:

We can never agree to be separated.

Will you not consent to lower the price by half, to something like fifty or sixty taels of silver? I can go to my maternal

uncle Chang Kuan's place and rent two or three rooms from him, so I would have a home into which to take Sister Six as my wife.

That would constitute 'a fling in the spring breeze,' even though you would make a little less off the transaction."

"Quite aside from fifty taels of silver," said Dame Wang, "I would not let you have her even for eighty taels of silver. Just yesterday, Magnate Ho, the silk merchant from Hu-chou, offered me seventy taels of silver for her. And Chang the Second from Main Street, who is currently serving as judicial commissioner, sent two adjutants offering eighty taels of silver, duly weighed out in two packets, but it was not enough, and they had to take it back with them. You're just a youngster with:

An empty mouth uttering empty words.

And yet you have the nerve to try to take advantage of me. But I'm not about to let myself be fleeced."

There and then, she strode out into the street and called out in a loud voice, saying, "Just whose son-in-law is it who is brazen enough to propose to marry his mother-in-law, and has the nerve to come farting around my place in order to do it?"

Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation by this that he pulled the old woman inside with one hand, got down on his knees before her, and pleaded, "Dame Wang, pray be quiet. I'll accept the price of a hundred taels of silver that you demand. The only problem is that my father is in the Eastern Capital. I'll set out for the Eastern Capital tomorrow in order to get the money from him."

"Since you are doing this for me," the woman said, "don't you quibble over the price with my godmother, but go get the money as fast as you can. My only fear is that if you are too late, I may be married off to someone else and won't end up belonging to you after all."

"I'll hire a horse and travel by double stages, both day and night," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I should be back in half a month, at most, or as little as ten days."

Dame Wang said, "As the saying goes:

The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat.

In addition, there is my go-between's fee of ten taels of silver. You must not come up short. I want to make that absolutely clear."

"There is no need to remind me," said Ch'en Ching-chi.

"Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

As soon as they finished their discussion, Ch'en Ching-chi said good-bye, went out the door, returned home, and packed his bags for the trip. Early the next morning, he hired a horse and set out for the Eastern Capital to get the money he needed. This trip of his was truly a case of:

The Green Dragon and the White Tiger

accompany each other;

Good fortune and bad fortune cannot

be safely predicted.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

DAME WANG HUNGERS AFTER WEALTH AND RECEIVES HER JUST REWARD; WU SUNG KILLS HIS SISTER-IN-LAW AND PROPITIATES HIS BROTHER

If you devote your life to good works
Heaven will reward you;
If you insist on being tough you will
surely elicit disaster.
If you are gracious with your tongue
you will suffer no harm;
It is because your teeth are so hard
that they suffer damage.
When autumn comes, the apricots and
peaches have all fallen;
In the depth of winter, the pines
and cypresses stay green.
Good and evil acts inevitably bring
their appropriate results;
Though you fly high or travel far¹
you cannot escape them.²

THE STORY GOES that Ch'en Ching-chi hired a horse for himself, called for a servitor of Militia Commander Chang Kuan to accompany him, and set out early in the morning for the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.

To resume our story, the day after Wu Yüeh-niang had expelled P'an Chin-lien from the household, she sent Ch'un-hung to summon Auntie Hsüeh because she also wished to sell Ch'iu-chü.

While Ch'un Hung was walking along Main Street on this errand, he happened to run into Ying Po-chüeh, who called him to a halt and inquired, "Ch'un-hung, where are you headed?"

"The First Lady has sent me to summon the go-between Auntie Hsüeh," replied Ch'un-hung.

"What does she want with that go-between?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"She plans to sell the maidservant Ch'iu-chü from the Fifth Lady's quarters," explained Ch'un-hung.

"Why was the Fifth Lady expelled from the household?" Ying Po-chüeh went on to ask. "She is now at Dame Wang's place, and I hear that Dame Wang is looking for someone to marry her off to. Is all this really true?"

Ch'un-hung then proceeded to tell him, thus and so, "She was said to be having an affair with her son-in-law, and, when the First Lady found out about it, she first expelled the young lady Ch'un-mei from the household, after which she subjected her son-in-law to a beating and forced him to flee to his family home. It was only yesterday that she expelled the Fifth Lady from the household."

When Ying Po-chüeh heard this, he nodded his head and said, "So it turns out that your Fifth Lady was up to something with that son-in-law of yours. It's not easy to tell what people are capable of."

He then addressed Ch'un-hung again, saying, "My child, since your master is already dead, why should you want to remain in his household? There's no profit to be obtained by doing so. If you would like to go back to the south where you came from, why not look for someone here that might take you back there with him? What do you think?"

"It is just as you say," responded Ch'un-hung. "My master is already dead, and the First Lady has become extremely strict with us. She has closed up most of the businesses the master formerly engaged in, and sold off the premises where they were conducted. Ch'in-t'ung and Hua-t'ung have already left, and she is no longer able to support such a large number of people. I would like to be able to return to the south, but I don't know of anyone who would find it convenient to take me, and I don't know how to find anyone here in the city who would be willing to employ me."

"You silly child!" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"If one is not farsighted,³

One will never be secure.

To return to the south, you would have to traverse:

A thousand mountains and a myriad streams.⁴

What would be the point of that, and who would take you there? You are able to perform quite a few songs, and consequently you should have no trouble finding someone here in town to employ you. Let me recommend a possibility to you, namely, the household of His Honor Chang the Second on Main Street. He disposes of property worth tens of

thousands of strings of cash, owns buildings with a hundred rooms, and has been appointed to replace your former master in his posts as judicial commissioner and battalion commander. And at present he has also acquired the Second Lady from your household as a concubine. If I should take you to his place in order to seek employment, when he sees that you are adept at performing southern songs, I guarantee you'll:

Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow.

If he retains you as a personal servant to wait on him, you'll be better off than you are in your current situation. He has a good disposition, is still quite young, is unrestrained in his behavior, and is attracted by good looks. You would be a lucky fellow to obtain such a position."

Ch'un-hung then proceeded to prostrate himself before him and said, "I would be indebted to you for your help. If I meet with His Honor Chang the Second and succeed in:

Advancing by so much as a single step,

I will purchase a present and come kowtow to you."

Ying Po-chüeh pulled Ch'un-hung to his feet with one hand and said, "Silly child, stand up. I always do whatever I can to help people succeed. I don't require any expressions of gratitude from you. Where would you get the money for such a thing?"

"If I should go with you," said Ch'un-hung, "I fear that the First Lady back at home will wonder where I have gone. What should I do about that?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I will ask His Honor Chang the Second to write a note to her and enclose a tael of silver. She probably won't dare to accept the silver but, no doubt, will end up by handing you over to him with both hands."

When they had finished their conversation, Ch'un-hung went on to Auntie Hsüeh's place and told her that she was wanted by his mistress. Upon meeting with her, Auntie Hsüeh led Ch'iu-chü away, after paying Yüeh-niang her asking price of a mere five taels of silver. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh took Ch'un-hung with him to pay a visit to Chang the Second and, on seeing how good-looking he was, and hearing that he could perform southern songs, Chang the Second agreed to retain him as a personal servant. He then wrote out a note, sealed it up with one tael of silver, and sent someone to the Hsi-men household to collect his trunk of belongings.

That day, Wu Yüeh-niang was at home, entertaining Yün Li-shou's wife, née Su,⁵ with a cup of wine. Some time before this, Yün Li-shou had succeeded to his elder brother's hereditary post as vice commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard. Upon witnessing the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, and the fact that Yüeh-niang was set on maintaining her widowhood and still had substantial means at her disposal, he could not help salivating with excitement at the prospect of profiting from the situation. That day, his wife had purchased eight trays of preserved fruit and come to call on Yüeh-niang. Knowing that Yüeh-niang had given birth to a son named Hsiao-ko, and having a daughter of her own who was only two months old, she intended to form a marriage alliance with Yüeh-niang by betrothing the two children to each other and formalizing the pact by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses.⁶ She had also presented a gold ring as a betrothal gift.

At this point, Tai-an came in with the note from His Honor Chang the Second and the tael of silver and explained that Ch'un-hung had accepted a job as a personal servant in his household, and that he had sent someone to collect his trunk of personal effects and his clothes. Yüeh-niang felt that since Chang the Second now held the post of judicial commissioner she could hardly object to this arrangement, but she refused to accept the proffered silver and duly turned over Ch'un Hung's trunk of belongings.

Before this, Ying Po-chüeh had said to Chang the Second, "P'an Chin-lien, the Fifth Lady in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, is really attractive, is adept at playing the balloon guitar, and, when it comes to the standard repertory of popular songs, backgammon and elephant chess, there is little she has not mastered. In addition, she is literate and knows how to read and write. Because she is still young, she is unable to maintain a chaste widowhood, and she has been so at odds with the First Lady that she has been expelled from the household and is currently residing at Dame Wang's place waiting to be married off."

In response to this, Chang the Second had sent a servant with money in hand to Dame Wang's place, again and again, to size up the situation; but Dame Wang had insisted that, pursuant to the orders of the First Lady, she would refuse to accept anything less than a hundred taels for her. The servant had gone back and forth several times to bargain with her and had raised the offered sum to more than eighty taels, but Dame Wang still refused to give her assent.

Afterwards, when Ch'un-hung entered his household, and Chang the Second learned from him that the woman had engaged in adultery with her son-in-law, and that that was the reason why she had been expelled, he decided that he didn't want her.

"I have a fourteen-year-old son in my household," he told Ying Po-chüeh, "who has not yet reached puberty but is going to school and studying his books. What would I want with a woman like that in my home?"

Li Chiao-erh also told him, "Chin-lien originally poisoned her husband to death so that she could be taken into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. She later had an affair with a page boy and was also responsible for doing to death both the Sixth Lady and her baby son."

As a result, Chang the Second no longer wanted anything to do with her.

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei was sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and the commandant saw that she was naturally:

Both beautiful and clever, and

Her deportment was enticing, he was utterly delighted and not only supplied her with a suite of three rooms to live in but also arranged for a young maidservant to wait upon her.

He slept in her room for three nights in a row. At the third day celebration after her marriage into the household, he had two outfits of clothing tailored for her, rewarded Auntie Hsüeh with five mace of silver on her departure, and purchased another female servant to serve Ch'un-mei. In addition, he formally designated her as the Second Lady in his household. His first wife was blind in one eye, restricted herself to vegetarian fare, devoted herself to reciting the Buddha's name, and:

Did not concern herself with ordinary affairs.⁷

Chou Hsiu also had a concubine named Sun Erh-niang, who had borne him a daughter and resided in quarters on the eastern side of the courtyard, while Ch'un-mei's quarters were on the western side of the courtyard. He entrusted the keys to all the doors in the house to Ch'un-mei and conspicuously bestowed his favor upon her.

One day, she heard from Auntie Hsüeh that P'an Chin-lien had also been expelled from the household and was residing at Dame Wang's place, waiting to be married off.

That evening, Ch'un-mei, wailing and weeping, addressed Chou Hsiu, saying, "My mistress and I kept each other company for many years, and she never so much as raised her voice in anger against me but treated me as though I were her own daughter. I knew that we had to separate but failed to anticipate that she, too, would now be expelled from the household. If you are willing to take her in marriage, the two of us could enjoy happy days together again."

She then went on to elaborate on her attractiveness, saying, "She can perform the lyrics and songs of a multitude of authors and is adept at playing the balloon guitar. She is:

Both quick-witted and elegant,⁸

just as clever as can be. She was born in the year of the dragon and is now only thirty-one years old. If she were to enter your household, I would be happy to cede my place to her and settle for the position of your Third Lady."

By so saying, she succeeded in arousing Chou Hsiu's interest, and he proceeded to dispatch his servants Chang Sheng and Li An to Dame Wang's place with two handkerchiefs and two mace of silver to look her over. Sure enough, they found her to be an exceptionally attractive woman. Dame Wang informed them at the outset that the First Lady from her former household demanded the sum of a hundred taels of silver for her. Chang Sheng and Li An bargained with her for what seemed like half a day and raised their offer to as much as eighty taels, but Dame Wang still refused to accept it. When they reported this to Chou Hsiu, he agreed to put up an additional five taels and sent the two of them back with the silver in hand to continue their bargaining with Dame Wang. Dame Wang, however, persisted in alleging that the First Lady would not settle for anything less than a hundred taels for herself, and that although her fee as the go-between might be negotiable:

Heaven would hardly condone letting her go
unrewarded for her pains.

Chang Sheng and Li An had no alternative but to take the silver back with them and report the situation to Chou Hsiu.

He let the matter drop for two days but could not withstand the weeping and wailing of Ch'un-mei, who said to him at night, "If you would only offer a few more taels of silver, for better or for worse, and contrive to marry her so that we can be together again:

I'd be prepared to die if I must."



Dame Wang Craves Wealth and Ignores the Consequences

When Chou Hsiu saw that Ch'un-mei continued to do nothing but weep bitterly, he felt compelled, once again, to direct his senior servant Chou Chung, along with Chang Sheng and Li An, to take the silver in a felt bag and open it up for Dame Wang to see. The sum offered had been increased to a full ninety taels.

But Dame Wang responded more meretriciously than ever, saying, "If I had been willing to let her go for ninety taels, she wouldn't be here now, for Judicial Commissioner Chang the Second would have carried her off in a sedan chair."

This response annoyed Chou Chung, who told Li An to put the silver back in the bag and said, "Though a three-legged toad may be nowhere to be found, a two-legged woman can be found anywhere. This inveterate whore doesn't know who she's dealing with. What reason do you have to mention that official Chang the Second? Do you think my master the commandant is incapable of dealing with you? It is only because that newly married secondary wife of his is constantly pressing him to do so that he wants to marry this woman. What need does he have for her that he should put up all this money?"

"She has forced us to come back and forth two or three times," said Li An. "The lousy old whore! She is repeating herself more and more like a parrot."

So saying, he took hold of Chou Chung and said, "Brother, let's go home and report the situation to His Honor. How do you suppose she would like it if we had a jailer drag her into the yamen and give her a good taste of the squeezers?"

Dame Wang, however, was still looking forward to the profit she expected to make off Ch'en Ching-chi and let them threaten her without saying a word in reply.

Upon returning to his residence, they reported to Commandant Chou Hsiu, saying, "Even though we have raised our offer to ninety taels, she still refuses to accept it."

"In that case," said Chou Hsiu, "tomorrow, we might as well weigh out the sum of a hundred taels and go bring her back here in a sedan chair."

"Master," said Chou Chung, "even if you increase your offer to a hundred taels, Dame Wang will still demand a go-between's fee of an additional five taels. It would be better to drop the matter for a couple of days and then, if she still raises any objections, have her arrested and given a taste of the squeezers. Only then will she be appropriately fearful."

Gentle reader take note: For P'an Chin-lien, as for all of us:

Her place of birth and place of death
were predetermined.⁹

As a direct result of these few words uttered by Chou Chung, Chin-lien would find that:

Though her deeds were done in the past,
Today the chickens would come home to roost.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In this life, although we are not
endowed with foreknowledge;
The causes of disaster or good fortune
are not to be sought elsewhere.
Good and evil acts inevitably bring
their appropriate results;
The only question being whether they
come early or come late.

Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment in order to speak of another person.

To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had managed to have Wu Sung sentenced to military exile in Meng-chou, he was befriended by Shih En, the son of the warden of the prison camp. Later, when Shih En was engaged in a struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern, he was wounded by Chiang Men-shen and called on Wu Sung for help, upon which Wu Sung gave Chiang Men-shen a beating. Who could have anticipated that Chiang Men-shen's younger sister Chiang Yü-lan, who was a concubine of Military Director-in-chief Chang of Meng-chou, should collaborate with her husband in framing Wu Sung, subjecting him to a beating, and sentencing him to military exile in the An-p'ing Stockade. Upon reaching Fei-yün P'u, Wu Sung murdered the two guards who were escorting him and then returned to slaughter the entire households, old and young alike, of Military Director-in-chief Chang and Chiang Men-shen.¹⁰

After this, he escaped to the home of Shih En, who gave him a letter of recommendation and a leather case containing a hundred taels of silver and directed him to go to the An-p'ing Stockade and seek the patronage of his friend Liu Kao, the commander of the stockade. Who could have anticipated that, while on his way, he heard that an heir apparent had been designated to reside in the Eastern Palace, and that at the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice, a general amnesty had been issued to celebrate the occasion. Thus, on receipt of the amnesty, Wu Sung was able to return home to Ch'ing-ho district, where, on submitting his papers at the district yamen, he was allowed to resume his post as police captain.

On returning to his brother's home, he looked up his neighbor Yao the Second, who turned his orphaned niece Ying-erh back over to him. At this time Ying-erh was already eighteen years old, and he took her in to live with him.

Upon making inquiry, he was told, "Hsi-men Ch'ing is already dead, and your sister-in-law has been expelled from his household and is currently residing at Dame Wang's place where she is waiting to be married off."

When Wu Sung heard this:

His old resentment awoke in his heart.

Truly:

Though you wear out shoes of iron without
finding what you seek;
In the end you may find it without making
any effort whatsoever.¹¹

The next day, he put on his turban, donned his clothes, went straight out the door, and headed to Dame Wang's place. Chin-lien was standing behind the blind that hung over the front door at the time, and when she saw Wu Sung coming, she promptly disappeared into the inner room.

Wu Sung lifted aside the blind and asked, "Is Dame Wang at home?"

Dame Wang, who was engaged in sweeping up the flour by the millstone at the time, promptly came out and asked, "Who is it that is calling for me?"

When she saw that it was Wu Sung, she greeted him with a bow, saying, "Many felicitations," and Wu Sung bowed deferentially in return.

Dame Wang said, "Brother Wu the Second, congratulations! How long have you been home?"

"On being granted an amnesty I have been able to return home," said Wu Sung. "But I only arrived yesterday. I am much indebted to you for looking after my brother's home all this time. I will demonstrate my gratitude to you on another day."

Dame Wang gave him an ingratiating smile, saying, "Brother Wu the Second, you look more impressive than before

and have even begun to grow a stubble of beard. Your figure has also filled out attractively, and you have picked up a knowledge of etiquette while away from home."

She then offered him a seat, poured out a serving of tea, and shared it with him.

"There is something I would like to talk to you about," said Wu Sung.

"What might that be, Brother Wu the Second?" asked Dame Wang. "Go ahead and tell me what it is."

"I have heard," responded Wu Sung, "that Hsi-men Ch'ing is already dead, and that my sister-in-law has been expelled from the household and is currently residing here with you. I would venture to ask you to tell my sister-in-law that if she does not intend to remarry, so be it; but that if she does intend to remarry, now that Ying-erh has grown up, I would like to take her as my wife, so she could look after Ying-erh and, early or late, find someone to marry into our family as a son-in-law, so that we can:

Keep the whole household together,
and live out our lives, without arousing the derision of others."

Initially, Dame Wang was reluctant to give her assent to this proposal and said, "It is true that she is living here with me, but I don't know whether she plans to remarry or not."

Afterwards, however, on hearing that Wu Sung intended to see that she was amply rewarded, she said, "Permit me to feel her out on the subject."

The woman, who was eavesdropping behind the portiere, heard Wu Sung say that he would like to marry her so she could help him look after Ying-erh. She also noticed that while away from home Wu Sung had grown bigger and taller than ever, had put on weight, and had learned to speak even more effectively than before.

Her former feelings had not altered, and

In her heart she thought to herself,

"This marriage affinity will enable me to end up in his hands after all."

Thereupon, without waiting for Dame Wang to call for her, she came out herself, greeted Wu Sung with a bow, and said, "If you would really like to marry me so I can help you look after Ying-erh, and find a husband for her, that would be splendid."

"But there is another issue," said Dame Wang. "The First Lady of her household is demanding a bride price of a hundred taels of 'snowflake' silver for her."

"Why is she demanding so much?" asked Wu Sung.

"His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing," said Dame Wang, "originally spent enormous sums of money on her; enough to cast a silver figurine of similar dimensions."

"It doesn't matter," said Wu Sung. "Since I would like to take my sister-in-law home with me as my wife, if it costs me as much as a hundred taels, so be it. In addition, I am willing to offer you five taels of silver as a reward for your efforts."

Upon hearing these words, Dame Wang was pleased enough to:

Fart ferociously and pee in her pants,
and blurted out the words, "Brother Wu the Second, you have really acquired a knowledge of etiquette from your experiences out on the rivers and lakes the last few years. You've really turned out to be a fine man."

Upon hearing these words, the woman went into the inner room, poured a cup of strong tea flavored with melon seeds, and proffered it to Wu Sung with both hands.

"At present," Dame Wang went on to say, "the mistress of her household is anxious to have her disposed of as soon as possible; and there are also three or four persons of official status who are competing with each other to marry her. But I have refused their offers as insufficient. You had better come up with this money as fast as you can. As the sayings go:

The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat.

A marriage affinity between people a thousand li apart
connects them by a single thread.

You wouldn't want her to end up in someone else's hands."

"If you really want to marry me," the woman said, "you must show some urgency about it."

"I'll come to weigh out the silver tomorrow," said Wu Sung, "and invite you to come home with me that evening."

Dame Wang was still somewhat incredulous that Wu Sung had the stipulated amount of money at his disposal but tentatively gave her consent and allowed him to go.

The next day, Wu Sung opened the leather case, took out the hundred taels of silver that Shih En had given him for Stockade Commander Liu Kao, wrapped up an additional five taels worth of loose silver, and went to Dame Wang's place, where he proceeded to weigh it out with a steelyard.

When Dame Wang saw the shiny display of silver that covered the entire tabletop:

From her mouth no word was uttered, but

In her heart she thought to herself,

"Although Ch'en Ching-chi promised me a hundred taels of silver and has gone off to the Eastern Capital to get it, there is no way of knowing when he will return. No matter whether:

Things land right side up or upside down,
it would make no sense to:

Refrain from ringing the bell at hand,

In order to wait for one to be forged."¹²

When she realized that he was also offering her an additional gratuity of five taels, she promptly accepted the money

and bowed to him repeatedly, saying, "Brother Wu the Second, you have really acquired a knowledge of etiquette, and: Understand one's vicissitudes."

"Since you have accepted my silver," said Wu Sung, "I would like to invite my sister-in-law to come and cross my threshold today."

"Brother Wu the Second," expostulated Dame Wang, "you're in too much of a hurry. You're the type who:

Lets off fireworks behind the gate:

Unable to wait for evening.

You'll have to wait until I've gone to the First Lady's place and turned over the money before I'll relinquish her to you."

She then went on to say, "Today:

You'd better don shiny new headgear, for

Tonight you're going to be a bridegroom."¹³

Wu Sung was unhappy about this, but Dame Wang, just as though she:

Didn't know any better,

continued to banter with him and sent him on his way.

"The First Lady from her household," she thought to herself, "merely told me to dispose of her without settling on a particular amount. Today, I might as well simply give her ten or twenty taels of silver. At the very least, barring any monkey business, I ought to be able to make off with more than half of the asking price for the support of my family."

She consequently chiseled off a piece of silver worth twenty taels and went to Yüeh-niang's place to settle accounts with her.

"Who has agreed to take her in marriage?" asked Yüeh-niang.

Dame Wang responded by saying:

"When the rabbit has done exploring the hill,

It will finally go back to its original hole.

She is being taken in marriage by her former husband's brother, so she will end up by:

Eating congee out of her old pot."

Upon hearing this, all Yüeh-niang could do was stamp her feet in resignation.

As the saying goes:

When two enemies meet each other,

Their eyes are clearer than ever.¹⁴

Later on, Yüeh-niang spoke to Meng Yü-lou about it, saying, "In the future, she is likely to die at the hands of her brother-in-law. He is the sort of man who:

Kills people without batting an eye,¹⁵

and is hardly likely to spare her."

We will say no more for the moment about the way Yüeh-niang gave vent to her concerns back at home.

To resume our story, in the afternoon, after Dame Wang had returned home from turning over the silver, she sent Wang Ch'ao ahead to deliver the woman's trunks and her table to Wu Sung's place. Wu Sung, meanwhile, had already completed his preparations, buying wine and meat and appropriate foodstuffs for the occasion.

That evening, Dame Wang led the woman over to Wu Sung's place. She had abandoned her mourning garments, put a new fret on her hair, dressed herself in red clothing, and wore a veil over her head. As she entered the door, she observed that the parlor was brightly illuminated with lanterns and candles, and that Wu the Elder's spirit tablet was set up in a position of honor at the head of the room. This made her somewhat apprehensive, and she couldn't help feeling as if:

Her hair was being pulled, or

Her flesh was being hooked.¹⁶

When they had come through the door and entered the room, Wu Sung ordered Ying-erh to lock both the front and the back doors.

Upon seeing this, Dame Wang said, "Brother Wu the Second, I've got to go. There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."

"Venerable dame," said Wu Sung. "Please come inside and have a cup of wine."

Wu Sung then told Ying-erh to bring in the food and set it out on the table. In no time at all, the wine was duly heated, and he invited the woman and Dame Wang to help themselves to the wine. Wu Sung himself, however, did not proffer any wine to his two guests, but proceeded to pour himself four or five bowls of wine and drink them down one after the other.

When Dame Wang saw that he was getting himself nastily drunk, she said, "Brother Wu the Second, I've had enough wine. Permit me to go. The two of you can continue to enjoy drinking together."

"Dame Wang," responded Wu Sung, "you can cut out the nonsense. I, Wu the Second, have a score to settle with you."

All they could hear was a swishing sound as he proceeded to whip out from beneath his clothes a two-foot long, fine-edged, thick-bladed dagger, which he gripped firmly by the hilt with one hand, while holding it to her breast with the other.

As he:

Opened wide his weird eyes, and

Caused his beard to bristle,

he said, "Dame Wang, there is no reason for you to be surprised. It has always been true that:

For every injustice there is a perpetrator;

For every debt there is a creditor.

You had better not pretend to be:

Still asleep in dreamland.

It is you who are responsible for the death of my elder brother."

"Brother Wu the Second," exclaimed Dame Wang, "it's late at night, and you're drunk. This business of:

Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,

Is not a laughing matter."

"Dame Wang," responded Wu Sung, "you can cut out the nonsense.

Even death itself does not frighten me."¹⁷

Wait until I have finished interrogating this whore, and I will then proceed to question you. Old pig and dog that you are, if you stir by so much as a step, I'll give you five or seven slashes with this blade."

So saying, he turned around to face the woman and reviled her, saying, "Listen to me you whore. Just how did you plot to do my elder brother in? If you:

Report the facts truthfully,¹⁸

I may forgive you."

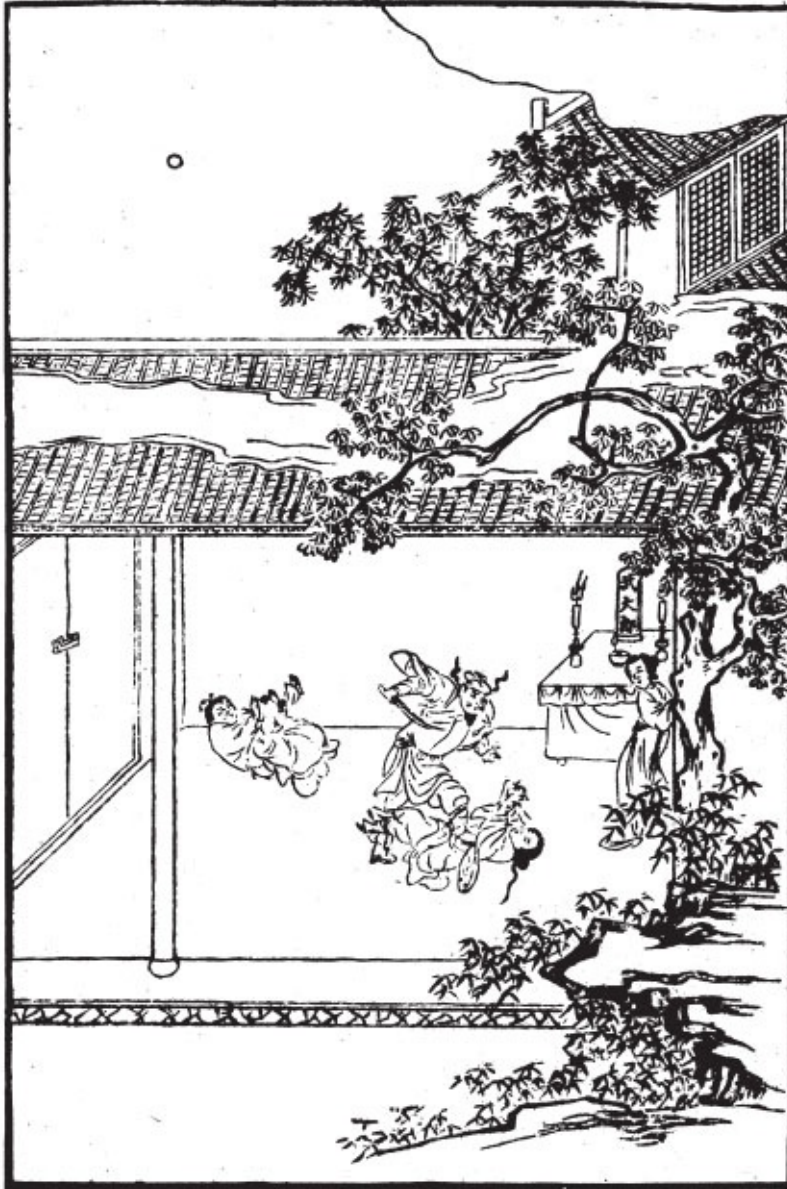
"Brother-in-law," the woman responded, "why is it that:

The beans are popping in this cold pot?

It doesn't make any sense. The fact is your elder brother died of heart trouble. What does it have to do with me?"

Before she had even finished speaking, Wu Sung drove the point of his dagger into the tabletop with a chopping sound, gripped the woman's hair with his left hand, grabbed her bodice with his right hand, lifted her off the ground, and kicked over the table with one leg, knocking the cups and saucers to the floor, and smashing them to smithereens. The woman did not have the stamina to resist as her assailant lifted her lightly over the table and dragged her into the adjacent room to confront the stand on which his brother's spirit tablet was placed.

When Dame Wang saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, she fled toward the front door but found it to be locked. Wu Sung caught up with her in large strides, doubled her over on the floor, took off the belt around his waist, and tied her four limbs together in front of her in the position known as "The Gibbon Offering Fruit,"¹⁹ so that she was completely immobilized.



Wu Sung Kills His Sister-in-law to Propitiate His Brother

"Captain," she called out, "there is no reason for you to get incensed at me. It is the lady herself who is responsible. I had nothing to do with it."

"Old pig and dog that you are!" ejaculated Wu Sung, "I know all about it. Who else are you trying to shift the blame onto? It was you who suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that he get me out of the way by contriving to have me sentenced to military exile. But today, it is I who have managed to return home, while that rascal Hsi-men Ch'ing is nowhere to be seen. If you refuse to speak up, I will first carve up this whore and then proceed to kill you, old pig and dog that you are."

So saying, he picked up his dagger and waved it a couple of times in front of Chin-lien's face.

The woman hastily called out, "Brother-in-law, forgive me. If you will only let me up, I'll tell you what really happened."

Wu Sung responded by jerking the woman to her feet, stripping her stark naked, and then forcing her into a kneeling position in front of the stand that held his brother's spirit tablet.

"You whore!" Wu Sung shouted at her, "You'd better start to talk immediately."

The woman was so frightened it seemed as though:

Her soul was no longer attached to her body,²⁰

and she felt compelled to confess the truth. She told him how, in taking down the bamboo blind over the front door, the forked stick in her hand had fallen onto the head of Hsi-men Ch'ing; how she had made up the burial garments for Dame Wang as part of the scheme to initiate their illicit affair; how Hsi-men Ch'ing had kicked Wu the Elder in the solar plexus

and injured his heart; how Dame Wang had persuaded her to obtain arsenic from Hsi-men Ch'ing and administer it to her husband; how she had arranged for him to be cremated; and how she had been taken into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. She gave a full account of what had happened, word for word, from beginning to end.

When Dame Wang heard this, all she could do was to complain bitterly to herself, saying, "What a simpleton you are! Now that you've told him the truth, how will I ever be able to cover up my own complicity?"

Wu Sung, for his part, held the woman down in front of the spirit tablet with one hand, while pouring a libation with the other, and burning some paper money.

"Elder Brother," he said, "hear me, if your departed soul be not too far away. I, Wu the Second, will now undertake to: Avenge your wrong and assuage your resentment."²¹

When the woman saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, she was about to cry out loudly, but Wu Sung plucked up a handful of ashes from the incense burner and stuffed it into her mouth, so that she was unable to utter a sound, and then roughly doubled her over on the floor. The woman struggled so violently that the fret on her hair, and her pins and earrings, rolled off onto the ground.

Wu Sung was afraid that she might succeed in struggling free, so he kicked her in the ribs with his waxed boots and then stamped on her two arms, saying, "You whore! It is said that you're really intelligent, but I don't know what sort of a heart you have, so I'm going to take a look at it."

So saying, he pulled open her bodice with one hand, and then:

The telling is slow, but

What happened was quick;

he took the dagger and cut open her pale and fragrant breast with a single slash, producing a blood-filled cavity from which fresh blood gushed out. As for the woman:

Her starry eyes blinked half open,

and her two feet kicked spasmodically. Holding the dagger in his teeth, Wu Sung then pulled open her breast with his two hands and, with a popping sound, tore her living heart and entrails, dripping with blood, out of the cavity, and laid them as a sacrifice before the spirit tablet. After which, with a single swipe of the dagger, he cut off her head, as a result of which:

The flow of blood inundated the ground.²²

On seeing this from one side, Ying-erh, who was still only a young girl, was so frightened all she could do was to cover her face with her hands. It is clear that Wu Sung was truly a ruthless man, and that the woman had suffered a pitiable fate. Truly:

So long as one has three inches of breath,

one uses it a thousand ways;

But when the messenger of death shows up,

everything comes to an end.

She was thirty-one years old at the time of her death. Behold:

On falling into his hands, the springtime

of her youth came to an end;

When his dagger fell, the pink-powdered

beauty's life was terminated.

Her seven material souls have floated

into the distance,

And have arrived at the Sen-lo Palace

in the underworld.

Her three ethereal souls have vanished

into invisibility,

And have doubtless reached the City of

the Unjustly Dead.

Her starry eyes are tightly closed;

Stretched out straight, her body lies

on the bare ground.

Her silver teeth are half-clenched;

Dripping with blood, her head lies

fallen to one side.

It is just like:

The heavy snowfall of early spring,

Which breaks the golden threads of

the willow branches;

Or the wild wind of the twelfth month,

That blows off the jade blossoms of

the flowering plum.

As for this woman:

Who knows where her alluring beauty
has vanished to;
Or whose home her fragrant soul has
been reborn in?²³

A poet of yore has left us a poem lamenting the gruesome nature of Chin-lien's death:

The grievous destiny suffered by Chin-lien
was certainly pitiable;
As, stripped of her clothes, she knelt down
before the spirit tablet.
How could she have known that Wu Sung would
slay her with his dagger,
When she expected him to tie her up as Hsi-
men did in the Grape Arbor?
Past events tend to inspire sighs of regret,²⁴
though ephemeral as a dream;
The present life is not even worth so much
as half of a copper cash.²⁵
In this world, every single life must be
repaid with another life;²⁶
Just retribution is clear and inescapable,²⁷
and occurs for all to see.

When Dame Wang saw that Wu Sung had killed the woman, she called out in a loud voice, "A murder has been committed!"

Upon hearing this, Wu Sung stepped forward and cut off her head as well with a single swipe of his dagger, after which he dragged her corpse to one side. He then took Chin-lien's heart and entrails and pinned them up with his dagger under the eaves at the back of the house. By then, it was the first watch of the night, and he proceeded to lock Ying-erh into the room.

"Uncle," complained Ying-erh, "I'm frightened."

"My child," Wu Sung responded, "there is nothing I can do for you under the circumstances."

Wu Sung then vaulted over the wall into Dame Wang's house next door, intending to kill her son Wang Ch'ao; but it turned out that Wang Ch'ao was not fated to die at this juncture. Upon hearing his mother's cry, he realized that Wu Sung was bent on wreaking havoc and tried unsuccessfully to open both the front and back doors. In a state of consternation, he ran out onto the street to find the head of the local mutual security unit. The neighbors to either side knew full well how violent and ruthless Wu Sung was, and none of them ventured to come forward.

When Wu Sung had vaulted over the wall and entered Dame Wang's house, he saw that, though the lanterns were lighted, nobody was present. He then proceeded to open Dame Wang's trunks and scatter her clothing all over the floor. Of the hundred taels of silver he had paid her, she had turned over only twenty taels to Yüeh-niang, so there were eighty-five taels left over, together with a number of hairpins, earrings, and other head ornaments. Wu Sung wrapped all these things up into a bundle, picked up his sword, vaulted over the back wall, and waited until the fifth watch, when he was able to slip out through the city gate and head toward Shih-tzu P'o, where he hid out in the inn operated by Chang Ch'ing and his wife. He subsequently disguised himself as a Buddhist ascetic and went to join the band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh.²⁸ Truly:

If you do nothing in your lifetime to make people
raise their eyebrows;
There should be no one in the world prepared to
gnash his teeth at you.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

P'AN CHIN-LIEN APPEARS IN A DREAM IN COMMANDANT CHOU HSIU'S HOME; WU YÜEH-NIANG CONTRIBUTES A GIFT TO A SUBSCRIPTION-SEEKING MONK

Above, one is exposed to the scrutiny
of Heaven;
Below, one is watched by the spirits
of the Earth.

In the world of light there is imperial law¹
to restrain one;
In the darkness there are ghosts and spirits
to follow one.²

Loyalty and uprightness should be embedded
in one's heart;
Joy and anger should be governed by one's
vital spirits.

It is lack of integrity that causes one
to lose one's home;

It is dishonesty that results in losing
one's position.

You are urged to be vigilant about this
throughout your life;
Lest you have cause to sigh, be alarmed,
or become afraid.³

THE STORY GOES that after Wu Sung had killed the woman and Dame Wang and taken their valuables, he went to join the band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh.

To resume our story, after Wang Ch'ao ran out onto the street to look for the head of the local mutual security unit, he noticed that both the front and rear doors to Wu Sung's house were locked, and that the valuables had been taken from Dame Wang's house and the clothing scattered:

Higgledy-piggledy,
all over the floor. Upon realizing that Wu Sung had killed both women and made off with their valuables, he felt compelled to break open both the front and rear doors, only to find their two corpses dripping with blood where they lay on the floor, Chin-lien's heart and entrails pinned up with a dagger under the eaves at the back of the house, and Ying-erh locked up inside the room. When he asked her what had happened, all she could do was to weep bitterly.

The next day, at the early session of the court, he submitted a report to the district magistrate and laid the dagger that had been used as the murder weapon before him. The newly appointed district magistrate was named Li Ch'ang-ch'i and was a native of Tsao-ch'iang district in Chen-ting prefecture of Hopei province. On hearing that it was a case of homicide, he promptly deputed the docket officer on duty to round up the neighbors, the head of the local mutual security unit, and the family members of the victims, Wang Ch'ao and Ying-erh, so that the corpses could be carried out into the street for all to see while a formal inquest was performed as the law required. It was determined that the two victims, P'an Chin-lien and Dame Wang, had been murdered by Wu Sung in a fit of drunken rage, and this tentative conclusion was:

Duly drawn up as a file on the case.⁴

The local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit were ordered to arrange for the temporary interment of the two bodies and to keep watch over them. Public placards describing the fugitive were hung up announcing that officers were being deputed to pursue the culprit Wu Sung in all directions, and that a reward of fifty taels of silver was being offered by the authorities for anyone who could provide evidence of his whereabouts.

Meanwhile, Chang Sheng and Li An from Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence showed up at Dame Wang's place with a hundred taels of silver, only to find that Dame Wang and the woman had both been murdered by Wu Sung, and that the district yamen had sent people to perform an inquest on the corpses and apprehend the murderer. The two of them then returned and reported this at the commandant's residence. When Ch'un-mei learned that Chin-lien was dead, she did nothing but weep for two or three days and refused to partake of either tea or food. This threw Commandant Chou Hsiu into such a state of consternation that he sent someone out onto the street to hire an itinerant acrobat to come in and entertain her, but her sorrow was not assuaged. He also dispatched Chang Sheng and Li An every day to find out if the culprit Wu Sung had been apprehended and report back to him. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our

narrative aside for a moment.

To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi had started out for the Eastern Capital in order to get the money needed to ransom Chin-lien, with whom he had set his heart on becoming man and wife. Who could have anticipated that when he was halfway there, he should run into his family's servant Ch'en Ting, who had set out from the Eastern Capital to tell him that his father was in a parlous state of health.

"My mistress sent me to ask you to come home," he said, "so she can turn over to you the responsibility for the future of the household."

No sooner did Ch'en Ching-chi hear these words than he set out faster than ever:

Covering two stages in the time for one,
and duly arrived, one day, at the house of his father's brother-in-law, Chang Shih-lien, in the Eastern Capital.

Chang Shih-lien had already died, so only his aunt was there, and he learned that his father, Ch'en Hung, had passed away about three days earlier, so the whole household was wearing mourning garb. Ch'en Ching-chi paid his respects before his father's spirit tablet and kowtowed to his mother, née Chang, and his aunt, née Ch'en, the elder sister of Ch'en Hung. His mother saw that he had already reached manhood, and the two of them, mother and son, wept together and then consulted with each other about the situation.

"Right now," his mother said:

"On the one hand, there is reason to be happy,

While on the other, there is reason to be sad."⁵

Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "What reason is there to be happy, and what reason is there to be sad?"

"The reason to be happy," his mother responded, "is that the Emperor has designated an heir apparent to reside in the Eastern Palace, and that at the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice a general amnesty has been issued to celebrate the occasion. The reason to be sad is that your father has taken ill and died unexpectedly, your uncle has also died, and your aunt is maintaining her widowhood. Under the circumstances, for us to remain living here:

Is not a long-term solution.

That is why I sent Ch'en Ting to summon you. If we can arrange together to take your father's coffin back to his native place for burial, it would be a good thing."

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard these words:

In his heart he thought to himself,

"If I should have to be responsible for preparing the coffin, and loading the bulky belongings of our family and its dependents into carts for the journey, it is bound, at the very least, to hold me up for a considerable period of time and cause me to miss out on this opportunity to marry Sister Six. It would be better for me, thus and so, to propose setting out for home immediately with two carts loaded with trunks of valuables. It would not be too late for me then to come back and take care of my father's coffin after marrying Sister Six."

He then said to his mother, "At present, the roads are beset with bandits and are hazardous to travel. If we were all to set out together, with my father's coffin and our trunkloads of bulky household belongings loaded onto any number of carts and beasts of burden, it would be difficult to avoid arousing attention; and if we were to encounter a bunch of brigands along the way, what would we do?

It is better to be late than to be sorry.

I ought to set out for home right now with two carts loaded with trunks of valuables, and take care of getting the house in shape. You and Ch'en Ting, along with the other household dependents, can then accompany father's coffin, and return home during the first month, after the New Year's Festival is over. It will not be too late then to deposit the coffin in a temple outside the city walls, arrange a funeral ceremony and scripture recitation, and see that it is properly entombed."

His mother, being the woman that she was, though she ought not to have done so, allowed herself to be persuaded by Ch'en Ching-chi's artful arguments; set out to pack two trunks with valuables; and loaded them onto two large carts that bore banners identifying them as pilgrimage vehicles. He departed from the Eastern Capital on the tenth day of the twelfth month and arrived not many days later at the gate of the family home in the Ch'ing-ho district of Shantung province.

Upon his arrival, he told his maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, "My father is already dead, and my mother is going to accompany the cart with his bier and should arrive sometime in the near future. I have brought two cartloads of belongings with me and have come ahead to take care of getting the house in shape and sweeping it out prior to her arrival."

When his maternal uncle heard this, he said, "In that case, I had better move out and return to my own home."

He then, forthwith, told his servants to move his belongings and vacated the premises.

Upon seeing his maternal uncle move out, Ch'en Ching-chi was utterly delighted and said to himself:

"At long last my enemy has been removed from my sight,

which will enable me to marry Sister Six and enjoy her here at home to my heart's content. Since my father is already dead, and my mother dotes on me, I can first divorce that whore of mine, and then lodge a formal complaint against my mother-in-law and have her haled into court in order to recover the things that my family originally entrusted to her. Under the circumstances, she is no longer in a position to say no to this demand, since the members of my family are no longer threatened with military exile."

Truly:

Though men may plan to do thus and so:

Heaven's principles may yet deny them.

Ch'en Ching-chi, as soon as he had succeeded in getting his maternal uncle to move out, put a hundred taels of silver into the wallet at his waist, and another ten taels into his sleeve as a gratuity for Dame Wang, and proceeded to make his way to the door of her house on Amethyst Street.

Strange as it may seem, what should he see but the temporary tombs of two corpses buried on the side of the street in front of her door, with a pair of spears crisscrossed above them, and a lantern suspended from them. On the door there hung a handwritten placard that read as follows:

Notice concerning a case of murder posted by the district yamen. The culprit, Wu Sung, has murdered the woman née P'an and Dame Wang. Anyone who is able to apprehend him, or provide information to the authorities, will be rewarded with fifty taels of silver.

Ch'en Ching-chi raised his head and gazed at it for some time.

What should he see at this juncture but two men who emerged from a temporary shelter and shouted at him, "Who are you? And why are you gazing at that placard? At present, the real culprit has not been apprehended. Who are you anyway?"

The two of them advanced toward him in large strides as though they wished to take him into custody. Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation by this that he fled from the scene as fast as he could go.

As he was passing by the tavern below the stone bridge on Lion Street, he ran into someone wearing a flat-topped cap and a black jacket, who came up behind him from under the bridge and said, "Brother, you're really foolhardy. What were you staring at back there for no good reason?"

When Ch'en Ching-chi turned his head to look at him, he saw that it was an old friend of his named Yang the Elder, nicknamed the Iron Fingernail.

After the two of them had exchanged greetings, Yang the Elder said, "Brother, I haven't seen you for some time. Where have you been?"

Ch'en Ching-chi told him all about his trip to the Eastern Capital and his father's death and then said, "That woman who was slain recently was a concubine of my father-in-law's, whose maiden name was P'an. I didn't know that she had been murdered. It was only on reading that placard just now that I found out about it."

"It was her brother-in-law Wu Sung who did it," explained Yang the Elder. "He had been serving a term in military exile but was able to return home as the result of a general amnesty. I don't know why he murdered the woman and also refused to let Dame Wang off. He has a young niece who was supported for the last three or four years by my maternal Uncle Yao the Second. The other day, when her uncle committed those murders and disappeared, who knows where, my uncle recovered the girl from the district yamen, and he is planning to look for someone he can marry her to. Right now, those two corpses have been buried in their temporary graves for some time and are a source of distress to the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, who don't know on what day, month, and year the culprit Wu Sung will be arrested."

When he had finished speaking, Yang the Elder invited Ch'en Ching-chi to join him for a drink in the tavern, saying, "It will serve to brush off the dust from your journey."

Ch'en Ching-chi was so distressed at heart by the death of the woman that he was unable to enjoy the wine, and after drinking a mere three cups or so, he got up, went downstairs, said good-bye, and returned home.

That evening, he bought a hundred sheets of paper money and made his way to a spot by the stone bridge, some distance from Dame Wang's house on Amethyst Street, and addressed the woman, saying, "Sister Six, née P'an, I, your younger brother Ch'en Ching-chi, am burning a hundred sheets of paper money on your behalf today. It is all because I arrived back a step too late that you forfeited your life."



Ch'en Ching-chi Moved by the Past Sacrifices to Chin-lien

While alive you were a human being;

Once dead you have become a spirit.⁶

Allow me to assure you that I will apprehend your enemy Wu Sung in order to:

Avenge your wrong and assuage your resentment.

Only when I see him dismembered on the execution ground will my aspirations of a lifetime be fulfilled."

When he had finished speaking, he wept and then burned the paper money on her behalf.

Upon returning home, Ch'en Ching-chi shut the door, entered his bedroom, and went to bed, whereupon:

Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,

Chin-lien appeared to him in a dream, dressed all in white, with her entire body covered with blood, and wept before him, saying, "My brother, I died a gruesome death. I had hoped that I would be able to spend the rest of my life with you, but unexpectedly you failed to show up, and I was murdered by that rascal Wu Sung. At present, the Underworld will not admit me, so that, by day, I can only:

Drift aimlessly about;⁷

and, by night, I have to scrounge around everywhere in search of offerings made to the deceased. Just now, I received the hundred sheets of paper money that you burned for me, but that enemy of mine has not yet been apprehended, and my corpse is lying in a temporary grave on the street. If you are still moved by our old feelings for each other, you might buy a coffin, put my corpse into it, and see that I am properly buried, so that I will not have to lie there exposed for days on

end.”

Ch'en Ching-chi wept on hearing this and said, “My sister, needless to say, I would like to see you properly buried. But I am afraid that my mother-in-law, that bitch who is utterly devoid of benevolence or righteousness from the Hsi-men Ch'ing household, who has it in for me, would seize upon this pretext to do me harm. Sister, what you ought to do is go to the residence of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and ask Ch'un-mei to see if she can take care of having you properly buried.”

“I have just been to the commandant's residence,” the woman said, “but:

The Gate God and the Portal Sentinel,⁸
blocked my way and would not let me in. I will have to go back and plead with them again however long it may take.”

Ch'en Ching-chi wept on hearing this and reached out to take hold of her and discuss the problem further when he was assailed by the stench of blood from her body as she extricated herself from his grasp and disappeared. It turned out to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch.

As he lay awake on his pillow he heard the watchman's drum sound the second period of the third watch and said to himself, “How uncanny! Just now, I clearly saw Sister Six in a dream. She shared her innermost feelings with me and asked me to take care of giving her a proper burial; but we don't know:

On what day of what year,⁹

Wu Sung will be apprehended. It's really distressing.”

Truly:

Beset by limitless sorrow, communicated
in a dream;
He sits alone in an empty room, weeping
until dawn.

We will say no more for the moment about how Ch'en Ching-chi sought for information about the whereabouts of Wu Sung.

To resume our story, the authorities in the district yamen spent more than two months trying to locate and arrest Wu Sung but failed to apprehend him. Only then did they learn that he had fled to join the band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh. When the local constable, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, and the neighbors reported this to the authorities, it was decided that it would be appropriate to empower the relatives of the deceased to remove their bodies for burial. Dame Wang's corpse was duly taken away and buried by her son Wang Ch'ao; but there was no one to take charge of P'an Chin-lien's cadaver.

To resume our story, in the meantime, Ch'un-mei in Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence had been sending Chang Sheng and Li An to the district yamen every two or three days to find out if there was any news about the situation; and they had been reporting back that the culprit had not yet been apprehended, that the bodies of the victims were still temporarily interred under the surveillance of the local constable, and that under the circumstances no one would dare to remove them. This situation continued until some time in the first ten days of the first month of the following year.

Unexpectedly, one evening, Ch'un-mei had a dream in which Chin-lien appeared to her:

In an illusory and hallucinatory manner;¹⁰
With her cloud-shaped chignon disheveled,
And her entire figure covered with blood;

and called out to her, saying, “Young lady P'ang, my good sister, I died a gruesome death. I have been unable to come and see you, having been prevented by the Gate Gods who shouted so fiercely at me that I did not dare try to come in. At present, my nemesis Wu Sung has managed to escape, and my corpse has been exposed in the street for a long time:

Blown by the wind, drenched by the rain,¹¹
And stepped on by the chickens and dogs,

with no one to bury it. Since I am without any relatives to look to, if you can remember our former feelings for each other, like those between mother and daughter, bring yourself to purchase a coffin for me, and see to my burial:

Although I will be dead in the Underworld,
I will be able to close my mouth and eyes.”

When she had finished speaking, she wept unceasingly. Ch'un-mei attempted to take hold of her, wishing to question her further, but she extricated herself from her grasp and disappeared, leaving Ch'un-mei to wake up and find that it was merely:

A dream of the Southern Branch.

Upon wakening from her dream in tears, she was:

Hesitant and uncertain what to do.¹²

The next day, she called in Chang Sheng and Li An and directed them, saying, “The two of you go to the front of the district yamen and see whether the corpses of that woman and Dame Wang are still buried there, or not.”

Chang Sheng and Li An accepted her instructions and set off on their errand.

Before long, they returned and reported, “The perpetrator of their murders is still at large. It is not convenient for the local officials to continue keeping watch over the corpses any longer, so they have empowered the relatives of the victims to remove their corpses and bury them. The corpse of Dame Wang has been removed by her son, but no one has come forward to take charge of the other woman's corpse, which is still buried there on the street.”

Ch'un-mei said to them, "In that case, there is something I would like to ask the two of you to do for me, for which I will see that you are amply rewarded."

The two of them knelt down and said, "Mistress, how can you say such a thing? If you are willing to put in a good word for us with the master, that will be more than sufficient."

Though we should have to go through fire and water, we would not refuse your request."

Ch'un-mei went into her room and came out with ten taels of silver and two bolts of muslin, which she turned over to the two of them, saying, "This murdered woman is actually a sister of mine, who married into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household but has been murdered upon leaving it. I would like the two of you, without informing the master, to take this silver, purchase a coffin with it, see that her corpse is encoffined, and then carry it outside the city and take care of burying it properly in some convenient spot. If you do so, I will see that you are amply rewarded."

The two of them responded, "That's no problem. We will do what you ask."

But Li An said, "I'm only afraid that the authorities in the district yamen will not let the two of us remove the corpse. It would be preferable if we could give them a note from the master authorizing our request."

Chang Sheng responded, "If we simply tell them that our mistress is a younger sister of the deceased who married into the Hsi-men household, the authorities in the yamen will not dare not to comply with our request. What need is there for a note?"



Thereupon, they took the silver and retired to the duty room, where Chang Sheng said to Li An, "I imagine that this murdered woman and our mistress must have lived together in the Hsi-men household and become intimate with one another. Otherwise, why should our mistress go to such pains on her behalf? I remember that when our mistress heard that this woman was dead, she did nothing but weep for two or three days and refused to eat, which disturbed our master to such an extent that he sent someone out onto the street to hire an itinerant acrobat to come in and try to entertain her, but her sorrow remained unassuaged. So, today, when there are no relatives to take possession of her corpse, how could our mistress fail to take care of having it decently buried? If we are able to carry this task out successfully, she is bound, sooner or later, to speak to the master on our behalf. Which means she will turn out to be our lucky star. At present, the master pays heed to everything she says and is:

Obedient to her every whim,

while our First Mistress and Second Mistress have had to take a back seat."

When they had finished speaking, the two of them took the silver they had been provided with, went to the district yamen, and submitted a formal request that they be authorized to remove the corpse, explaining that their mistress, a member of His Honor Chou Hsiu's household, was the younger sister of the deceased and had entrusted them with this task. They then spent six taels of silver on the construction of a coffin, disinterred the woman's cadaver, replaced her heart and entrails in her abdominal cavity, employed thread to reattach her head to her body, wrapped the corpse in a shroud, and placed it in the coffin.

Chang Sheng then said, "We might as well take her out to be buried at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, our master's family temple outside the South Gate, where there are empty grounds available, and then report back to our mistress."

They then hired two men to carry the coffin out to the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where they explained to the abbot, Tao-chien, that the corpse was that of a relative of their mistress. The abbot, who did not dare to be remiss, chose a spot for the burial behind the temple, under a hollow-trunked white poplar tree.

Once the burial was completed, they returned home and reported to Ch'un-mei, saying, "There are still four taels of silver left over after buying a coffin and placing her corpse in the casket, which we hereby return to you."

"I have put the two of you to a lot of trouble," responded Ch'un-mei. "You should give two of the four remaining taels to Abbot Tao-chien, and ask him to arrange for the recitation of Buddhist sutras and litanies of repentance in order to ensure her rebirth in Heaven."

She then presented them with a large flagon of wine, a leg of pork, and a leg of lamb and said, "As for these two remaining taels of silver, each of you should take one of them home with you to help with your household expenses."

The two of them knelt down before her and refused to accept what she had offered, saying, "Mistress, if you will only put in a good word for us with the master, we will be more than adequately compensated. How could we accept payment in silver for such a meager accomplishment?"

"If I offer you a reward and you refuse to accept it," said Ch'un-mei, "you will only make me angry."

The two of them, consequently, felt obliged to kowtow to her and accept what she had offered before leaving her presence. As they drank the wine they had been given in the duty room, they expressed great appreciation for their young mistress.

The next day, Chang Sheng went to deliver the silver to Abbot Tao-chien and arrange for the scripture recitations. Ch'un-mei also spent five mace of silver to purchase paper money to burn on Chin-lien's behalf. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ch'en Ting had conducted the coffin of Ch'en Ching-chi's deceased father, Ch'en Hung, and his dependents from the Eastern Capital to the outskirts of Ch'ing-ho district, where they proceeded to store the coffin temporarily in the Temple of Eternal Felicity until they could make the arrangements for scripture recitations, funeral rites, and the burial ceremony.

When Ch'en Ching-chi, who was living in the family home, heard that his mother, née Chang, their servants, and the carts with their belongings had arrived, and that his father's coffin had been placed in storage at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city, he proceeded to bring in the luggage, before kowtowing to his mother.

His mother was annoyed and asked him, "Why did you not come to meet me?"

Ch'en Ching-chi merely replied that he was depressed, on the one hand, and that there was no one to look after the place.

His mother then asked, "Why is your uncle not to be seen?"

To which he replied, "On hearing that you were coming home, he promptly moved out and returned to his own place."

"You should have told your uncle to stay a while," his mother said. "What need was there for him to move out so fast?"

Soon thereafter, his uncle, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, came to see his elder sister, and the two of them:

Embraced each other by the neck and wept.¹³

Wine was served and they proceeded to chat together, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

The next day, his mother sent Ch'en Ching-chi to deliver five taels of silver and several packets of paper money to Abbot Tao-chien at the temple outside the city gate, so he could arrange a scripture recitation on behalf of his deceased father. As he was riding his donkey along the street, he ran into two friends of his named Lu the Second and Yang the Elder and dismounted in order to greet them.

"Brother, where are you going?" the two of them asked.

Ch'en Ching-chi explained his errand, saying, "My deceased father's coffin is in temporary storage at a temple outside

the city gate. Tomorrow, the twentieth, is the time for the final weekly commemoration of his death, and my mother has sent me to deliver some silver to the abbot so he can arrange for a funeral ceremony and scripture recitation on his behalf."

"The two of us did not know that your father's coffin had arrived," they responded. "We have been remiss in offering our condolences."

They then went on to ask, "When will the funeral procession and the burial ceremony take place?"

"They will take place in another day or two," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "After the scripture recitation has been held, he will be put to rest in the grave."

When they had finished their conversation, the two of them raised their hands in a gesture of farewell and started to leave, but Ch'en Ching-chi called them back and asked Yang the Elder, "How is it that the cadaver of my father-in-law's concubine, née P'an, that was temporarily interred in front of the district yamen is no longer to be seen? Who has taken it away?"

"About a fortnight ago," said Yang the Elder, "because the local authorities had not been able to apprehend Wu Sung, they petitioned the district magistrate to allow the relatives of the deceased to take their corpses away for burial. Dame Wang's cadaver was taken away by her son, but the body of the other woman was left where it was for another three or four days. In the end, someone from the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command purchased a coffin and sent people to carry the bier outside the city and bury it on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity."

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he realized that it must have been Ch'un-mei, who was now a member of the commandant's household, who had arranged for the burial of the body.

He then turned to Lu the Second and asked, "How many Temples of Eternal Felicity are there outside the city wall?"

"There is only the one Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate," replied Lu the Second. "It is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu. How could there be more than one temple of that name?"

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he was secretly pleased and thought to himself, "So it's the same Temple of Eternal Felicity after all."

This coincidence was fated to occur.

It is fantastic that Sister Six is also buried there."

He then took leave of his two friends, whipped up his donkey, and made his way outside the city straight to the Temple of Eternal Felicity.

On meeting Abbot Tao-chien, he did not mention the scripture recitation for his father but asked the abbot, "Where is the grave of the woman from Commandant Chou Hsiu's household that was buried here recently?"

"It is underneath the white poplar tree behind the temple," the abbot replied. "They said that it was the body of the elder sister of the young mistress from the commandant's household."

Ch'en Ching-chi did not even bother to go look at his father's coffin but went first to P'an Chin-lien's grave with his paper money and sacrificial offerings.

After presenting the offerings and burning the paper money, he wept, saying, "Sister Six, your younger brother Ch'en Ching-chi has respectfully burned a packet of paper money on your behalf. May you:

Find an appropriate place in which to live;

And use the cash to cope with any problems."¹⁴

Only after he had finished sacrificing to her did he proceed to the abbot's quarters in order to burn paper money before his father's coffin and offer a sacrifice to him. He then presented the abbot with the money to pay for a scripture recitation and asked him to arrange for eight Buddhist monks to hold a scripture reading on the twentieth to mark the final weekly commemoration of his father's death. The abbot accepted the money offered for the scripture recitation and provided him with a vegetarian repast, after which Ch'en Ching-chi returned home to report to his mother.

On the twentieth, they all went to the temple to burn incense and select an auspicious day for the funeral procession. Later on, after his father's coffin had been transported to their ancestral graveyard and properly buried, they returned home, where mother and son continued to live together. But no more of this.

To resume our story, one day during the first ten days of the second month, when the weather was mild, Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Hsiao-yü, made their way out to the front gate in order to observe the coming and going of the carts and horses, and enjoy:

The liveliness of the teeming crowds.¹⁵

While there, they happened to observe a throng of men and women following in the wake of a Buddhist monk, who had an imposingly corpulent figure, wore bronze effigies of three Buddhas on his head, and bore a number of lantern trees on his body.

The sleeves of his apricot-yellow gown
ruffled in the wind;

While the ankles of his naked feet were
immersed in the mire.

He claimed to be an itinerant monk who had been ordained at Mount Wu-t'ai¹⁶ and had arrived here in the course of his wanderings in the endeavor to raise money and supplies for the erection of a Buddhist sanctuary there. An author of olden times has bequeathed us a few lines describing the virtues of such itinerant monks.

Assuming the lotus position to practice meditation,

Explaining the scriptures and expounding the Dharma,¹⁷
Raising their brows and blinking their eyes,
They struggle to attain the truth of the patriarchs.¹⁸
Relying on their religion to seek sustenance,
They propound the regulations of the Buddhist faith.
By day, they only sport their placards
and rattle their bells;
At night, they manipulate their spears
and flaunt their clubs.
Sometimes, they kowtow with their bald
heads outside the gate;
When hungry, they give themselves loud
slaps along the street.
Reality is vacuity, vacuity is reality;
But who has ever seen living beings
escape the mundane world?
They may go and come, and come and go;¹⁹
But who have they managed to escort
to the Western Paradise?

When the monk saw Wu Yüeh-niang and the other women gathered at the gate, he came forward and saluted them in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "You venerable lay bodhisattva-like benefactors, though you may inhabit:

Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
are all predestined to be present at the Dragon Flower Assembly.²⁰ I have come down from Mount Wu-t'ai in the hope of cementing our virtuous affinity by soliciting the funds to erect a temple to the Ten Kings of the Underworld and a sanctuary dedicated to the Three Jewels, The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The success of this effort is dependent upon the willingness of you bodhisattvas, and others of:

The patrons in the ten directions,
to:

Widely sow your fields of fortune,²¹
so that by disbursing your wealth you can:

Together achieve a major endeavor,
and thus ensure:

A just reward in the life to come.
This humble monk is merely an intermediary."

Upon listening to his appeal, Yüeh-niang turned to Hsiao-yü and directed her to fetch a monk's hat, a pair of monk's sandals, a string of copper cash, and a peck of white rice from her room. It so happens that Yüeh-niang had always been given to:

Almsgiving, or providing vegetarian
meals for monks,

so that during her leisure hours she devoted herself to making monk's hats and monk's sandals in order to give to them.

When Hsiao-yü brought these things out, Yüeh-niang said to her, "You go ask His Reverence to come forward, and bestow these things upon him."

Hsiao-yü, thereupon:

Deliberately adopting an arrogant air,²²
called out in a loud voice, saying, "You shaven-pated donkey of a monk, why haven't you come over here? My mistress is bestowing all these things on you, and you haven't even kowtowed in response."

Yüeh-niang rebuked her, saying, "You crazy, depraved little stinker! He is a monk, and a devoted Buddhist.

As though you didn't know any better,
how can you bring yourself to abuse him that way? It's really outrageous. Little whore that you are, there's no telling how much evil karma you will have accumulated before you're through."

Hsiao-yü laughed at this and responded, "Mistress, as for this lousy monk, why is it that when I called him over, he devoted himself to:

Looking me over from top to bottom,
with those furtive eyes of his?"

The monk, for his part, accepted the sandals, hat, cash, and rice with both hands, saluted Yüeh-niang in the Buddhist fashion, and said, "Many thanks for your largess, you venerable bodhisattva of a benefactor."

"This shaven-pated rascal is really discourteous?" remarked Hsiao-yü. "All of us are standing here, but he has only offered us two salutations. Why has he not offered one to me?"

"You little piece," said Yüeh-niang. "How can you:

Scramble black and white,

so blatantly? He is a son of the Buddha, and you are not worthy of receiving his salutation."

"Mistress," responded Hsiao-yü, "If he is a son of the Buddha, who are the Buddha's daughters?"

"I imagine," said Yüeh-niang, "that it is ordained nuns who are the daughters of the Buddha."

"If you say that people like Nun Hsüeh, Nun Wang, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery are all daughters of the Buddha," continued Hsiao-yü, "who are the sons-in-law of the Buddha?"

Yüeh-niang could not help laughing at this and reproved her, saying, "You lousy little whore! You've developed such an:

Oily mouth and a slippery tongue,
that you constantly resort to vulgarity."

"Mistress," responded Hsiao-yü, "you're only directing your criticism at me, but this shaven-pated monk, with his:

Thievish looks and prying eyes,
has been constantly ogling me."

"The fact that he looks at you that way," said Meng Yü-lou, "must be because he recognizes you as a candidate for salvation."

"If he really wants to save me," responded Hsiao-yü, "I'm willing to go along with him."

The gathering of womenfolk couldn't help laughing over this, but Yüeh-niang reproved her in a loud voice, saying, "You little whore! It seems that all you can do is persist in:

Blaspheming monks and profaning Buddhas."²³

Meanwhile, the monk in question accepted the donations and proceeded nonchalantly on his way with the bronze effigies of three Buddhas on his head.

"Mistress," complained Hsiao-yü, "though you rebuked me for cursing him, as you saw yourself, that lousy shaven-pated rascal gave me another indecent look as he departed."

There is a poem that describes Yüeh-niang's proclivity to:

Cultivate her virtue by charity to monks.

Maintaining my widowhood and reading the sutras
the years and months flow by;
Private dissipation and meaningless indulgence
have long been anathema to me.
My person is just like the moon near the edge
of the horizon;
That will not let itself be intruded upon by
floating clouds.

As Yüeh-niang and the others continued their conversation by the gate, they suddenly observed that Auntie Hsüeh was passing by on the street with her box of trinkets in hand.

When she saw Yüeh-niang and the others she bowed to them, and Yüeh-niang asked, "Where are you headed? And why have we not seen so much as your shadow around here recently?"

"I hardly know what it is that keeps me so busy all day," said Auntie Hsüeh. During the last few days, the family of His Honor Judicial Commissioner Chang Mao-te who lives on Main Street has contracted a marriage between his son and the niece of Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter, a match that was proposed by myself and Auntie Wen. Yesterday, as part of the 'third-day celebration,' they put on a lavish party, which kept me so busy that even though the young lady from your place who is now the mistress of Commandant Chou Hsiu's household sent for me, I was unable to go. Who knows how irritated with me she may be?"

"So where are you headed right now?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"There is something that I have respectfully come to tell you about," said Auntie Hsüeh.

"If there is something you want to communicate," said Yüeh-niang, "come inside and tell me about it."

So saying, she ushered Auntie Hsüeh back to the master suite in the rear compound and offered her a seat.

When they had consumed a serving of tea, Auntie Hsüeh said, "Venerable lady, you may not know about it, but last year in the Eastern Capital your son-in-law's father Ch'en Hung fell ill and died, and his wife called upon your son-in-law to come and help bring their dependents and his coffin home. They arrived here during the first month, and the scripture recitation, funeral procession, and burial ceremony have already taken place. I had assumed that you knew about all this, but if so, why did you not go burn some paper money on his behalf, or visit with your relatives?"

"If you had not come to tell us about it, how could we have known?" said Yüeh-niang. No one bothered to inform us. All we heard was that P'an Chin-lien had been murdered by her brother-in-law and was buried, along with Dame Wang, in a temporary grave. And we don't even know what her situation may be at present."

Auntie Hsüeh opined, "It has always been true that for P'an Chin-lien, as for all of us:

Her place of birth and place of death
were predetermined.

If the Fifth Lady's conduct had not caused her to be expelled from the household, everything would have been all right. But, for no good reason, since she:

Was not the sort to abide by her lot,
she chose to engage in an ugly affair, and got herself expelled. If she had remained in the household, how would her brother-in-law have been able to murder her? After all:

For every injustice there is a perpetrator;

For every debt there is a creditor.

It is thanks to the young lady from your household, Ch'un-mei, who couldn't get over her intimate feelings for her former mistress, that someone was sent to purchase a coffin, take possession of her corpse, and give it a proper burial. Otherwise, it would still be exposed to the public gaze in the street. Her brother-in-law has not been apprehended, and there was nobody else concerned about her fate."

Sun Hsüeh-o interrupted from the sidelines, saying, "It hasn't been long since Ch'un-mei was sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu. How could her status have risen so quickly to the point that she was able to dispense the silver needed to buy a coffin for her? How could the commandant help being annoyed with her? Who does she think she is, anyway?"

"Ai-ya!" responded Auntie Hsüeh. "You may not know it, but the commandant has really become attached to her. He spends every night in her quarters.

She has but to say one thing,

And he will comply with ten.

No sooner did he take her into his household than he noticed how attractive and intelligent she was, provided her with a suite of three rooms on the western side of the courtyard, assigned a maid to wait upon her, and spent three successive nights in her room. He had outfits of clothing for the four seasons tailored for her and allowed her to put her hair up like a regular lady. At the party on the 'third-day celebration' he rewarded me with a tael of silver and a bolt of satin. His first wife is forty-nine years old, is blind in both eyes, restricts herself to vegetarian fare, and does not concern herself with household affairs. His concubine Sun Erh-niang resides on the eastern side of the courtyard and has borne him a daughter. Although she is theoretically in charge of the household, she has her hands full looking after her daughter. As a result, the keys to all the storerooms in the house, both large and small, have been entrusted to Ch'un-mei. The commandant responds favorably to every request she has to make. So how can you say that she would be unable to disburse such a sum of silver?"

With these few words she managed to reduce both Yüeh-niang and Sun Hsüeh-o to silence.

After sitting a while longer, Auntie Hsüeh got up to go, and Yüeh-niang said to her, "If you are willing to come back tomorrow, I will prepare an offertory table, a bolt of fabric, and a packet of paper money for the use of the dead, and impose upon you to escort Hsi-men Ta-chieh to her father-in-law's tomb in order to burn the paper money on his behalf."

"Are you not going to go yourself?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.

"Just tell them I have been feeling out of sorts," said Yüeh-niang, "and that I will pay a visit to them on another day."

Auntie Hsüeh agreed to these arrangements, saying, "Tell the young lady to get everything ready and wait for me. I will come by after lunch."

"Where are you off to now?" inquired Yüeh-niang. "If it is the commandant's place, forget it."

"If I don't go, they will be annoyed to death with me," said Auntie Hsüeh. "They have sent a young servant to summon me several times already."

"What are they summoning you for," asked Yüeh-niang.

"Mistress," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "you may not know it, but she is already four or five months pregnant. His Honor is utterly delighted and has probably summoned me in order to reward me."

So saying, she picked up her box of trinkets, said farewell, and proceeded on her way.

"What that old whore says is completely without any basis," remarked Sun Hsüeh-o. "How long has it been since she was sold into the commandant's household? Scarcely long enough to have developed half a wombful of child. That commandant, at the very least, has a number of concubines at his disposal. So why should he insist on favoring her? How can she overstate things so?"

"He already has a legitimate wife," said Yüeh-niang, "as well as a concubine who has borne him a daughter."

"It's outrageous!" pronounced Sun Hsüeh-o. "Just an example of the loquaciousness of a go-between."

Producing hundred-foot waves out of a
foot's worth of water."

What Sun Hsüeh-o said that day was not without consequences. Truly:

Heaven has seen fit to bestow both
the needle and thread;
That bring out discordant patterns
from the fabric's ground.²⁴

There is a poem that testifies to this:

One recalls the time when she was a servant
at her mistress's beck and call;
Who could have anticipated that today her
prospects would be so different?
In this world, the infinite possibilities²⁵
are all predetermined;
Scoff not that, in this floating life one's
efforts may prove vain.²⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

ON THE CH'ING-MING FESTIVAL THE WIDOW VISITS THE NEW GRAVE; WU YÜEH- NIANG BLUNDERS INTO THE TEMPLE OF ETERNAL FELICITY

Tossed by the wind, enshrouded in mist,
the brocade banner flutters;
During this era of great peace¹ the days
are beginning to grow longer.
Wine is capable of enhancing the courage
of even a stouthearted hero;²
And is equally effective at alleviating
the depression of a beauty.
Deep within the three-foot-long branches
on the willow-lined bank;
The tavern's signpost rises at an angle
beside the apricot trees.
The stalwart who has yet to accomplish
his lifelong ambition;³
Is prone to sing haughtily as he enters
the Land of Drunkenness.⁴

THE STORY GOES that the next day Wu Yüeh-niang saw to the preparation of an offertory table, replete with a pig's head and the three sacrificial animals, soup and rice, paper money for the dead, and the like, wrapped up a bolt of fabric, and directed Hsi-men Ta-chieh to get herself ready by donning plain white mourning garments, and taking her seat in a sedan chair. Auntie Hsüeh then took charge of the sacrificial offerings and preceded her along the way to the door of the Ch'en residence. What should she see when she arrived there but Ch'en Ching-chi himself, who happened to be standing in the doorway.

Auntie Hsüeh started to turn the sacrificial offerings over to a servant to take inside when Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "Where do they come from?"

Auntie Hsüeh greeted him with a bow and said, "Son-in-law, don't pretend that you don't know. Your mother-in-law has sent me to present these things as an offering to your deceased father, and also to return your wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to you."

"Some fucking excuse for a mother-in-law!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi.

"To paste up the effigies of the Gate Gods on

the sixteenth of the first month,

Is to be half a month too late.⁵

Only after the corpse of the deceased has been buried in the grave does she bother to offer a sacrifice on his behalf."

"My good son-in-law," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "your mother-in-law points out that a widow is as helpless as a legless crab. It is only because she did not know that the coffin of her kinsman had been brought home that she has been late in her response. Don't hold it against her."

While they were speaking to each other, what should they see but Hsi-men Ta-chieh's sedan chair, which was being set down at the door.

"Who is that?" Ch'en Ching-chi demanded to know.

"Who else would it be?" responded Auntie Hsüeh. "Your mother-in-law is not feeling well. On the one hand, she is returning Hsi-men Ta-chieh to you, and on the other hand, she is respectfully offering to burn paper money on behalf of your father."

"Take that whore back where she came from forthwith!" Ch'en Ching-chi exclaimed abusively. "Better persons than she have died:

By the ten thousands and the thousands.⁶

What would I want with the likes of her?"

"As the saying goes," responded Auntie Hsüeh,

"To marry a husband is to accept a master.

How can you talk that way about her?"

"I won't have anything more to do with that whore!" said Ch'en Ching-chi. "Why aren't you taking her away?"

Seeing that the bearers of the sedan chair were just standing there without making a move, Ch'en Ching-chi stepped out and gave them a couple of kicks, saying, "If you refuse to take her away, I'll break the legs of you beggars and pluck out the hair on her temples."

When the bearers of the sedan chair saw that he was bent on kicking them, they felt compelled to pick up the sedan chair and head for home without delay.

By the time Auntie Hsüeh succeeded in calling out Ch'en Ching-chi's mother, née Chang, the sedan chair had already been carried away, and she had no alternative but to take up the sacrificial offerings and return to report the situation to Wu Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang nearly fainted with rage on hearing about it and said, "What an unprincipled short-life of a jailbird! Originally, your family, because of its legal troubles, sent you here to hide out in your father-in-law's household, which has maintained you for all these years. And now you are:

Requiting kindness with enmity,
and have the nerve to maintain that my dead husband was only bent on sequestering your valuable property. Having first created a scandal, you are now trying to:

Cast me in the role of a stinking rat,
while you persist in:

Letting off your hot stinking farts of protest."

She then turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "My child, you have seen with your own eyes that neither his father-in-law nor his mother-in-law have shortchanged him in any way. But the fact is that:

While you live you are a member of his family;

If you die you will become his family's ghost.⁷

There is no way I can continue to keep you here. You must go back to him tomorrow. There is no reason to be afraid of him. He will hardly thrust you down a well. No matter how foolhardy he may be, he is not likely to kill you. One can scarcely allege that there is no imperial law to be applied to him in this world."

We will say no more of the events of that evening.

The next day, Yüeh-niang had Hsi-men Ta-chieh put into a sedan chair and told Tai-an to escort her to Ch'en Ching-chi's residence. Who could have anticipated that Ch'en Ching-chi was not at home at the time but had gone to the cemetery to add earth to his father's tomb in order to make a higher grave mound.

His mother, née Chang, was a woman of breeding and agreed to receive Hsi-men Ta-chieh, saying to Tai-an, "When you return home, convey my gratitude to our kinswoman for her sacrificial offerings, and ask her to make allowances for my son, who had too much to drink yesterday, which accounts for his rude conduct. I will do what I can, little by little, to admonish him."

So saying, she offered Tai-an some refreshments before gently inducing him to return home.

That evening, when Ch'en Ching-chi returned from the graveyard and saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh, he fell to kicking and beating her as he cursed her, saying, "You whore! What are you doing back here? Do you still have the nerve to accuse me of scrounging for food off your family? Your family still has possession of the trunks of valuables that we entrusted to you, and which enabled your family to achieve its considerable wealth, so how can they claim to have been supporting their son-in-law for nothing? Better persons than you have died by the thousands. So what would I want with a whore like you?"

Hsi-men Ta-chieh responded in kind, saying, "You shameless jailbird! You unprincipled jailbird! When that whore was expelled from the household and got herself murdered, you felt helpless to do anything about it and have been taking it out on me."

Ch'en Ching-chi reacted by grabbing hold of the hair on top of her head and beating her as hard as he could with his fists. When his mother came over and tried to intervene, he gave her a shove that knocked her onto the floor.

His mother, screaming with rage, shouted, "What a jailbird you are! Your eyes are so red you don't even recognize your mother."

That evening, Ch'en Ching-chi once again sent Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to the Hsi-men household, saying, "If you fail to recover your dowry and the trunks of valuables that my family entrusted to them, whore that you are, I will see that your life is put to an end."

Hsi-men Ta-chieh was so intimidated by this threat that she stayed at home and did not venture out again. There is a poem that testifies to this:

On first acquaintance, their mutual trust
was not unmingled with doubt;
Though their feeling for each other seemed
to be utterly without limit.
Who could have known that even the best of
things are subject to change;
Even a single thought may turn out to be
the harbinger of resentment.⁸

Hsi-men Ta-chieh remained so intimidated that she stayed at home, without daring to go out.

One day during the third month, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, Wu Yüeh-niang prepared incense and candles, imitation gold and silver paper money for the dead, offerings, including the three sacrificial animals, wine and delicacies, and the

like, and had them put into two large food boxes to be carried to the family graveyard five li outside the city wall and presented at Hsi-men Ch'ing's recently created tomb. She left Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and the maidservants behind to look after the house, while taking with her Meng Yü-lou, Hsiao-yü, and the wet nurse Ju-i, who was carrying the infant Hsiao-ko, as they proceeded in their sedan chairs to the site of the family graveyard. She also invited the venerable couple, her brother Wu K'ai and his wife, to accompany them.

As they emerged from the city gate, behold:

The suburban fields stretch into the distance;
A landscape replete with blossoming fragrance.⁹
The flowers are red and the willows are green;
Wellborn young ladies and wandering gentlemen,
Pass hither and yon in their unbroken streams.
Among the four seasons of the year,
None of them is superior to spring,
With its all-surpassing loveliness.
Its days are designated glorious days,
Its breezes are called genial breezes,
Expanding the willow buds,
Opening the flower hearts,
Blowing the fragrant dust.
When the weather is warm it is called genial;
When the weather is cool it is called chilly.
The horses ridden then are called rare steeds;
The sedan chairs are called fragrant vehicles;
The roads walked on are called fragrant paths.
The dust that ascends is called fragrant dust.
The thousands of flowers that begin to bloom,
And the myriad grasses that engender sprouts,
Are called the harbingers of spring.
The spring splendor shimmers,
Its pure vistas are pleasing.
The tiny peaches cluster,
Their visages decorated voluptuously;
The slender willows sway,
Their waists supple as palace ladies.
The warbling of the orioles,¹⁰
Breaks off one's midday dreams;
The chirping of the swallows,
Betokens their spring sadness.
As the days begin to lengthen,
Yellow goslings bathe in the warm streams;
As the waters start to spread,
Green ducklings cavort amid the fragrance.
Across the water one glimpses an estate
of someone unknown;
Where a swing is suspended on high amid
misty green willows.

Indeed, the springtime scene is truly marvelous. When the spring season arrives, the prefectures, subprefectures, districts, and circuits all see to it that every village, garrison, township, and market within their jurisdictions is provided with areas that are worth visiting.¹¹ There is a poem that testifies to this:

During the Ch'ing-ming Festival mists
hover everywhere;
In the suburbs the breezes waft shreds
of paper money aloft.
People laugh and people sing amidst
the fragrant meadows;
Sudden clearing and sudden showers¹²
beset the apricot blossoms.
Amid the flowering crab apples the
songbirds give voice;
Beside the willow-lined embankment
the drunkards snooze.
Red-rouged beauties compete for places
on the painted boards;
Tugging the gaudy ropes they resemble



On the Ch'ing-ming Festival a Widow Visits the New Grave

To resume our story, by the time the sedan chairs of Wu Yüeh-niang and the others arrived at the family graveyard at Wu-li Yüan, Tai-an, who had gone ahead of them with the food boxes, had already made his way to the kitchen and arranged for the fire in the stove to be lighted, and for the chef who had been hired for the occasion to prepare the foodstuffs. But no more of this.

When Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, Hsiao-yü, and the wet nurse Ju-i, who was holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, arrived at the country estate, they sat down in the parlor and consumed a serving of tea while they waited for Sister-in-law Wu to arrive, but she failed to show up. Meanwhile, Tai-an went to the sacrificial platform in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's tomb and set up the offertory tables replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals, the soup and rice, and other ceremonial offerings and also laid out the paper money to be burned to the dead.

All they could do was to wait, but it turned out that Sister-in-law Wu had been unable to hire a sedan chair. It was not until around ten o'clock in the morning that she and her husband Wu K'ai, who had succeeded in hiring a couple of donkeys, finally arrived.

"If you were unable to hire a sedan chair, Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "there really must not have been enough of them available on this festival occasion."

After consuming a serving of tea, and changing their clothes, they proceeded to the front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's tomb to

present their sacrificial offerings and sweep the grave. Yüeh-niang was holding five sticks of incense in her hand, one of which she kept for herself, one of which she handed to Meng Yü-lou, and one of which she gave to the wet nurse Ju-i, who was carrying Hsiao-ko in her arms. The other two she handed to her elder brother Wu K'ai and his wife.

After placing her stick of incense in the burner, Yüeh-niang bowed deeply before the tomb and said, "Brother:

While alive you were a human being;

Once dead you have become a spirit.

Today, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival during the third month, your devoted wife Wu the Third, your Third Lady Meng Yü-lou, and your infant son Hsiao-ko have respectfully come to burn paper money before your grave, in the hope that you will assure him a long life of a hundred years, so that he will be able to offer sacrifices and sweep your grave in the future. Brother, you and I were man and wife for all that time, and when I recall your looks, and the way you used to talk to me, I am overcome with sorrow."

Tai-an then set the paper money on fire. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

As the paper money burns out,
I can't help stamping my little feet.
During the whole period I was your wife,
We never exchanged hostile words with each other.¹⁴
I really looked forward to living in harmony
with you until our old age.¹⁵
Who could have anticipated that you would
abandon me halfway?
Originally, the sentimental hopes for
the future were mine,
But though you bequeathed us a fortune
as solid as a brass ladle,¹⁶
Our child is still young,
And mother and son have been left
a widow and orphan.
How will we manage to get by?
It is just like running into a rainstorm
during a journey,
Or encountering a windstorm halfway to
one's destination.
The male and female mandarin ducks have
been forced to part;
The exotic fruits have been plucked
before they were ripe.
I cry out to my good-natured brother,
"On recalling your carriage and deportment,
How can I help sighing in distress?"

Continued to the tune "Every Step Is Captivating":

The ashes of the paper money I have
burned swirl about,
But I do not see the face of my husband.
I cry out, "My young husband,
You have abandoned our delicate son,
And left me all alone.
If the two of us have no marital affinity,
How will we ever be able to see
each other again?"

Meng Yü-lou then stepped forward, stuck her stick of incense in the burner, bowed deeply, and wept to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

As the paper money burns out,
My eyes are filled with tears.
I cry out to mankind and to Heaven,
You have abandoned me with no place to go.
I really looked forward to remaining with you
until our hair turned white.
Who could foresee that en route the flowers
would wither and the moon fade?¹⁷
The First Lady has a male child, so her
future prospects are good;
But I have been abandoned so that the fallen
tree no longer provides shade.
With whom am I to carry on?
To keep lonely vigil amid empty bed curtains,¹⁸
Is more than I can stand.
I'm unable to reach the inn ahead, or make it
back to the village behind.
I suppose my fallen leaves have returned to the root,
And I must harvest my garden and reap my just reward.
I cry out to my youthful brother,
"If I ever see you again, it can only be
an encounter in a dream."¹⁹
It's enough to grieve me to death."

Continued to the tune “Every Step Is Captivating”:

I can only weep and wail until I am
stupefied with grief.
Once gone there are no tidings of you.
You have left me with no future in sight,
no future in sight.
You were in the springtime of your youth,
And I was still captivated to behold;
How upsetting it is.
It has wasted my flowery visage
and moonlike features.

After Meng Yü-lou had finished burning her incense, the wet nurse Ju-i, holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, also knelt down to present her incense and kowtowed; after which Wu K'ai and his wife proceeded to burn their incense in turn. When these formalities were concluded, they were ushered into the summerhouse on the country estate, where a table and mats had been set up, and food and wine prepared. Yüeh-niang arranged for Wu K'ai and his wife to occupy the positions of honor, while she and Meng Yü-lou sat along one side, and Hsiao-yü, the wet nurse Ju-i, and Lan-hua, the senior maidservant in the Wu household, sat on the other. The wine was then poured, but we will say no more, for the moment, about how they proceeded to drink it.

To resume our story, that day Commandant Chou Hsiu also went to visit his ancestral tombs. Before this, during the preceding night, Ch'un-mei had slept with the commandant and pretended to have had a dream from which she awakened in tears.

The commandant asked in consternation, “What are you crying about?”

Ch'un-mei replied, saying, “I dreamt that my former mistress came to me in tears and wanted to know why, since she had nurtured me so generously over the years, I was not planning to go and burn paper money on her behalf at the time of the Ch'ing-ming Festival and the Cold Food Festival.²⁰ That is why I wept on waking up.”

“This is an example of your filial feelings of gratitude for the nurture you received from her,” said the commandant. “Do you know where your former mistress's grave is located?”

“It is located behind the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate,” responded Ch'un-mei.

“That's not a problem,” said the commandant. “The Temple of Eternal Felicity is my family temple. Tomorrow, when we go to visit our ancestral graves, you can have the servants carry some sacrificial offerings to present to her, and burn some paper money on your mistress's behalf. That would be the right thing to do.”

The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu had his servants prepare food boxes, wine and appetizers, and sacrificial offerings and set out for his ancestral graveyard outside the South Gate. His estate was replete with a mansion, halls, and gardens, as well as a chapel and a sacrificial platform. His first wife, his concubine Sun Erh-niang, and Ch'un-mei all rode in sedan chairs borne by four bearers each, and preceded by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, as they set out on their excursion to the family graveyard.

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang, with her older brother Wu K'ai and his wife, enjoyed their wine for a while, after which, fearing that it was getting late, she directed Tai-an and Lai-an to collect the food boxes and the remaining wine and appetizers and precede them along the Ten-li-long Embankment to find an elevated spot before the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village,²¹ where they could set up a picnic table and await them, so they could enjoy:

The liveliness of the teeming crowds.

When they saw that Sister-in-law Wu did not have a sedan chair, they decided to walk and let the bearers carry their sedan chairs behind them. The group of men and women then set out on their way, tripping over the grass and enjoying the scenery, while Wu K'ai led the donkeys to bring up the rear.

After three li they walked past Peach Blossom Inn;

After five li they beheld Apricot Blossom Village.

Behold: Swarming along the roads to visit their ancestral graves:

The patrician youths and wellborn ladies,²²

Amidst the red flowers and green willows,

Producing a tumultuous hubbub as they go,

Pass hither and yon in their unbroken streams.

On top of which:

The sun is warm and the breeze is gentle,²³

so that those who:

Pursue fragrance and savor the landscape,

Are so multitudinous they cannot be numbered.

As they walked along, it turned out to be one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

As they gazed into the distance, in the shade of the green locust trees, they perceived a temple of impressively fine construction. Behold:

The gate of the temple soars aloft;

The Buddhist sanctuary is secluded.

The characters on the imperial plaque

are clearly inscribed;
 The bearing of the guardian deities on
 either side is fierce.
 The thirty-foot-wide front of the main hall,
 Is roofed with serried rows of azure
 dragon-scale tiles;
 The monk's quarters along the two corridors,
 Are made of shiny tortoiseshell bricks
 inlaid with flowers.
 In the front hall are graven gods that bring,
 Favorable winds and seasonable rains;²⁴
 In the rear hall stand venerated effigies of,
 The Buddhas of the past and the future.²⁵
 The bell and drum towers rise close together;
 The sutra storage chamber is located on high.
 The flagstaff soars aloft impinging upon
 the bluish clouds;
 The sacred pagoda likewise encroaches on
 the azure heavens.
 Wooden fish are horizontally suspended;
 Cloud-shaped gongs are hanging on high.
 The space before the Buddha is ablaze
 with lamps and candles;
 Emerging from the burner the smoke of
 incense swirls about.²⁶
 Pennants are arrayed in endless numbers;
 The hall of the goddess Kuan-yin is next to
 the chapel of the patriarchs.
 Jeweled canopies are clustered together;
 The effigy of Hārīti²⁷ is situated next to
 the gallery of the Arhats.
 From time to time the Dharma-protecting
 gods descend;
 Year in and year out the demon-quelling
 deities appear.²⁸

"What is the name of this temple?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang.

"This is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu," responded Wu K'ai. "It is called the Ch'an Temple of Eternal Felicity. In former days, when my brother-in-law was still alive, he donated a considerable sum of silver for the restoration of the sanctuary, which is why it is in such good shape today."

Yüeh-niang then turned to Sister-in-law Wu and said, "Let's go into the temple and see what it looks like."

Thereupon she led her group of men and women into the temple. It was not long before a young novice spotted them and reported their arrival to the abbot.

When he saw that there were a number of men and women, he came out of his quarters to welcome them, saying, "My bodhisattva and my benefactor, pray feel free to explore the premises."

What did this abbot look like? Behold:

His bluish, finely polished, pate
 is newly shaven,
 And is evenly anointed with musk
 and pine seed oil.
 His long blazing-yellow gown is
 newly tailored,
 And is saturated with aloeswood
 and sandalwood.
 His high-ridged sandals,
 Have been dyed a deep black
 in Fu-chou;
 His belt of silk braid,
 Is of deep purple, imported
 from the West.

The slippery and furtive eyes
 of this monk,
 Are solely devoted to ogling
 alluring donors;
 The sweet-sounding words of
 this bald rascal,
 Are merely designed to tempt
 bereft young widows.
 When his voluptuous feelings
 are stirred,
 He proceeds to seek out nuns in
 their convents;
 Whenever his lustful daring
 is turbulent,
 He entices novices into his
 abbot's quarters.
 When he observes immortal ladies
 he seeks to bed them;
 Upon beholding the Moon Goddess
 he longs to seduce her.²⁹

When the abbot saw Wu K'ai and Wu Yüeh-niang, he came forward and saluted them by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to them in the Buddhist fashion, after which, he promptly summoned a young novice and said to him, "You open up the Buddhist sanctuary and invite our benefactor and the bodhisattva to explore the premises. Meanwhile, this humble monk will see to providing a serving of tea."

The young novice, thereupon, opened up the sanctuary and conducted Yüeh-niang and the group of men and women accompanying her on a tour of the two corridors, front and rear. After paying their respects and looking around for a while, they returned to the abbot's quarters, where he hastened to pour out a serving of fine tea, brewed with sweet water, and served in snow-white cups.

Wu K'ai then asked the abbot for his religious name, and the abbot responded, with an ingratiating smile, saying, "This humble monk's religious name is Tao-chien, and this edifice is the family temple of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu. This humble monk serves as the abbot of the temple, and there are some hundred or more monks under my jurisdiction. The meditation hall located behind the sanctuary also houses a considerable number of itinerant monks who engage in continual meditation in order to requite the good deeds of the benefactors from the four directions."

He then proposed to provide a vegetarian repast in the abbot's quarters and invited Yüeh-niang to partake thereof, saying, "Will you bodhisattvas please be seated. This humble monk is unable to provide any more than this meager collation."

"We ought not to impose upon your sacred institution in this way," responded Yüeh-niang.

She then took out five mace of silver and handed them to Wu K'ai so he could offer them to the abbot, saying, "This is to compensate you for burning some incense before the Buddha."

The abbot, with an ingratiating smile, bowed in gratitude, saying, "This humble monk is not able to offer you any more than this scant refreshment. It is my hope that you benefactors and bodhisattvas will condescend to sit down for a while and partake of this meager collation, which is all that I can offer. What need is there for you to present me with a donation?"

In no time at all, a young novice set up a table and brought in a vegetarian repast and some pastries, while the abbot sat down beside them and raised his chopsticks in order to proffer Yüeh-niang and the others samples of the various dishes.

All of a sudden, they were interrupted by the appearance of two black-clad servants, panting and puffing, who broke in upon them like a clap of thunder and addressed the abbot, saying, "Abbot, why haven't you come out to welcome her? The young mistress from the commandant's household is on her way here to make a sacrificial offering."

This threw the abbot into such consternation that he hastily threw on his cassock, donned his Vairocana hat, ordered a young novice to clear away the utensils, and said to his guests, "Will you bodhisattvas please retire into a side chamber for the time being. It will not be too late to sit down together again after the young lady has burned some paper money, offered her sacrifice, and gone on her way."

Wu K'ai wanted to refuse, but the abbot insisted upon their staying, as though it were a matter of life or death, and would not let them go.

He then hastily ordered the striking up of bells and drums and went out the gate of the temple to receive his visitor, going as far as the turnoff where the entranceway to the temple met the highway to wait. What should he see then but a crowd of black-clad servants escorting a large sedan chair as it came flying toward him from the east. The chair bearers had been traveling so fast that:

Their faces were bathed in sweat,
 And their clothes soaked through.

The abbot bent his body and saluted his guest in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "This humble monk did not know of

your coming, young lady. I fear I have been remiss in not coming further to meet you. Pray forgive me.”

Ch'un-mei, from inside the curtain of the sedan chair, merely said, “I am imposing upon Your Reverence.”

Meanwhile, her servants had taken the offertory table to the back of the temple, where they placed it in front of Chin-lien's grave and set out the offerings and paper money upon it. When Ch'un-mei's sedan chair arrived, she did not go into the temple but proceeded straight to the site of Chin-lien's grave under the white poplar tree behind the temple, where she got out of her sedan chair, and her black-clad servants lined themselves up to either side.

Ch'un-mei then:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
made her way in front of the grave, stuck her stick of incense in the burner, kowtowed four times, and said, “My mistress, today your servant P'ang Ch'un-mei has come to burn a packet of paper money on your behalf.

May you find a pleasurable place in Heaven;

And use the cash to cope with any problems.

If I had only anticipated that you might suffer death at the hands of your enemy, I would have found a way, somehow or other, to have you enter the commandant's household, so that we could be together. It is I who have let you down, but my repentance is too late to be of any use.”

When she had finished speaking, she ordered her attendants to burn the paper money. Ch'un-mei then stepped forward and commenced to weep out loud. There is a song to the tune “Sheep on the Mountain Slope” that testifies to this:

As the paper money burns out,
I stamp my phoenix-toed shoes to pieces.
I call out to you, “Mother,
My liver and intestines feel ruptured.
Merely because you were so captivating,
people turned against you,
And lost no time in seeing you expelled
from the household;
Thereby opening the way for your enemy
to ensnare you.
Situating as I was in a secluded mansion,
I was not free to act;
And you had no relatives, so there was
no one to care about you.
I had hoped that we could share the same
bed and a single pillow.
Who could have known that death would
cut short your life,
And in such a pitiable fashion?”
I cry out to Azure Heaven, “How blind
can you be?”
As the sayings go, the finest objects
are difficult to preserve,
And the bolt of red silk is shorter
than it ought to be.

We will say no more, for the moment, about how Ch'un-mei made sacrifices and wept before Chin-lien's grave.

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang, in the side chamber of the monk's quarters, knew only that a young lady from the commandant's quarters had come, and that the abbot had gone out to receive her, though she had not been seen to come in.

She asked a young novice about this, and he explained, “An elder sister of the young lady was recently buried in a grave behind the temple. Because today is the Ch'ing-ming Festival, she has come to make a sacrifice, sweep the grave, and burn paper money on her behalf.”

“I wonder if it might not be Ch'un-mei who has come?” remarked Meng Yü-lou.

“Since when has she had any elder sister that might have been buried here?” responded Yüeh-niang.

She then asked the young novice, “What is the surname of this young lady from the commandant's household?”

“Her maiden name is P'ang,” replied the novice. “The other day she donated four or five taels of silver to the abbot to pay for a scripture recitation on her elder sister's behalf, in the hope that it might:

Promote her chances of rebirth in Heaven.”³⁰

“I have heard Father mention that Ch'un-mei's maiden name was P'ang,” remarked Meng Yü-lou, “and that she was referred to as Miss P'ang. It must surely be her.”

As they were speaking, what should they see but the abbot, who came in ahead of his guest and ordered a young novice to quickly prepare some fine tea. Before long, the sedan chair was borne past the inner gate of the abbot's quarters, where the passenger was allowed to descend. Yüeh-niang, along with Meng Yü-lou and the others, proceeded to look out through the door-blind of the room in which they were secluded to see what the young lady looked like. When they got a closer look, they saw that it was indeed Ch'un-mei, although, compared to her former appearance, she seemed to have grown:

Larger and taller in stature.

Her face was like a full moon,

and she appeared to be:

Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.

On her headdress:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;

A phoenix hairpin was half askew.

She was wearing a scarlet jacket with a floriate design, over a skirt with a wide border of kingfisher blue embellished with gold thread, suspended from which decorative pendants tinkled. She was adorned quite differently from the way she had been in the past. Behold:

Her chignon is of an imposing height;

Her phoenix hairpin is half askew.

Pearl earrings hang low beneath her ears;

Golden phoenixes jut behind either temple.

Her scarlet embroidered jacket,

Enhances her jade-white fragrant flesh;

Her kingfisher-patterned skirt,

Shows off her minuscule golden lotuses.

Whenever she moves,

It makes the jade pendants on her breast tinkle;

Wherever she sits,

The reek of orchid and musk assails the nostrils.

Her neck appears to be made of congealed powder;

Flowery ornaments artfully enhance her eyebrows.

Her visage is astonishing,

Her countenance resembles the rare beauty

of a secluded flower;

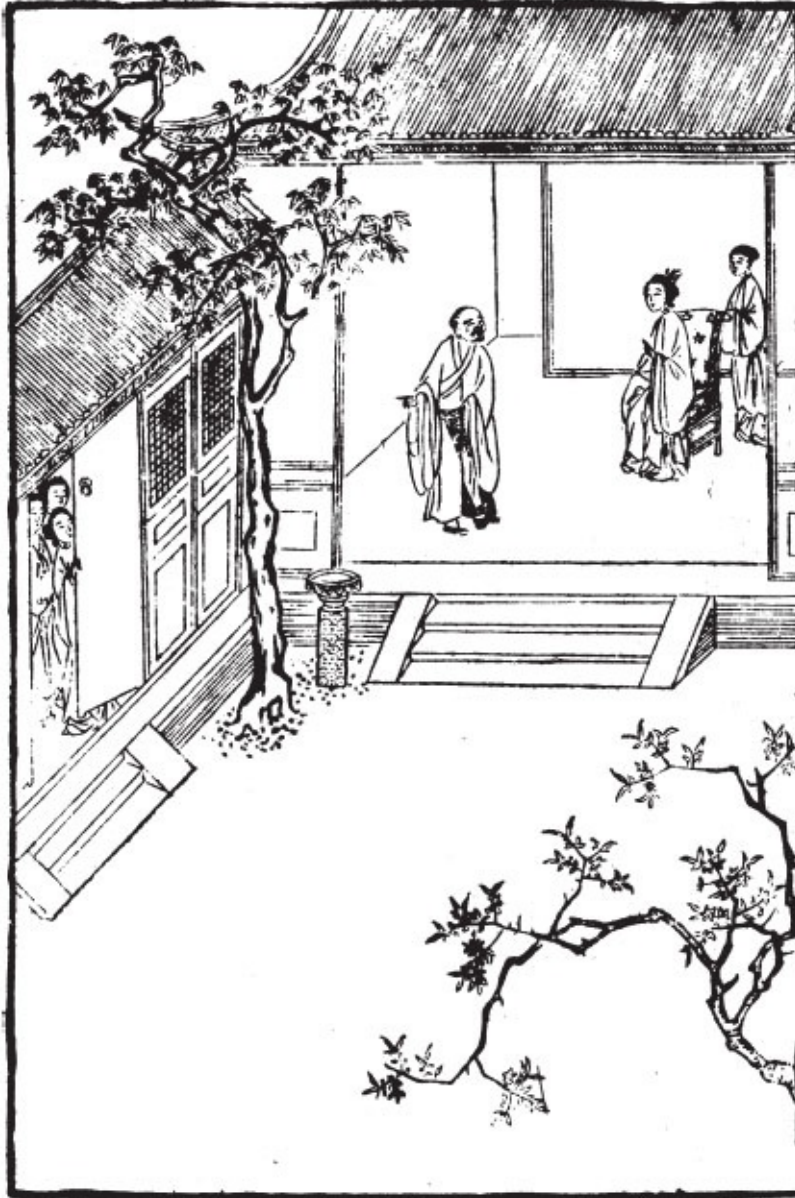
Her deportment is elegant,

Her nature appealing and agreeable as the

fragrance of orchids.

If she was not engendered in ornate quarters,

She has been raised in orchidacious chambers.



In the Temple of Eternal Felicity a Wife Meets Her Owner

She looks just like:

The alabaster goddess from the Purple Elysium
taking leave of the milky way;
An immortal of the Palace of Clustered Pearls³¹
descending to the mundane world.

The abbot lifted aside the portiere and invited the young lady into the parlor in his quarters. A formal seat was placed all by itself in the place of honor at the head of the room, and Ch'un-mei sat down upon it. When the abbot had finished paying his respects, a young novice came in with a serving of tea.

The abbot then offered her some tea, saying, "This humble monk was unaware that anyone was coming from the commandant's household to visit the grave today, or that you would be arriving to present a sacrifice.

I have been remiss in welcoming you.³²

Pray extend this humble monk your forgiveness."

"The other day," responded Ch'un-mei, "I put you to a lot of trouble reciting scriptures and praying for the salvation of the soul of the departed."

"How could this humble monk presume to accept such praise?" the abbot blurted out. "What effort did I expend sufficient to repay my benefactress for all the money for the recitation and other acts of beneficence you lavished upon

me? This humble monk merely engaged the services of eight Ch'an monks to conduct the rites, recite the scriptures, and perform a litany of repentance. At the end of the day, they also prepared several coffers of paper money and burned them on behalf of the deceased. Only after the rites had been completed did I send the three servitors from your household back inside the city to report back to you."

When Ch'un-mei had finished drinking her tea, the young novice took the utensils away, and the abbot continued to engage her in an animated dialogue. This meant that Wu Yüeh-niang and her fellows were cooped up in their side room and did not feel comfortable about coming out. When Yüeh-niang saw that it was getting late, she sent the young novice to invite the abbot inside and told him that they would like to leave, but the abbot would not consent.

Instead, he went back into the parlor and said to Ch'un-mei, "There is something that this humble monk would like to mention to you."

"Your Reverence," responded Ch'un-mei, "Pray express yourself without constraint."

"Right now," the abbot explained, "there are several sightseeing ladies here, who were engaged in looking over the premises but did not know that you would be arriving. At present, they have expressed a desire to go home, but I do not know what you may feel about it."

"Your Reverence," said Ch'un-mei, "why not ask them to come out so we can meet each other?"

The abbot hastened to convey this request, but Wu Yüeh-niang was still reluctant to come out and said, "Your Reverence, there is no need for us to meet her. It is getting late, and we would like to be on our way."

The abbot felt embarrassed that he had accepted their largess without doing anything adequate to entertain them, and therefore he urged them repeatedly to come out. In the end, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Wu K'ai's wife felt that they could hardly refuse any longer and consented to come out.

As soon as she saw them, Ch'un-mei exclaimed, "So it turns out to be you two ladies and Sister-in-law Wu."

So saying, she maneuvered Wu K'ai's wife into assuming the position of honor and proceeded:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
to kowtow to her; which so affected Sister-in-law Wu that she hastened to return her salutation, saying:

"The present cannot be compared to the past.

You embarrass this old body to death."

"My good sister-in-law," said Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? I am not the sort of person who ignores distinctions of status:

Exalted or humble, above and below;

This is a self-evident principle."

Having kowtowed to Sister-in-law Wu, she then turned to Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou and proceeded to kowtow to them:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.

Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou were about to return the compliment, but Ch'un-mei would not let them and helped them to their feet.

After kowtowing to them four times, she said, "I did not know that you all were here. If I had known, I would have invited you out so we could greet each other."

"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "since you left us, you have been a member of the commandant's household for some time now, and I have been remiss in not coming to pay a call on you. Pray don't hold it against me."

"My good lady," said Ch'un-mei, "how could the likes of me presume to hold anything against you?"

Then, upon noticing that the wet nurse Ju-i was holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, she remarked, "How little brother has grown."

Yüeh-niang thereupon turned to Ju-i and said, "You and Hsiao-yü, come over and kowtow to your elder sister."

Ju-i and Hsiao-yü, accordingly, came over with ingratiating smiles and performed a half obeisance to Ch'un-mei, while Yüeh-niang said, "Sister, pray accept their salutations."

Ch'un-mei then proceeded to extract a pair of gold-headed silver pins from her hair and stick them into Hsiao-ko's cap.

"Thank Sister for her pins," said Yüeh-niang to Ju-i. "Aren't you going to pay her an obeisance in return?"

Ju-i thereupon, while holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, actually paid an obeisance to Ch'un-mei, which pleased Yüeh-niang no end.

"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "if you had not come to the temple today, we would not have had this chance to meet each other again."

"You are right," responded Ch'un-mei. "It is only because my venerable mother was recently buried behind the temple here that I came. After all, I served under her for all this time, and she:

Lacks either relatives or friends.³³

If I were not to express my concern for her by coming and burning some paper money on her behalf, how would I be able to live with myself?"

Yüeh-niang said, "As I recall, your mother has been dead for quite a few years, but I did not know that she was buried here."

"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "you don't understand what Sister P'ang is saying. She is referring to the death of P'an the Sixth. It was thanks to our sister that she was buried here."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she was reduced to silence.

"Who could be kinder than you, Sister?" remarked Wu K'ai's wife. "You were unwilling to forget the favors you

enjoyed from her in the past and have gone to the trouble to have her decently buried. And now, on this festival occasion, you have remembered her, and come to burn paper money on her behalf."

"My good lady," responded Ch'un-mei. "I could hardly help remembering the favorable treatment I received from her. In view of the cruel manner in which she died, and the way in which her corpse was exposed and abandoned, how could I fail to arrange a decent burial for her?"

As soon as they had finished speaking, the abbot instructed a young novice to serve them a vegetarian repast. Two large Eight Immortals tables were duly set up, and their surfaces covered with steamed shortcake, fried pastries, a variety of vegetarian dishes, and the finest golden-leaved Sparrow Tongue tea, brewed with sweet water. When they had finished eating, the utensils were cleared away. Meanwhile, Wu K'ai had also been entertained in one of the monk's quarters, but no more of this.

Meng Yü-lou then got up, intending to go pay a visit to Chin-lien's grave and burn some paper money there on her behalf, in memory of the sisterhood they had shared together. When she saw that Yüeh-niang was not going to follow suit, she got out five candareens of silver and asked a young novice to go buy some paper money for her.

"My Lady," said the abbot, "there is no need for you to buy any paper money. I have a supply of imitation gold and silver paper money here, and you are welcome to take some of it with you to burn on her behalf."

Meng Yü-lou turned her silver over to the abbot and then had the young novice lead her out to Chin-lien's grave under the white poplar tree behind the temple, where she found a three-foot-high grave mound of yellow earth, on which a few clumps of artemisia were growing.

Inserting her incense stick into the mound and igniting the paper money, she performed an obeisance, saying, "Sister Six, I did not know that you had been buried here. But today, your sister Meng the Third, having chanced to visit this temple, has come to burn a packet of paper money on your behalf.

May you find a pleasurable place in Heaven;

And use the cash to cope with any problems."

So saying, she groped out a handkerchief and commenced to weep out loud. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

As the paper money burns out,
My pearly tears drop helter-skelter.
I call out to you, "Sister Six,
I weep for you until,
There are barely two breaths
left in my body."³⁴
I recall how we never used to make
distinctions between us,
During the sisterhood that we
shared together.
We never allowed ourselves to get
red in the face with anger.
Your temperament was forceful, and I
often gave way to you.
But if we ever lost sight of each other,
If you did not look for me, I would
go looking for you.
We were like the fish that swim in pairs,
with only one eye apiece,
Ardently sticking to one another;
Only to be suddenly blown apart
by a gust of wind.
Having been accustomed to perching
on the same tree,
One day we were forced to fly our
separate ways.
I cry out to you, Sister Six, just
try and listen to me.
What a pity that a person of your
great intelligence,
Should end up today being buried
under the ground."

The wet nurse Ju-i, on seeing that Meng Yü-lou had gone back to the rear of the temple, took Hsiao-ko in her arms, intending to go out for a look at the grave herself; but Yüeh-niang, who was still talking to Ch'un-mei in the abbot's quarters, said, "Don't take the child with you, I'm afraid he might find it frightening."

"Don't worry, Mistress," Ju-i responded, "I can handle the situation."

So saying, she took Hsiao-ko with her and went out to the grave site, where she looked on as Meng Yü-lou burned the paper money and wept, after which they came back inside.

Meanwhile, Ch'un-mei and Yüeh-niang had both adjusted their makeup and put their clothing to rights, after which Ch'un-mei directed her servants to open up the food boxes, and they proceeded to lay out a selection of appetizers on the two tables, including sweetmeats, delicacies of various kinds, and partitioned boxes of assorted dainties. Wine was provided, after being strained through a cheesecloth sieve, and laid out along with silver goblets and ivory chopsticks. Ch'un-mei invited Wu K'ai's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, and Meng Yü-lou to sit down in the positions of honor while she played the role of host, and the wet nurse Ju-i, Hsiao-yü, and Lan-hua, the senior maidservant in the Wu household, were seated to either side. Wu K'ai was also provided with a table for himself in the monk's quarters where he was located.

Just as they were drinking their wine, they suddenly saw a pair of black-clad servants, who came in, knelt down, and

reported, "His Honor is at his new estate and has sent us to invite the young mistress to come and enjoy the show he is putting on that includes tumblers and vaudeville acts. His First Lady and Second Lady are both there, and he would like you to come join them as soon as possible."

Ch'un-mei responded:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
saying, "You can go back. I understand the situation."

The two servitors assented and withdrew but did not venture to depart, choosing to wait outside for her to finish entertaining her guests.

Wu K'ai's wife and Yüeh-niang felt that it was time for them to take their leave, saying, "Sister, we don't wish to impose upon you any longer. It is getting late, and you have something to do. We had better be on our way."

Ch'un-mei, however, was reluctant to let them go and, telling her attendants to proffer them large goblets of wine, appealed to them, saying, "We former members of the same household:

Spend less time together than apart,³⁵
and have gone our separate ways, but we ought not to break off our relationship. I also:
Lack either relatives or friends.

On the occasion of your birthday, Mother, I will come to pay you a visit."

"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "it is nice of you to suggest it, but I would not presume to put you to such trouble. Some day soon, I will come pay a call on you."

After drinking a cupful of wine, Yüeh-niang said, "I have had enough wine. Sister-in-law Wu does not have a sedan chair, and it is getting late enough to hinder our return."

"If Sister-in-law Wu does not have a sedan chair," said Ch'un-mei, "I brought some ponies along with me and can lend one of them to her to ride home on."

As she prepared for her own departure, Ch'un-mei called for the abbot and had one of her servants bring out a bolt of muslin and five mace of silver, which she presented to him. The abbot bowed in thanks to her and escorted her out through the gate of the temple. Ch'un-mei exchanged farewells with Yüeh-niang and saw her, together with Meng Yü-lou and the others, into their sedan chairs, after which she got into her own sedan chair, and the two groups went their separate ways. Ch'un-mei was accompanied by a crowd of attendants who shouted to clear the way as she made her way to her husband's new estate. Truly:

If even the separate leaves of a tree
may encounter each other;
Why should people, too, not sometimes
meet with good fortune?³⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

LAI-WANG ABSCONDS TOGETHER WITH SUN HSÜEH-O; SUN HSÜEH-O IS SOLD TO CHOU HSIU'S HOUSEHOLD

Blossoms open and blossoms fall,¹
open and fall again;
Officials and commoners are wont
to replace one another.
Prominent families cannot count
upon remaining wealthy;
Poor persons are not necessarily
doomed to remain poor.
If you assist people, they will not
necessarily rise to Heaven;
If you abuse people, they will not
necessarily end in a ditch.²
You are urged, in all things, not to
be resentful toward Heaven;
Heaven's attitude toward mankind is
neither generous nor stingy.³

THE STORY GOES that Wu K'ai took charge of Yüeh-niang and the group of men and women that accompanied her as they left the Temple of Eternal Felicity and continued on their way under the tall trees on the long embankment. Meanwhile, Tai-an had already selected an elevated spot in the open air before the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village, from which they could enjoy:

The liveliness of the teeming crowds;
and set out their wine and appetizers:

Making a canopy of Heaven and a carpet of Earth.⁴
He had waited a long time before he saw the sedan chairs of Yüeh-niang and the others approaching.
Upon their arrival, he asked, "Why has it taken you so long to get here?"

Yüeh-niang responded by telling him all about how they had run into Ch'un-mei in the Temple of Eternal Felicity.
It was not long before the wine was decanted, and the group of them sat down to enjoy their drinks. As they did so, what should they see passing back and forth below the tavern in front of them but a stream of:

Perfumed carriages with decorated hubs,
Amid the discord of the teeming crowds.
The chariots and horses rumbled like thunder;
As the pipes and voices rose up tumultuously.⁵

Yüeh-niang and the others, standing on their elevated spot, looked on as the:
Mountains and seas of people,
crowded around to watch the military instructors perform their equestrian acrobatics.

It so happens that among them was the son of the district magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, whose name was Li Kung-pi. He was about thirty years of age and was enrolled as a student at the Superior College of the National University. He had ever been:

As romantic and dashing as can be,
But too lazy to study the classics;
preferring instead to engage in:
Equestrian hunting with falcons and hounds,
Or playing at kickball and suchlike sports.

He was a habitué of the:

Three quarters and two alleys,
of the pleasure precincts, and people referred to him as Bare Stick Li. That day, he was wearing an outfit of light glossy silk, with a small palmetto hat with a golden knob on his head, while his feet were clad in dark tan boots and embroidered stockings. Along with a clerk on the staff of the district yamen named Ho Pu-wei, he was leading a group of

twenty or thirty stout fellows, equipped with slingshots, blowpipes, balls, and sticks, who congregated in front of the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village looking on as the military instructor Li Kuei performed his equestrian acrobatics; doing headstands on horseback, hanging on one side of his steed by grasping its belly bands, twirling his spear and flourishing his club. The considerable number of men and women gathered there were cheering vociferously.

This Li Kuei, whose nickname was Shantung Yaksha,⁶ wore a flat-topped cap on his head, held in place with a hammered gold ring that floated at the back of his skull. His body was draped in a close-fitting purple gown, his waist was encircled with a gold lamé cummerbund, his shins were encased in patterned puttees, and his feet were clad in long-legged boots and variegated stockings with a flying fish motif. He rode on a steed with a silvery mane and held a gleaming vermilion-handled spear in his hand, from which there floated a commander's standard.

Vaulting into the saddle in the middle of the street, he went on to introduce himself in a loud voice, saying:

Martial arts instructors such as myself
are rare in this world;
My name has been known on the rivers and
lakes for a long time.
Blows with my two fists feel like being
hammered with a mallet;
My two feet carry me forward as nimbly
as though in flight.
In the martial contests in the Southern
and Northern Capitals,
And those in Kuang-tung and Kuang-hsi,
I am without a rival.
It is clear I am an adamantly boastful
and big-mouthed sort;
Though the fact is that I am utterly
devoid of any talent.
My skill with the Shao-lin quarterstaff,
Barely enables me to batter field frogs;
My mastery of the Yüeh school of boxing,⁷
Hardly equips me to terrify little dogs.
When confronted with a real match,
I scarcely dare make even a sound;
If there is no rival to deal with,
I am wont to utter boastful words.
The money I manage to swindle this way
I find hard to hold on to;
Because I am so given to plucking the
"willows" in the quarter.⁸
I am obliged to Young Master Li Kung-pi
from the Northern Capital,
Who sustains me in his household, and
views me as a bosom friend.
Dipped in fresh sauce, I enjoy consuming
half a field of scallions;
Wrapped in thin pancakes, I stuff myself
with half a load of leeks.
Your humble servant has always been
addicted to intemperance;
And enjoys drinking wine throughout
the time from 4:00 to 6:00.
Should my teeth hurt,
I only resort to grinding them;
Should my belly swell,
I merely resort to massaging it.
To sate myself, I have been known to
consume three pecks of rice;
To amuse myself, I have been known to
swill a large crock of wine.
I am exceedingly grateful to my patron,

but have no way to repay him;
In the life to come I will be reborn as
a watchdog to guard his home.
Should a housebreaker show up and try
to make a hole in his wall;
I will rise to the occasion by taking
a bite out of his scrotum.
If you want to know why I would take
a bite out of his scrotum;
It is because I am not as expert at
using my limbs as my mouth.⁹

On this occasion, no sooner did Li Kung-pi set eyes on Meng Yü-lou's tall and slender figure than, before he knew it;
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed.

It seemed to him that:

Such a vision is not exhaustible;
Such a view exceeds comprehension.
From his mouth no word was uttered,
In his heart he thought to himself,

"I wonder whose household that woman belongs to, and whether she has a husband or not?"

Turning to the "ball clubber" Trifler Chang, who was a member of his entourage, he called him over and whispered to him, saying, "You go over to that elevated slope and see if you can find out whose household those three women dressed in white belong to. If you succeed in discovering the truth of the matter, come back and report to me."

Trifler Chang, deferentially covering his mouth with his hand, assented and promptly flew off on this errand.

It was not long before he returned and proceeded to:

Whisper into his ear in a low voice,

saying, "Thus and so, they are womenfolk from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the district yamen. The oldest of them is surnamed Wu and is his sister-in-law. The one who is petite in stature is his First Lady Wu Yüeh-niang. The one with the tall and slender figure and a few white pockmarks on her face is his Third Lady, whose name is Meng Yü-lou. The latter two of them have both chosen to remain in his household and maintain their widowhood."

When Li Kung-pi heard this, he felt particularly attracted to Meng Yü-lou and generously rewarded Trifler Chang for his efforts. But no more of this.

Wu K'ai, along with Yüeh-niang and the others, continued to enjoy the scene for what seemed like half a day until:

The sun began to be swallowed by the hills,

when he directed Tai-an to gather up the food boxes and urged Yüeh-niang to get into her sedan chair and proceed home. Truly, it is the case that:

The young man grasps his brocade bridle and flaunts
his silken sleeves in drunkenness;
The silk-clad young lady lifts aside the embroidered
curtain the better to gaze at him.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The shadows of the flowers under the willows
hold down the dust on the road;
Each time one sets out to enjoy them
one's pleasure is renewed.
Those with affinities will meet though
separated by a thousand li;
Those without affinities will not meet
though face to face.

We will say no more, for the moment, about how Yüeh-niang and the others returned home.

To resume our story, that day, back at home, Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, having nothing else to do during the afternoon, went out and stood by the front gate. It just so happened that:

As providence would have it,

a peddler unexpectedly came along shaking the clapper by which he alerted housewives to his presence. In those days, peddlers who dealt in cosmetics, ornamental trinkets, and mirror polishing all alerted housewives by shaking such clappers.

Upon hearing the sound of the clapper, Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, "My mirror is tarnished," and told P'ing-an to go stop the peddler so he could polish her mirror for her.

The peddler put down his burden and said, "I am not a mirror polisher but deal in gold and silver objects, head ornaments, and trinkets."

As he stood there in front of the gate, he stared fixedly at Sun Hsüeh-o:

Looking her over from top to bottom.

Sun Hsüeh-o responded by saying, "As for you, if you are not a mirror polisher, you can take yourself off. What reason

is there for you to stare at me that way?"

The man then said, "Sister Hsüeh-o, and the young lady of the household, I guess you no longer recognize me."

"You look familiar," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "but I don't seem able to remember who you are at the moment."

"I am Lai-wang," the man replied, "whom the master drove out of his household."

"Where have you been all these years?" asked Sun Hsüeh-o. "Why haven't we seen you? You've managed to gain quite a bit of weight."

"Upon leaving the master's household," replied Lai-wang, "I returned to my native place in Hsü-chou but was at loose ends and unable to find regular employment. So I joined the entourage of a gentleman who was leaving for the capital to take up an official position. Unexpectedly, while we were en route, his father died, and he had to return home in order to observe the mourning rituals for his parent. I therefore sought employment in the jeweler's shop of Silversmith Ku, where I have been learning the craft of working with precious metals, engraving patterns on larger vessels, as well as head ornaments and other objects. These last few days, business has been slack, so Silversmith Ku has sent me out on the street with a carrying pole to peddle some miscellaneous objects. When I saw you all standing in the entranceway, I did not dare to accost you, lest you accuse me of venturing to:

Dawdle at your door or loiter at your gate.

If you had not called me over today, I would not have made myself known to you."

"Though I scrutinized you for what seemed like half a day," said Sun Hsüeh-o, "I failed to recognize you. As an old member of the household, what were you afraid of?"

She then went on to ask, "What sort of merchandise are you selling in that load of yours? Bring it inside so we can have a look at it."

Lai-wang then proceeded to carry his load into the courtyard and open up the coffers, extracting a variety of head ornaments and incised gold and silver artifacts from the boxes inside them. The patterns displayed upon them were works of exquisite craftsmanship. Behold:

A solitary wild goose holds reeds in its beak;

A pair of fish sport among the aquatic plants.

A peony blossom is artistically incised
with specks of gold;

The chalcedony head of a hairpin is as
lustrous as a flame.

There are also:

A pair of lions playing with a brocade ball,

And a file of camels bearing costly tribute;

Cap ornaments made to delineate the
Palace of the Moon,

Hair clasps carved to represent the
Peach Blossom Spring.

The pins holding the hair on left and right,

Depict pears and persimmons¹⁰ on one side and
a clump of lychees on the other;

The pins worn on the part in front and back,

Depict the Goddess Kuan-yin sitting with her
legs crossed on her Lotus Throne.

There are also:

Frigid sparrows contending for plum blossoms,¹¹

And male phoenixes flirting with their mates.

Truly:

The chatelaines are studded with
evenly spaced emeralds;

The cap buttons are fashioned from
glaucous precious stones.

After examining these samples for a while, Sun Hsüeh-o said to Lai-wang, "If you have any other ornaments for sale, bring them out so I can see them."

Lai-wang then brought out another box containing artificial flower ornaments to be worn on the hair over the temples, cap ornaments of kingfisher blue in the shape of bird's wings, and an assortment of cricket-shaped stickpins. Hsi-men Ta-chieh picked out for herself two pairs of flower ornaments for the hair over her temples, and Sun Hsüeh-o selected a pair of emerald-green phoenix hairpins, and a pair of brooches representing the motif of goldfish pierced with willow twigs.¹² Hsi-men Ta-chieh then proceeded to weigh out the silver for her purchase and give it to him, but Sun Hsüeh-o, who owed him one tael and two mace of silver for the two items she had selected, requested that he come back early the next morning to collect her payment.

She then went on to explain, "Today, the First Lady is not at home, having gone to the family graveyard, together with her infant child and the Third Lady, in order to burn paper money at Father's grave."

"While I was at home last year," said Lai-wang, "I heard that Father had died and that the First Lady had given birth to a son. I imagine he must have grown somewhat bigger by now."

"The First Lady's child is only a year and a half old right now," said Sun Hsüeh-o. "The members of our household, both high and low, treasure him like a pearl on a piece of jewelry, and our future prospects are dependent on him."

As they were talking, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," came out and poured a cup of tea for him to drink. Lai-wang accepted the tea and responded to her with a bow.

Lai-chao himself also appeared and, after chatting with him for a while, said, "You ought to come back tomorrow in order to pay your respects to the First Lady."

Lai-wang then picked up his carrying pole and departed.

That evening, when Yüeh-niang and the others arrived home in their sedan chairs, Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, together with the maidservants, all kowtowed to her. Tai-an felt unable to keep up with the bearers who were carrying the food boxes, and therefore hired a donkey for himself and took care of dismissing the bearers when they arrived home.

Yüeh-niang told Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh about their meeting with Ch'un-mei that day, saying, "It so happens that she had taken the trouble to arrange the burial of her mistress from the P'an family behind the Temple of Eternal Felicity, though we knew nothing about it. She came to burn paper money at her grave today, and we happened:

By some fortuitous fluke of fortune,¹³ to run into her there, and renew our acquaintance. Before this, we had already consumed a vegetarian repast provided by the abbot, but afterwards, Ch'un-mei also had two tables set up and directed her servants to lay out the contents of forty or fifty partitioned boxes containing delicacies of every kind, and to decant the wine. It was more than we could hope to consume. When she saw Hsiao-ko, she also presented him with a pair of her own hairpins. She was as friendly as could be. When she got up to go, she was:

Attended by three or five servants, and rode in a large sedan chair, followed by a crowd of retainers. Moreover, she appears to have grown taller than she was before, and is whiter and plumper as well."

"She has also chosen not to:

Alter her normal demeanor or forget her former status," remarked Sister-in-law Wu. "In the days when she was employed in your household, I noticed that her conduct was more proper and her speech more dignified than that of the other maidservants, and that she seemed to possess the potential for better things. One can see today the truth of the saying that:

Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence, and may result in this kind of prosperity."

Meng Yü-lou also chimed in, saying, "Our elder sister may not have asked her about it, but I did, and it turns out that she is pregnant, not having menstruated for the last six months, and that her baby is due in the eighth or ninth month. The commandant is utterly delighted by this. Thus, what Auntie Hsüeh reported to us turns out to be true after all."

After they had talked about this for a while, Sun Hsüeh-o said, "While Mother was not at home today, Hsi-men Ta-chieh and I were standing at the front gate when we caught sight of Lai-wang. It turns out that he has been here learning the craft of working with precious metals and was peddling a load of gold and silver articles and costume jewelry, though we did not even recognize him at first. Upon realizing who he was, we bought several items of costume jewelry from him. He asked about you, Mother, and I told him that you had gone to burn paper money at your husband's grave."

"Why didn't you ask him to wait until I returned home?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"We told him to come back tomorrow," responded Sun Hsüeh-o.

As they were sitting there, and talking together, whom should they see but the wet nurse Ju-i, who came forward and said to Yüeh-niang, "Ever since I arrived home with the little child, for what seems like half a day, he has been in a coma from which he has not awakened. The breath coming out of his mouth is cold, while his body feels:

As scalding as boiling water and as hot as fire."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she hastened in consternation to pick the baby up from the heated k'ang and give him a kiss. Sure enough, she found that he was covered with cold sweat, though his whole body felt feverishly hot.

Losing her temper, she took Ju-i to task, saying, "Whore that you are, you've let the child catch a chill in the sedan chair."

"I had him wrapped up tightly in a quilt," protested Ju-i. "How could I have exposed him to the cold?"

"If it wasn't that," continued Yüeh-niang, "you must have exposed him to a fright by taking him to visit that dead woman's grave. I told you not to take him there, but you ignored my instructions and insisted on taking him with you anyway."

"Luckily," responded Ju-i, "Sister Hsiao-yü can bear witness that I merely carried him with me to take a look at the grave and then came back. Since when did I expose him to any fright?"

"Don't give me any more of your lip," responded Yüeh-niang. "What need was there for you to go look at her grave in the first place, and thereby expose him to a fright?"

She then called in Lai-an and instructed him, saying, "Go at once and summon Dame Liu."

It was not long before Dame Liu showed up.

After taking his pulse, and feeling his body, she pronounced, "He is suffering from a colic brought on by encountering an evil spirit. I will leave you two doses of cinnabar pills which you should help him to wash down with some ginger extract."

She then directed the wet nurse to hold him in her arms and go lie down on the heated k'ang. It was halfway through the night before he broke out into a cold sweat and his fever began to abate. Dame Liu was then provided with a serving of tea, given three mace of silver as compensation for her services, and requested to return the next day to see how he was doing. What with the:

Opening of gates and closing of doors,
the whole household was thrown into a state of consternation for half the night.

To resume our story, the next day, Lai-wang came back to the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence carrying his load of merchandise as before and bowed to Lai-chao, saying, "Yesterday, Sun Hsüeh-o selected a number of my products for herself and promised that if I would return today she would pay me the silver she owed for them, and also arrange a meeting with the First Lady."

"You had better leave for the time being and come back another day," said Lai-chao. "Yesterday, when the First Lady came home, her infant son had fallen ill, and they had to call in the medical practitioner Dame Liu to prescribe medicine for him. As a result, the household has been in a state of disruption and suffering from acute anxiety all night long. Only today does he appear to have gotten somewhat better. Under the circumstances, how could anyone have the spare time to weigh out silver for you?"

As they were speaking, who should turn up but Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o, who were in the act of seeing off Dame Liu and caught sight of Lai-wang as they came to the front gate. Lai-wang proceeded to kneel down on the ground and kowtow twice to Yüeh-niang.

"It's been some time since we saw you last," said Yüeh-niang. "Why haven't you come by to pay us a visit?"

Lai-wang told her what had happened to him during the interim and explained that although he had wanted to come, he had not felt comfortable doing so.

"As a former member of the household," said Yüeh-niang, "what were you afraid of? Moreover, your master is now dead. Originally it was simply because that whore from the P'an family engaged in:

Setting fires with one hand, and

Pouring water on them with the other,

fabricating tales about people behind their backs, that your good wife was driven to commit suicide by hanging herself, and you were framed for something you didn't do and condemned to be banished to your native place. But now, Heaven has refused to countenance her, and she is gone for good."

"It's not something I want to talk about," said Lai-wang. "It suffices that you understand it as well as you do."

After they had spoken for a while, Yüeh-niang asked him, "What kind of wares are you offering for sale? Get them out so I can take a look."

When he had done so, she selected several head ornaments for herself, the cost of which came to three taels and two mace of silver, and weighed the payment out for him on a scale. She then invited him to enter through the ceremonial gate into the rear compound and told Hsiao-yü to fetch a jug of wine and a platter of savories for him. Sun Hsüeh-o, who was in charge of the kitchen, personally saw to heating up a large bowl of pork and brought it out for him to eat. When he had had his fill of wine and food, he kowtowed to them in gratitude and went back out to the front gate.

When Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and the others had returned to the rear compound after seeing him off, Sun Hsüeh-o surreptitiously whispered to him, "You should feel free to come back here as often as you like. What is there to be afraid of? If I have anything to say to you, I'll have Lai-chao's wife tell you about it. Tomorrow evening, I'll wait for you here inside the ceremonial gate in the little anteroom next to the crape myrtle hedge."

The two of them exchanged winks with each other, the meaning of which was not lost on Lai-wang, and he went on to ask, "Is this ceremonial gate closed at night, or not?"

Sun Hsüeh-o responded, thus and so, "When you come, go to Lai-chao's quarters first, and wait until nightfall, after which, you can scale the wall with a ladder, and then make your way along the other side of the latticework partition. I'll help you down on this side, and the two of us can get together again. There are some personal thoughts that I want to share with you."

When Lai-wang heard these words, truly:

Joy manifested itself about his temples;

Delight spread itself across his cheeks,

and, saying good-bye to Sun Hsüeh-o, he proceeded to take up his carrying pole and go out the gate. Truly:

Without the help of an insider,

A household cannot be broached.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Idle, with nothing to do, while merely
leaning against the doorjamb,
He encounters a lover with whom he once
enjoyed a deeply felt affair.
Not daring to speak loudly enough to
be overheard by anyone else,
She clearly reveals her ardor with the
autumn ripples of her eyes.

Lai-wang proceeded happily on his way home. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day, he did not take up his carrying pole and go out to peddle his wares but slowly sauntered back and forth

in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate waiting for Lai-chao to come out.

When he did so, Lai-wang greeted him with a bow, to which Lai-chao responded by saying, "What a rare bird you are, Brother Wang. Long time no see."

"Having nothing to do," Lai-wang said, "I've dropped by for a visit. The young lady Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound owes me several mace of silver for some trinkets she purchased from me, and I have come by to collect the payment."

"In that case," responded Lai-chao, "come into my place and have a seat."

So saying, he ushered Lai-wang into his quarters.

"Why is my sister-in-law not to be seen?" asked Lai-wang.

"Your sister-in-law is on duty in the kitchen in the rear compound today," explained Lai-chao.

Lai-wang then groped out a tael's worth of silver and handed it to Lai-chao, saying, "These few pieces of silver should suffice to purchase a jug of wine for my brother and sister-in-law to enjoy with me."

"There is no need for that much," said Lai-chao.

So saying, he called over his son Little Iron Rod. Little Iron Rod, who had just recently put up his hair on reaching the age of fourteen, went out with a jug and came back with a large vessel of wine, after which, he was sent to the rear compound to summon "The Beanpole."

It was not long before "The Beanpole" showed up with a covered pewter pot of heated rice, a large bowl of boiled hash, and two side dishes, to go with the wine, saying, "How nice it is to see Brother Wang here."

Lai-chao then brought out the silver that Lai-wang had given him and showed it to "The Beanpole," saying, "Our brother has given this to us with which to buy a jug of wine for our enjoyment."

"The Beanpole" laughed at this, saying, "To enjoy something we have done nothing to deserve is hardly the right thing to do."

She then set up a bed table on the k'ang, invited Lai-wang to sit down at it, laid out the refreshments, and decanted the wine. Lai-wang promptly responded by filling a cup of wine to the brim and offering it to Lai-chao, after which, he poured out another cup and presented it to "The Beanpole."

Bowing deeply to them, he said, "It is some time since I have seen my brother and sister-in-law. These cups of watery wine are intended to show my filial respect for the two of you."

"We are hardly likely to accuse you of sponging off us," said "The Beanpole." "But:

When addressing sincere people,

You must not speak insincerely.

The young lady Sun Hsüeh-o in the rear compound appealed to us for help yesterday. She said that:

Your old feelings for each other remained intact,¹⁴

and asked the two of us, thus and so, if we could help you to get together again. You had better not pretend to be:

Still asleep in dreamland.

If you want to find the route down the mountain,

You had better ask someone who has been over it.¹⁵

If you should find a way to be reunited, and gain anything in the process:

Don't try to keep it all for yourself; but

Spare us a mouthful of leftover gravy.

After all, we are putting ourselves at considerable risk on your behalf."

Lai-wang responded by getting down on his knees and saying, "All I am hoping for is that my brother and sister-in-law will consent to help us get together again. If so:

I will never dare to forget it."

When they had concluded this exchange, they proceeded to enjoy their wine for a while, after which "The Beanpole" went back to the rear compound to tell Sun Hsüeh-o about it.

Upon returning, she said, "We have agreed that you should come back this evening and hide out in our quarters until the ceremonial gate has been closed for the night and the residents of the rear compound have gone to bed, after which, you can climb over the wall and:

Seize the opportunity to do what you want."¹⁶

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Just retribution is absolutely devoid of bias;¹⁷

It follows as inevitably as shadows or echoes.

If you seek the causes of bad or good fortune;

Simply scrutinize the deeds that one has done.¹⁸

On hearing these words, Lai-wang went home and could hardly wait for the evening, when he slipped surreptitiously into Lai-chao's quarters and proceeded to share some wine with the two of them until late at night without anyone else being aware of his presence. After the main gate of the residence had been closed, and the crossbar had been locked in place on the ceremonial gate, the residents of the household, both high and low, all went to bed.

The two of them had arranged a secret signal, so as soon as Lai-wang heard the sound of Sun Hsüeh-o coughing, he proceeded to mount a ladder, crawl onto the plastered wall, and make his way along the other side of the latticework partition to the point at which Sun Hsüeh-o stood ready to help him down onto a bench.

The two of them then retired to the little anteroom on the western side of the courtyard that was used for storing saddles, where they fell to:

Hugging and embracing each other,
as they went on to engage in the game of clouds and rain together. It was a meeting between a widower and a widow with:

The fire of lust in their hearts.

As for Lai-wang:

His tasseled spear was impetuous,
and he worked it with all his strength for some time until his pleasure reached its height as his semen began to flow, and he:

Ejaculated like a geyser.

When they had finished their business together, Sun Hsüeh-o handed him a bundle containing some gold and silver head ornaments, several taels worth of silver, and two outfits of satin clothing and said, "You should come back again tomorrow evening. I still have some other valuables I can turn over to you then. You might as well start looking outside for a safe place for us to go. This household is no place for me to remain in the future. It would be better if the two of us could abscond together and find a place to stay outside where we could become man and wife. Since you have mastered the craft of a silversmith, there is no reason to worry about our being able to make a living."

"At the present time," responded Lai-wang, "there happens to be a maternal aunt of mine who lives on Polished Rice Lane outside the East Gate of the city. She practices midwifery and is well-known in the neighborhood as Midwife Ch'ü. It is an out-of-the-way location where we can safely escape observation. The two of us might as well seek refuge there for a while, and if we see that the coast is clear I can take you with me to my native place, buy a few acres of land, and plant some crops in order to support ourselves."

When the two of them had agreed on this plan, Lai-wang said good-bye to Sun Hsüeh-o, clambered back over the wall, and returned to Lai-chao's quarters, where he waited until the main gate was opened early the next morning and slipped furtively outside.



Lai-wang Absconds over the Wall with Sun Hsüeh-o

At dusk that day, he returned to the gate and slipped back into Lai-chao's quarters. That night, he climbed over the wall once again and made out with Sun Hsüeh-o. After this, as the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he met with her in this way on more than one occasion. They also took advantage of the opportunity to make off with a lot of valuable objects, gold and silver utensils, clothing, and so forth. Lai-chao and his wife also fattened themselves by appropriating a share of these stolen goods, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

One day, in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang, who was feeling out of sorts because she feared that Hsiao-ko might be coming down with smallpox, went to bed earlier than usual. The maidservant in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters at the time was Chung-ch'iu, who had originally worked for Hsi-men Ta-chieh but had been reassigned to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters by Yüeh-niang because Ch'en Ching-chi had asked for Yüan-hsiao, who had formerly served in Li Chiao-erh's quarters. Yüeh-niang had complied with this request by reassigning Chung-ch'iu to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters, and ordering Yüan-hsiao to work for Hsi-men Ta-chieh. That night, after Sun Hsüeh-o had made sure that Chung-ch'iu was asleep, she proceeded to assemble a large bundle of hairpins, earrings, and head ornaments in her bedroom, packed them in a box, wrapped her head in a kerchief, and put on her traveling clothes. She had previously arranged with Lai-wang that he should wait for her in Lai-chao's quarters so the two of them could abscond together.

Lai-chao said to them, "I have no problem with your making good your escape, but I am responsible for the front gate and cannot afford to let so much as a duckling get away. If the First Lady finds out what has happened and demands to know why I didn't stop you, what am I to say? It would be better if the two of you were to go out over the roof, and

break a few tiles in the process, so there will be some evidence of how you got away."

"Brother," responded Lai-wang, "what you say makes sense."

Sun Hsüeh-o also gave them a silver ewer with a hinged lid, a gold earpick, a black satin jacket, and a yellow satin skirt to thank them for their assistance. They decided to wait until the fifth watch when the moon was dark before climbing over the roof.

Lai-chao and his wife poured out two large goblets of heated wine and offered them to Lai-wang and Sun Hsüeh-o, saying, "This will facilitate your escape, and serve to buck up your spirits on the way."

They continued drinking until the fifth watch, when the two of them, while holding sticks of incense, climbed up the ladder and helped each other onto the roof. As they moved across it:

Step by step,

they dislodged and broke a considerable number of tiles. When they had climbed as far as the eaves on the front of the building, they saw that there were still no pedestrians in the street, though they could hear the sound made by a patrolling watchman. Lai-wang was the first to jump to the ground and then helped Sun Hsüeh-o down by allowing her to stand on his shoulders and then lifting her the rest of the way.

The two of them made their way forward, but when they arrived at a crossroads they were stopped by a patrolman, who demanded to know, "Where are the two of you going?"

This had the effect of throwing Sun Hsüeh-o into a state of panic, but Lai-wang responded:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,

by pointing to the stick of government-grade incense in his hand, and saying, "We are a married couple, and are on our way to burn incense at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak outside the city wall. We are earlier than we should be but hope that you will not hold it against us."

"And what have you got in that bundle you are carrying?" the officer went on to ask.

"It is a supply of incense, candles, and paper money," said Lai-wang.

"If the two of you are going to burn incense at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak," the officer responded, "that is a worthy undertaking, and you may continue quickly on your way."

This was just the signal Lai-wang was waiting for. Taking Sun Hsüeh-o by the hand, he proceeded to fly forward as fast as he could go. When they arrived at the city wall, the gate had just opened, and, insinuating themselves into the crowd, they made their way inconspicuously outside the city wall. After turning down a number of streets and alleys, they arrived at Polished Rice Lane, which was an out-of-the-way place, occupied by only a few families, living in:

Low-lying houses and humble dwellings,
that backed on the embankment of a large pond.

When they arrived at Midwife Ch'ü's house, she had not yet opened the door. They had to call out for what seemed like half a day before she got up to open the door, and caught sight of Lai-wang with a woman in tow. It so happens that Lai-wang's surname had originally been Cheng, so he was known to her as Cheng Wang.

"This woman is my newly acquired wife," he explained to her. "If you have the room to accommodate us for a little while, we can go on to look for a place of our own."

So saying, he handed her three taels of silver with which to purchase kindling and rice. When Midwife Ch'ü saw the gold and silver head ornaments they had with them, she realized that their provenance was suspicious.

Her son, Ch'ü T'ang, upon seeing that his mother had agreed to accommodate Cheng Wang and his wife, and that they had brought these things with them:

On seeing their value developed ideas.

Prizing open the door to their room, he made off with some of the valuables and went out to gamble with them but was apprehended, confessed to the circumstances, and was brought before the district magistrate. When District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i saw that they were stolen objects, and that the evidence of this was clear, he dispatched runners to take Ch'ü T'ang to his home and trussed Cheng Wang and Sun Hsüeh-o together with a single length of rope. Sun Hsüeh-o was so frightened that her face turned as sallow as wax, and she proceeded to change into her everyday clothes, put on a pair of eye shades, and tear the rings off her fingers to give to the runners. They were then escorted under guard to confront the magistrate. This event created something of an uproar in the neighborhood, and people came out onto the street to see what was going on.

Among them there were those who recognized them and said, "She is a concubine from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household who has run away with the servant Lai-wang. He was formerly driven into exile but has come back under the name Cheng Wang, fornicated with her, and colluded with her in running off with stolen property, in order to go live together somewhere else. Once there, they have been ripped off in turn by this Ch'ü T'ang, and now that their crimes have been brought to light, they are being taken to confront the magistrate."

There and then:

The news spread from one person to ten,

And then from ten persons to a hundred.¹⁹

The mouths of the pedestrians on the road

cause stories to fly.²⁰

Let us revert to the story of Yüeh-niang back at home. When Sun Hsüeh-o absconded, and her maidservant Chung-ch'ü discovered that the valuables and head ornaments in her cabinet were all gone, and that her clothes had been left:

Scattered about in a state of disorder,

and reported these facts to Yüeh-niang, she was taken completely by surprise.

"Since you slept with her," said Yüeh-niang, "how could you have failed to detect the fact that she was bent on eloping?"

"She was in the habit," responded Chung-ch'iu, "of sneaking outside during the night, and only returning after what seemed like half a day. I did not know what she was up to."

Yüeh-niang also interrogated Lai-chao, saying, "Since you are in charge of the main gate, how could anyone have escaped without your knowing it?"

"The main gate is locked every night," responded Lai-chao. "She could hardly have gotten out unless she flew off like a bird."

Later on, it was only when the broken tiles on the top of the building were discovered that she realized she must have escaped by going over the roof. Yüeh-niang did not venture to send anyone out to look for her, deciding that she had better repress her feelings and put up with the situation.

Who could have anticipated that when the district magistrate undertook to hear the case he started out by subjecting Ch'ü T'ang to the squeezers, which resulted in the recovery of four gold head ornaments, three silver ornaments, a pair of gold earrings, two silver goblets, five taels worth of loose silver, two outfits of clothing, a handkerchief, and a box. From Cheng Wang he recovered thirty taels of silver, a pair of gold hairpins with bowl-shaped ends, a pin in the shape of a Taoist goddess, and four rings. From Sun Hsüeh-o he recovered a gold clasp for the top of the coiffure, a pair of silver bracelets, five sets of gold buttons, four pairs of silver hairpins, and a package of loose silver. From Midwife Ch'ü he recovered three taels of silver. The magistrate issued a tentative ruling that Lai-wang was guilty of the crime of a servant engaging in fornication with his employer and stealing her goods, that Ch'ü T'ang was also guilty of larceny, both of which were miscellaneous capital crimes, commutable to five years of penal exile, and that the stolen goods were all subject to confiscation by the state. He then sentenced Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ch'ing's former concubine, as well as Midwife Ch'ü, to be subjected to the squeezers before the court. Midwife Ch'ü acknowledged her guilt and was released; but as for Sun Hsüeh-o, the magistrate directed runners from the district yamen to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household and request a formal document agreeing to resume responsibility for her.



Sun Hsüeh-o Suffers Abuse in Chou Hsiu's Household

Wu Yüeh-niang consulted with her elder brother Wu K'ai about what to do, and they concluded that since she had already created a scandal by her conduct, there was no point in taking her back, since her presence would only serve to further damage the family's reputation. They therefore paid off the runners and asked them to convey this message to the magistrate, who accordingly called in an official go-between and arranged for her to be put up for sale under judicial auspices.

To resume our story, meanwhile, in the commandant's quarters, Ch'un-mei heard it reported that Sun Hsüeh-o from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had, thus and so, been abducted by Lai-wang, who had also made off with some valuables, and then taken her to live with him elsewhere; but that the matter had come to light, and she had been taken before the magistrate and was now being offered for sale under judicial auspices. No sooner did Ch'un-mei hear this than it occurred to her that she would like to purchase her and put her to work in the kitchen, so she could slap her in the face, and thus repay her for her former hostility.

She therefore said to Commandant Chou Hsiu, "This Sun Hsüeh-o is a skillful cook, capable of producing excellent fare. Why don't we buy her so she can serve us here at home?"

The commandant forthwith dispatched Chang Sheng and Li An to deliver his card to the magistrate and transmit this request. The magistrate, seeing this as a chance to curry influence by doing a favor, agreed to sell her for a mere eight taels of silver, and, after paying over the money, they brought her back to Chou Hsiu's residence and introduced her first to his principal wife, and then to his concubine Sun Erh-niang. Only after this was she taken to meet Ch'un-mei in her

quarters.

Ch'un-mei had only just arisen from her bedstead with its incised gold ornamentation and its brocaded curtains, when her maidservants brought Sun Hsüeh-o in to meet her. Upon seeing that it was Ch'un-mei, all Sun Hsüeh-o could do was to bend low as she stepped forward, kneel down on the floor, and kowtow to her four times.

Ch'un-mei responded by opening her eyes wide, calling for the servant's wife who was on duty at the time, and ordering her, "Take charge of this worthless creature for me, strip off the fret from her coiffure, remove her outer garments, and drive her into the kitchen so she can light the stove and do the cooking for me."

On hearing this, Sun Hsüeh-o had no alternative but to groan to herself in silence. It has always been the case that:

The planks used in wall building are sometimes
on top and sometimes on the bottom;
The servile sweeper of the rice will sometimes
rise to become head of the granary.²¹
When confronted with low eaves,
How can we not lower our heads?

Upon finding herself in this situation, all Sun Hsüeh-o could do was to remove the fret on her coiffure, change out of her fancy clothing, and head for the kitchen with a sorrowful expression on her face. There is a poem that testifies to this:

The Calico Bag Monk²² has made his way as
far as Ming-chou;
With his walking stick and straw sandals
he wanders at will.
No matter how many myriad transformations
you can perform;
Every incarnation must cope with its own
burden of sorrow.²³

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

MENG YÜ-LOU IS HAPPY TO MARRY LI KUNG-PI; LI KUNG-PI IN A FIT OF RAGE BEATS YÜ-TSAN

Our hundred years of life pass by
as though in flight;
Among them, the flowering seasons
do not last for long.
When autumn congeals the white dew
the crickets cry;
At twilight during the late spring
the cuckoos weep.
Wealth, eminence, and luxury¹ are
blights upon the body;
Renown and great achievements are
specters in the eyes.
Spring dreams are phenomena created
by humans themselves;
The retributions ordained by azure
Heaven are not unjust.

THE STORY GOES that, one day, Ch'en Ching-chi heard from Auntie Hsüeh that Sun Hsüeh-o from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing had committed adultery with Lai-wang and absconded with him, along with a quantity of stolen property, to some place outside, but that their crimes had come to light, and she had been put up for sale by the district magistrate, and sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, where she was subjected to beating and abuse at the hands of Ch'un-mei both day and night.

Ch'en Ching-chi took advantage of this opportunity to send Auntie Hsüeh to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to say to Yüeh-niang, "I have heard 'wind-borne words' to the effect that Ch'en Ching-chi has openly announced that he no longer wants Hsi-men Ta-chieh as his wife; and that he has drafted formal complaints to submit to the grand coordinator and the regional inspector of the province asserting that Hsi-men Ch'ing, while still alive, had sequestered trunks of gold and silver and other valuables that his family had entrusted to him for safekeeping."

Yüeh-niang, first, because Sun Hsüeh-o had absconded with Lai-wang and made off with a quantity of valuables; second, because the servant Lai-an had run away; and third, because Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu had died, and her obsequies had only just been concluded, already felt herself to be overburdened with:

Seven of this and eight of that.

Consequently, when she heard what Auntie Hsüeh had to say, she was thrown into a state of panic and promptly hired a sedan chair in which to send Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to her husband. She also got together all the furniture, trunks, and other things that she had been provided with as her dowry and had Tai-an hire bearers to deliver them to Ch'en Ching-chi's place.

Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this by saying, "These are merely the things that she brought with her as her dowry. The trunkloads of valuables and gold and silver that my family entrusted to them must also be returned to me."

"Your mother-in-law," reported Auntie Hsüeh, "claims that when your father-in-law was still alive, he only took responsibility for accepting these articles from her dowry, and that she knows nothing of these other trunkloads that you refer to."

Ch'en Ching-chi also demanded that the maidservant Yüan-hsiao should be turned over to him.

When Auntie Hsüeh and Tai-an reported this to Yüeh-niang, she said, "I would prefer not to turn Yüan-hsiao over to him. This maidservant originally worked in Li Chiao-erh's quarters. Right now, I have nobody to look after Hsiao-ko, and I would like to keep her here for that purpose. I would be willing to let him have Chung-ch'iu, however, since she was originally purchased in order to serve Hsi-men Ta-chieh."

But Ch'en Ching-chi refused to accept Chung-ch'iu, and Auntie Hsüeh was obliged to go back and forth repeatedly to negotiate between the two households.

Ch'en Ching-chi's mother, née Chang, finally said to Tai-an, "Brother, when you return home please convey my respects to the First Lady, but since you have so many maidservants available in your household, how can she be so reluctant to relinquish this one on the grounds that she needs her to look after her child? Since she has been serving in Hsi-men Ta-chieh's quarters all this time, and her son-in-law has already deflowered her, how can she be so insistent on retaining her?"

When Tai-an went home and reported this to Yüeh-niang, she found herself:

At a loss for words,²

and felt compelled to deliver Yüan-hsiao to Ch'en Ching-chi.

Ch'en Ching-chi was delighted to receive her and remarked to himself, "So it turns out that, somehow or other, things have ended up going my way after all:

Though you may be as devious as any demon,
You'll drink the water I've washed my feet in."

Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment and speak of something else.

To return to the story of District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i's son Li Kung-pi; ever since the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival on which he had caught sight of Wu Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou in front of the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village outside the city, when he had noticed that the two of them were similarly dressed and both good-looking, sent Trifler Chang to identify them, and thereby found out that they were womenfolk from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, he had fallen in love with Meng Yü-lou. He had observed that she had a tall and slender figure, and a face shaped like a melon seed, and though she had a few inconspicuous white pockmarks on her face, her demeanor was romantic and alluring.

It so happens that Li Kung-pi's wife had died, and he had been living the life of a widower for some time. He had engaged go-betweens to look for a suitable wife for him, but so far none of the prospects they came up with appealed to him. Now that he had encountered Meng Yü-lou, his heart was stirred, but:

There was no way he could gain access to her;

and he did not know whether she was prepared to remarry, or whether she would accept him or not. Unexpectedly, when Sun Hsüeh-o's case happened to come before the magistrate's court, and he learned that she had been a member of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, he exerted himself to see to it that the culprits were interrogated with the squeezers before his father's bench, and the stolen property duly retrieved, in the expectation that someone from the Hsi-men Ch'ing household would come to take possession of it. But Yüeh-niang was afraid and refused to send anyone to appear before the court, with the result that Li Kung-pi was disappointed, the stolen property was confiscated by the state, and Sun Hsüeh-o was put up for sale.

At this point, he consulted with his friend the clerk on the staff of the district yamen named Ho Pu-wei, and they decided to send Old Mother T'ao, the licensed go-between, to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to see if a match could be arranged; promising her that if she succeeded in bringing it about, she would no longer be required to report for duty at the yamen and would be rewarded with five taels of silver.

Old Mother T'ao was delighted by this proposition and set out forthwith:

Running as fast as though she had wings,
straight to the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.

Lai-chao was standing there at the time and saw Old Mother T'ao come forward, greet him with a bow, and inquire, "Brother, is this the residence of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing?"

"Where have you come from?" asked Lai-chao. "This is the home of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, but His Honor is deceased. What have you come for?"

"I would trouble you," said Old Mother T'ao, "to go inside and report my arrival. I am the officially licensed go-between of the district yamen, and my name is Old Mother T'ao. The young squire, the son of the district magistrate, has informed me that there is a lady in your household who wishes to be married, and I have come to respectfully propose a match between them."

"You old baggage!" Lai-chao shouted at her. "How unreasonable can you get? His Honor, the head of this household, has been dead for more than a year, and there are only two of his ladies left, who are both bent on preserving their widowhood, and are not about to marry anyone. As the saying goes:

Even to escape wild winds and violent rains,
One should not seek to enter a widow's door.³

How can a go-between like yourself:

As if you didn't know any better,
barge in to propose such a match? You'd better get out of here. If the ladies in the rear compound find out about it, you're likely to get a good beating for your pains."

Old Mother T'ao merely laughed at this, saying, "Brother, as the saying goes:

Even if the order of an official or clerk is wrong,
The person deputed to carry it out is not to blame.⁴

If the young squire had not sent me on this mission, I would hardly have ventured to come on my own initiative. No matter whether she is willing to remarry or not, I would trouble you to go inside and convey the proposal so that I can report back on my mission."

"So be it," responded Lai-chao.

"To do someone else a favor,
Is to do a favor to oneself.⁵

If you will wait a little while, I will go inside and convey your message. Of the two ladies of the household, one of them has a son, and the other does not. Which of the two ladies do you think might be willing to remarry?"

Old Mother T'ao responded, "The young squire from the district yamen said that he had seen her out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival, and that it was the lady with a few white pockmarks on her face."

When Lai-chao heard this, he went back to the rear compound and reported, thus and so, to Yüeh-niang, saying, "The district yamen has sent an official go-between to come here, and she is waiting outside."

This caught Yüeh-niang by surprise, and she exclaimed, "Not even half a word of what goes on here in our household is ever leaked abroad. How could anyone outside know anything about it?"

“The young squire from the district yamen,” responded Lai-chao, “caught sight of the lady in question out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch’ing-ming Festival. He says that the lady in question is the one with a few white pockmarks on her face.”

“It must be Sister Meng the Third that he’s referring to,” said Yüeh-niang. “It would seem that:

Even during the twelfth month the frozen heart of
the turnip is capable of being moved.⁶

All of a sudden, she wants to better her condition by marrying someone, does she? Truly:

In this world even the depth of the
ocean may be gauged;
It is the human heart alone that is
difficult to measure.”⁷

So saying, she went into Meng Yü-lou’s quarters, where she sat down and said, “Sister Meng the Third, there is something I would like to ask you about. There is a go-between out front, who says that the young squire from the district yamen claims that he saw you on the day of the Ch’ing-ming Festival, and that you would like to better your condition by getting married. Is there any truth to this?”

Gentle reader take note: On that occasion:

Without coincidences there would be no stories.

It has always been true that:

A marriage affinity connects people by a single thread.

On that day, out in the suburbs, when Meng Yü-lou observed that the young squire possessed a handsome demeanor, was:

As romantic and dashing as can be,
and that the two of them were about the same age, as well as the fact that he was adept at horsemanship and archery:
Their mutual feelings were visible in their four eyes,⁸
There was no longer any need to express them in words.

The only problem was that she did not know whether he already had a wife or not.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she figured to herself,

“My husband is already dead, and I have not borne a child of my own. Although the First Lady has a son, when he grows up in the days to come, since:

Everyone cares the most for his own flesh and blood,
he is sure to cling to his own mother, and I will face the fact that:

The fallen tree no longer provides shade,
and that I will be obliged to:

Try to dip up water with a bamboo basket.

I have also observed that since Yüeh-niang gave birth to Hsiao-ko, her disposition has changed, and she does not care for me as much as she used to. I might as well take a step forward on my own, and seek a refuge where:

The fallen leaves can return to the root.

Why should I insist on foolishly preserving my widowhood here, only to end up:

Squandering the springtime
season of my youth,
And forgoing the pleasures
of my early years?”

She had just been engaged in pondering this question when Yüeh-niang unexpectedly came in and spoke to her about it. Thus it turned out to be the very gentleman that she had been attracted to out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch’ing-ming Festival that was expressing an interest in her.



Meng Yü-lou Considers Marrying Li Kung-pi

She was both delighted and embarrassed by this development, but although she responded by saying, "First Lady, don't believe any such nonsense, I never expressed such a wish," the blood flew to her cheeks.

Truly:

Suppressing her embarrassment, she is disinclined
to open her mouth in public,
Tidying the hair over her temples, without a word,
she only adjusts her tresses.

"This is the sort of question it is up to the individual to decide," said Yüeh-niang. "I can't be bothered by such things." So saying, she called in Lai-chao and told him, "You go out and invite that go-between to come inside."

Lai-chao, accordingly, went out to the front gate and called for Old Mother T'ao to follow him back to the rear compound into the parlor in Yüeh-niang's quarters, where Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet was displayed in the position of honor at the head of the room. When Old Mother T'ao had finished exchanging the customary amenities with her host, she sat down, and the young maidservant Hsiu-ch'un poured her a serving of tea.

When she had finished her tea, Yüeh-niang asked, "Go-between, what brings you here?"

Old Mother T'ao responded by saying, "As for me:

If I did not have a reason to do so, I would not

visit the Hall of the Three Treasures.⁹

I have come at the behest of the son of the district magistrate, who asked me to respectfully report that there is a lady in your household who wishes to be married, and to propose a match with her."

"Even if there were a lady in the household who wished to be married," responded Yüeh-niang, "no word of this has been noised abroad, so how did the young squire find out about it?"

"The young squire told me," reported Old Mother T'ao, "that on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival, out in the suburbs, he had observed the lady in question with his own eyes, and seen that she had a tall and slender figure, and a face shaped like a melon seed, and that there were a few inconspicuous white pockmarks on her face. That is the lady he is interested in."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, needless to say, she realized that he was referring to Meng Yü-lou.

Thereupon, she ushered Old Mother T'ao over to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, where they sat down in the parlor, and waited for some time before Meng Yü-lou, after performing her ablutions and putting on her makeup, came out to receive them.

Old Mother T'ao greeted her with a bow and said, "So this is the lady in question. Sure enough:

The story is not untrue.

Her caliber is outstanding,¹⁰

Without peer in this world.

She is clearly fit to be the legitimate wife of the young squire. Just look:

If scanned from top to bottom,

Her glamour is incomparable;

If surveyed from head to foot,

Her glamour runs downward apace."

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this and said, "Mother, don't talk such nonsense. Just tell us the present age of the young squire, whether he is married or not, whether he has any concubines at his disposal, what his name is, the location of his native place, and whether he holds any official position or not. Be sure to tell us only the truth, without lying about anything."

"My Heavens," protested Old Mother T'ao, "I am the go-between officially appointed by the district magistrate and am not given to lying like the others may do.

If I've got a sentence,

I'll say that sentence,

without any falsification. His Honor the district magistrate is more than fifty years old, and the young squire in question is his only offspring. He was born on the twenty-third day of the first month at eight o'clock in the morning during the year of the horse, so this year he is thirty years old. He is currently enrolled in the Superior College of the National University and is destined soon to become a provincial graduate or a holder of the *chin-shih* degree. He not only:

Commands a bellyful of literature,¹¹

but is also:

Adept at archery and horsemanship.¹²

As for the works of the hundred schools, there is little that he has not mastered. His wife died some two years ago, so all he has at his disposal now is a maidservant who entered his household as part of his wife's dowry and doesn't amount to anything. That is why he is looking for a wife to take charge of his household but has not so far found one of:

Appropriate social and economic standing.¹³

That is why I have respectfully come here to propose a match on his behalf. I have been promised that if the marriage is successfully arranged, I will no longer be required to report for duty at the district yamen and will receive a substantial reward to boot. If the mistress of your household agrees to this match, His Honor has also promised that in the future the household will be relieved of any requirements for corvée labor, or land taxes on your family graveyard; and that if anyone should try to take advantage of you, all you need do is report it, and he will have the culprit arrested and subjected to punishment before the bench."

Meng Yü-lou responded by asking, "Does the young squire have any male or female children, and where is his native place? I fear that when his father's term of office expires, I may be made to traverse:

A thousand mountains and a myriad streams.

My relatives are all here, but I would probably have to leave them behind in order to accompany him."

"The young squire has fathered no male or female children," responded Old Mother T'ao. "He is quite companionless. He is a native of Tsao-ch'iang district in Chen-ting prefecture in the vicinity of the Northern Capital, which is no more than six or seven hundred li north of the Yellow River. The wealth of his household is such that:

The paths run crisscross between the fields,

The mules and horses compose teeming herds,

And the male dependents are without number.

The memorial arches spanning the horse path,

bear placards inscribed by the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor, with an inscription by the Emperor himself standing above them all. It is all:

Resplendent enough to impress anyone.

Now if he should succeed in taking you into his household as his legitimate wife, and go on to obtain an appointment as an official in the future, you would then be entitled to receive a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, to ride in a carriage embellished with seven aromatic spices, and to be addressed by the honorific title of lady. Is that not an appealing prospect?"

Meng Yü-lou was so impressed by this single speech of Old Mother T'ao's that she expressed herself to be:

Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times.

She then summoned her maidservant Lan-hsiang and had her set up a table and provide tea and snacks for the go-between, saying, "Please don't take offense at the fact that I have insisted on asking so many questions, but the number of you go-betweens who resort to telling falsehoods is extremely great. You start out by eloquently describing things as if:

A flurry of flowers were descending from Heaven,¹⁴

Or golden lotuses were bursting from the ground;¹⁵

but when they are concluded, they don't amount to anything at all. I have, myself, had the experience of being grievously deceived."

"My good lady," protested Old Mother T'ao, "you must evaluate each case individually.

The clear is ever clear,

The turbid ever turbid.

The reputation of the good is often damaged by the bad. I do not purvey falsehoods but try my best as a matchmaker to bring about good matches for people. If you agree to accept the proposal, give me a card stating the year, month, day, and hour of your birth, so I can report back to the young squire with it."

Meng Yü-lou, accordingly, got out a piece of scarlet silk and had Tai-an take it out to Manager Fu Ming in the shop upfront so he could inscribe it with the eight characters that determined her horoscope.

Wu Yüeh-niang then said to her, "Originally, it was Auntie Hsüeh who arranged your marriage into the household. At present, it would be appropriate to send a page boy to summon Auntie Hsüeh, so the two go-betweens can proceed together to deliver the card with your vital statistics, and arrange the match between you."

Shortly thereafter, they sent Tai-an to summon Auntie Hsüeh, and when she saw Old Mother T'ao, she greeted her with a bow, in the way that:

Fellow professionals acknowledge each other;

and the two of them set out together with the card in hand, going out the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and heading for the district yamen in order to report back to the young squire.

One of them was the matchmaker

from this side;

The other was the go-between

from that side.

With their two mouths, they had a total of

forty-eight teeth between them.

On this mission, they could be counted on to boast that:

The Goddess in the Moon, Ch'ang-o,¹⁶

is looking for a mate;

The Goddess of Witch's Mountain¹⁷

is wedding King Hsiang.¹⁸

As they went their way, Old Mother T'ao asked Auntie Hsüeh, "So you were the original go-between for this lady, were you?"

"That's right, I was," replied Auntie Hsüeh.

"Originally," asked Old Mother T'ao, "what family was she a daughter of, and was this marriage that you arranged for her a second marriage?"

Auntie Hsüeh responded by giving her a full account, word for word, of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had originally married her as a widow from the Yang family.

Old Mother T'ao, on noticing that the card with the eight characters that determined her horoscope stated that she was a thirty-six-year-old woman who was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, said, "I fear that the young squire may consider her to be too old for him. What are we to do about that? He is only thirty years old at present, so she is six years older than he is."

"Let's take this card," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "and show it to a fortune-teller along the way, so he can calculate whether her horoscope presents any obstacles or not. If there are any problems with it, we would not be overstepping the bounds if we were to make her out to be a few years younger than she is."

As they continued on their way, they did not encounter any itinerant fortune-tellers sounding their clappers in the street, but in the distance,

on the south side of the road, they saw a fortune-telling booth of blue cotton fabric, on which there were displayed two columns of large characters that read:

Tzu-p'ing¹⁹ will predict your fate,

be it noble or base;

The iron brush will determine your

success or failure.
Whoever should come to have their
fortunes foretold;
Will be dealt the truth without
any prevarication.

Within the booth a table had been set up, behind which there sat a practitioner who was:

Adept at calligraphy and quick at calculation,
named Master Ling. The two go-betweens approached him and bowed in greeting, at which he asked them to be seated.

Auntie Hsüeh addressed him, saying, "We would trouble you, sir, to calculate the fortune of a certain woman for us."

She then reached into her sleeve and pulled out three coins in lieu of a fee, saying, "Pray don't disdain this meager sum, but deign to accept it for the time being. We happened to be passing by and did not have any more money with us."

"If this relates to a marriage proposal," said Master Ling, "tell me the eight characters that designate the horoscope of the person in question."

Old Mother T'ao then handed him the card with this information on it, so he could evaluate her age and the eight characters of her horoscope.

Master Ling said, "So this does concern a marriage proposal."

He then:

Calculated on the joints of his fingers,

gave his abacus a shake, and proceeded to pronounce, "The horoscope for this woman indicates that she is thirty-six-years-old at the present time, and that she was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month; that is to say, in a *chia-tzu* year, in a *ping-tzu* month,²⁰ on a *hsin-mao* day, during the *keng-tzu* hour, which calls for the analysis of the horoscopic category 'seal ribbon.'²¹ Working backwards, as one does with female horoscopes, she is now in the 'decennial period of fate' designated by the combination *ping-shen*. When the stems *ping* and *hsin* occur in the same horoscope, it indicates that in the future she is sure to hold a position of authority and enjoy the prestige of a principal wife. In the 'four pillars' of her horoscope the 'husband star' occurs more than once. Although this prosperous portent indicates that she is fated to benefit her husband, gain wealth, and enjoy her husband's favor, eventually she is sure to suffer some adversities. Has she met with any such setbacks, or not?"

"She has already lost two husbands," responded Auntie Hsüeh.

"If that is so," continued Master Ling, "in the future she will find a husband who was born in the year of the horse."

"Will she bear any sons in the future?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.

"Her horoscope indicates," said Master Ling, "that it will not be until she is forty-years-old that she will bear an only son to support her in her old age. She will be blessed with good fortune for the rest of her life, and enjoy incomparable wealth and honor, glory and luxury."

Taking up a brush, he then proceeded to compose a poem of eight lines about her future prospects, which read as follows:

The time when flowers and fruits have bloomed
and been harvested is noteworthy;
She is delighted to marry a husband with the
prospect of attaining high office.
Her seductive appearance has lost nothing of
the loveliness of the river plum;
She will doff her bridal veil thrice and let
two husbands paint her eyebrows.²²
Holding each other's hands, they will embark
along the way to the jade palace;
Hiding her bashfulness, she will undertake to
proffer the golden wedding goblet.
Looking forward to the day when the horse's
head will ascend into the heavens;
She will consent to abandon the tiger's skin
so she can opt for something better.

Auntie Hsüeh questioned him, saying, "Sir, what is the meaning of the two lines:

Looking forward to the day when the horse's
head will ascend into the heavens;
She will consent to abandon the tiger's skin
so she can opt for something better?

We don't understand their significance. Pray be good enough to explain them to us."

"As for the horse's head," said Master Ling, "the lady in question is about to marry a husband who was born in the year of the horse, which is an auspicious star in her horoscope, indicating that she is fated to:

Enjoy a life of glory and luxury."²³

The tiger's skin refers to her deceased husband who was born in the year of the tiger. Although he did care for her, she was only a concubine in his household. In the future, her husband will have a successful career, and she will live to the age of sixty-seven, with a son to look after her, before her life comes to an end.

Husband and wife will grow old together."²⁴

The two go-betweens, upon receiving this statement of her prospects, went on to say, "It is true that the man she

hopes to marry was born in the year of the horse, but we fear that the match may be rejected on the grounds that she is too old for him. It would look better if you could alter the horoscope to make her two years younger than she is."

"If you want to change it," Master Ling responded, "I'll alter the year of her birth from *chia-tzu* to *ting-mao*, which would make her out to be thirty-three years old."²⁵

Auntie Hsüeh went on to ask, "Will this alteration of her horoscope accord with that of someone born in the year of the horse, or not?"

Master Ling responded, "The stem *ting* is associated with the element fire, and the stem *keng* is associated with the element metal. When fire is employed to smelt metal a superior vessel may be produced. It should be propitious."

Thereupon, he altered the horoscope to make her thirty-three years old, and the two go-betweens took their leave, exited the fortune-telling booth, and headed straight for the district yamen.

The young squire was sitting inside at the time, and the gate-keeper went in to announce their arrival. After a time, the two go-betweens were summoned before him, knelt down on the ground, and kowtowed.

"Where does that other woman come from?" the young squire inquired.

"She is the go-between who negotiated her former marriage," replied Old Mother T'ao.

She then proceeded to recount the progress they had made, saying, "The lady in question is a person of incomparable caliber, but she is a little older than you are, and I did not have the presumption to act on my own. In order to let Your Honor decide, I have acquired a card with her horoscope for your perusal."

So saying, she handed the card to him.

When the young squire, Li Kung-pi, saw that it stated that she was thirty-three years old and was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, he said, "It doesn't matter if she is two or three years older than I am."

"Your Honor is an experienced observer," interjected Auntie Hsüeh. "It has always been true that:

When the wife is two years older,

Yellow gold never molders;

When the wife is three years older,

Yellow gold piles up like boulders.

As for this lady:

Her caliber is outstanding.

She is:

Good-natured and agreeable in disposition;

and as for her familiarity with the works of the hundred schools, and the ability to take charge of a household:

That naturally goes without saying."²⁶

"If she's as good as all that," the young squire responded, "and I've already had a chance to look her over, there's no need to arrange a formal viewing. We can have the yin-yang master select a propitious day and hour for the wedding, and go to her place to perform the tea-presentation ceremony."²⁷

The two go-betweens asked, "When shall we come back to receive your instructions?"

"There is no reason to delay," the young squire replied. "The two of you can come back to check with me tomorrow, and then return to her place to settle matters."

He then instructed his attendants, saying, "Give each of them a tael of silver as a reward for their efforts."

The two go-betweens were pleased at this and went happily on their way. But no more of this.

When the young squire, Li Kung-pi, realized that the match was going to take place, he was so delighted he could scarcely contain himself and called in his friend on the yamen staff, Ho Pu-wei, to consult about it. He informed his father, District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, of his intentions and sent for the yin-yang master, who selected the eighth day of the fourth month for the betrothal ceremony, and the fifteenth day of the month as a propitious day and hour for him to bring the bride over his threshold. He then weighed out a quantity of silver and commissioned Ho Pu-wei and Trifler Chang to purchase the tea, auspicious red ornaments, wine, and other gifts for the occasion, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

The next day, the two go-betweens, after ascertaining the proposed dates, went to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household to report back to Wu Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou on their mission. Truly:

Marriage affinities are determined

in one's former life;²⁸

During which jade has been planted

in the Indigo Field.²⁹

On the eighth day of the fourth month, in the district yamen, on the young squire's behalf, there were prepared sixteen trays of preserved fruit, tea and pastries, a headdress of gold filigree, a set of gold head ornaments, a girdle with an agate buckle and seven tinkling pendants, gold and silver bracelets and bangles, and the like. In addition, there were two robes of palace-style crimson brocade, four outfits of figured clothing, and thirty taels of silver as a bride-price. What with all the muslin, cotton, and silk fabrics, there were more than twenty loads of gifts. The two go-betweens accompanied them, and Ho Pu-wei from the yamen staff took charge of the procession, as they made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and performed the ceremony of presenting the betrothal gifts.

On the fifteenth, the district yamen dispatched a bunch of couriers and idlers who had been hired for the purpose to carry Meng Yü-lou's beds and curtains along with the trunks in which her trousseau was packed. Yüeh-niang looked on and directed them to remove all the furnishings from her quarters. Originally, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive, he

had taken one of the gilt lacquer beds with retractable steps that had been part of Meng Yü-lou's dowry and given it to Hsi-men Ta-chieh as part of her trousseau. Yüeh-niang now took the bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl from P'an Chin-lien's quarters and turned it over to her to make up for it. Meng Yü-lou proposed to take her maidservant Lan-hsiang with her, while leaving Hsiao-luan behind to assist Yüeh-niang in looking after Hsiao-ko.

Yüeh-niang objected to this, however, saying, "How could I be justified in retaining one of the maidservants from your quarters? After all, Hsiao-ko already has Chung-ch'iu, Hsiu-ch'un, and the wet nurse to take care of him, which is more than enough."

Meng Yü-lou merely chose to leave behind a pair of silver flasks of Mohammedan manufacture for Hsiao-ko to play with, and to serve as a keepsake, while taking all the rest of her belongings with her.

That evening, the district yamen dispatched a large sedan chair borne by four bearers and four pairs of red silk lanterns encased in networks of steel wires, accompanied by eight lictors, to come fetch Meng Yü-lou. She was wearing a gilt-ridged cap:

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,
along with pearl earrings, her body was clad in a scarlet full-sleeved robe, fastened at the waist by a girdle with an agate buckle in a gold setting and seven tinkling pendants, over a willow-yellow skirt sprigged with flowers. She first performed a farewell obeisance before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet and then kowtowed to Yüeh-niang.

"Third Sister Meng," said Yüeh-niang, "you are cruel. Once you have gone, I will be left alone, all by myself, with no one to keep me company."

The two of them held hands and wept together for a while, after which, the members of the household, both high and low, accompanied her to the front gate, where she donned her bridal veil of gold-flaked red gauze with the help of the two go-betweens and took the golden "precious vase"³⁰ in her arms. Since Yüeh-niang was preserving her widowhood, she did not feel that she should venture abroad but invited Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, the wife of Han Ming-ch'uan, to escort her to the district yamen, riding in a large sedan chair, wearing a gown of figured scarlet material, over a kingfisher-blue skirt, while:

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets.

The people along the street remarked to each other, "This is the Third Lady of the official Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, who is marrying the son of His Honor the district magistrate. Since this is a propitious day and hour for the wedding, she is on her way to be carried over his threshold."

There were some who had favorable things to say about it,

As well as those who had critical things to say about it.

Those who had favorable comments to make said, "Originally, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had a position in society to maintain, and now that he is dead, his First Lady is the only one of the women in his household who is determined to preserve her widowhood, which is truly admirable. She has given birth to a son, and her household is no longer able to support such a large number of people, so she has allowed the others to go their own way, which is an appropriate attitude to take."

Those who had critical comments to make, when:

Gossiping in the streets and discoursing in the alleys,

pointedly remarked, "This is the third concubine from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing who is now about to remarry. Originally, while that rascal was still alive, he was:

Defiant of both Heaven and principle,³¹

Covetous of wealth and given to lust,

and guilty of seducing other peoples' wives, and now that he is dead, the women in his household are absconding with his property.

Some are marrying other people,

Some are plundering his wealth,

Some are taking furtive lovers,

Some are resorting to thievery.

The feathers of the pheasant are being

plucked one by one.

As the saying goes:

Retribution may take place as much as

thirty years hence;

But here, retribution is taking place

before our very eyes."

The people on the sidelines all expressed their uninhibited views along these lines.

When Meng Yü-lou's elder sister had escorted the bride to the district yamen and seen that the beds and curtains and so forth in her trousseau were properly displayed, she remained there to enjoy the wedding feast before returning home. The bridegroom Li Kung-pi then summoned Auntie Hsüeh and Old Mother T'ao before him and rewarded each of them with five taels of silver and a length of festive red silk, before sending them on their way. That night the bride and groom consummated their marriage:

Emulating the pleasures of fish in the water, and

Exhausting the felicities of connubial bliss.

The next day, Wu Yüeh-niang sent the ritually prescribed gifts of tea and food to celebrate the consummation of the marriage. Aunt Yang was already dead, but Meng the Elder's wife, Meng the Second's wife, and Meng Yü-lou's elder sister also sent ritual gifts of tea to the district yamen. Li Kung-pi, for his part, sent replies to his newly acquired female relatives, inviting them all to come and participate in the "third-day celebrations," including the erection of a tower of variegated bunting in the shape of a mountain, and a feast where they were to be entertained by musicians and singing girls from the licensed quarter, who would greet them with martial music, and perform pieces from the southern-style plays known as hsi-wen.

On that day, Wu Yüeh-niang went to the district yamen in a large sedan chair to participate in the "third-day celebrations" and attend the feast.

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets, while her body was clad in a scarlet full-sleeved robe, a flower-sprigged skirt, and a gilded girdle. As she was drinking wine in the rear hall, the district magistrate's wife came out to keep her company.

On Yüeh-niang's return home after this event, she remembered the way the company had enjoyed themselves:

Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade;
whereas, when she arrived home, the courtyard in the rear compound was deserted, and there was no one to welcome her. This reminded her of how she and her sister wives had enjoyed things together in former days, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive. In those days, when she came home from a social engagement, they would all come out to welcome her, and even a long bench would prove insufficient to seat them all; whereas now, there was nobody there. Happening to bump into Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, she was overcome with grief before she knew it and started to weep out loud. Only after she had wept for some time did her maidservant Hsiao-yü succeed in persuading her to stop and dry her eyes. Truly:

The innermost feelings of one's life³²
are known to no one else;³³
Only the bright moon shining through
the window discerns them.³⁴

We will say no more, for the moment, about Yüeh-niang's grief.

To resume our story, Li Kung-pi and Meng Yü-lou, being:

A woman of beauty and a man of talent,
enjoyed each other:

Like fish sporting in the water.
They fit together as closely as the
lid on a lamp-oil jar.³⁵

Every day, he:

Enjoyed himself with his new wife,
remaining with her in the nuptial chamber, and:

Not straying a step from her side.³⁶

When he contemplated Meng Yü-lou's face, it seemed to him that:

Such a vision is not exhaustible;
Such a view exceeds comprehension.

The more he gazed at her the more he was enamored by her. He also appreciated the fact that she had brought with her as part of her dowry two maidservants, one of whom, Lan-hsiang, was seventeen years old and could play musical instruments and sing, while the other, Hsiao-luan, was fourteen years old, and beautiful as well. He was:

Delighted in his heart,

by this to such an extent that he scarcely knew what to do with himself. There is a poem that testifies to this:

How praiseworthy are this woman of beauty
and this man of talent;
Heaven has devised this marriage affinity³⁷
as propriety dictates.
Amid the twelve peaks of Witch's Mountain³⁸
clouds and rain mingle;³⁹
Their mutual feelings will surely sustain
a lifetime of bliss.⁴⁰

It so happens that Li Kung-pi's deceased wife had left him with a senior maidservant, about thirty years of age, named Yü-tsan, who was given to:

Putting on makeup and applying powder,

and was a past master at mischief making. She did up her hair in two curled knots on either side of her head but covered it with a kerchief, held in place with a gold lamé headband so that it looked like a gentlewoman's fret, and studded it with brass pins and waxen ornaments that looked like fallen leaves and withered flowers. Her ears were adorned with a pair of muskmelon-shaped pendants. Her body was clad in a skirt and jacket of an off-shade of green and a strange shade of red that revealed glimpses of her undergarments in front and her posterior behind, so that she appeared to others like

nothing so much as a rat dressed in lotus leaves. On her feet she wore a pair of cut-velvet moccasins that were:

Oil-stained inside and out,
Mortifying even to Liu Hai,⁴¹
Resembling a pair of boats,
Manifesting four apertures,

and as much as a foot and two inches in length. She smeared her face with lead powder so that it displayed:

A spot of white on the east,
A blotch of red on the west,

looking for all the world like the surface of a fresh winter melon. In front of people, she gave vent to:

Simpleminded and officious foolishness,
Putting on airs and assuming attitudes.

Before the young squire took Meng Yü-lou into the household as his wife, she devoted herself every day to boiling his soup and cooking his rice, waiting upon him assiduously.

Though not spoken to, she forced herself to speak,
Though not smiled at, she forced herself to smile;

exhibiting a wealth of feeling. But after he married Meng Yü-lou, and she observed that he slept with her every night, that he was so close to her that they were:

Like glue and like lacquer,

and that he no longer paid any attention to her, this maidservant began to give vent to fits of anger.

One day, when the young squire was in his study reading a book, this Yü-tsan prepared a cup of fine tea, flavored with fruit kernels, brought it to his study on a tray which she held with two hands, and smiled ingratiatingly as she lifted aside the portiere and took it inside to present to him. Who could have anticipated that the young squire, after reading his book for a while, had lain his head down on his desk and fallen asleep.

"Father," Yü-tsan called out to him, "who else is as fond of you as I am? I have taken the trouble to prepare this cup of fine tea for you, while that new wife of yours is still fast asleep under her bedclothes. Why has she not bothered to get one of her maidservants to bring you a cup of tea?"

On seeing that the young squire was taking a nap, she went up to him and called out again, but he did not respond, whereupon she exclaimed, "You old beggar! You labored so hard on your nocturnal business last night that you wore yourself out, did you? And now, you are dozing and nodding off in broad daylight. You had better get up and drink your tea."

She managed to wake him up, and when he saw who it was, he blurted out at her, "You crazy uncouth slave! Put the tea down, and get out of here."

Yü-tsan's face turned red with humiliation, and she dumped the tea down on the desk in a fit of pique and left the room, saying,

"You wouldn't know a favor if you saw one.

I went out of my way with the best of intentions to bring you a cup of tea early in the morning, only to be railed at this way. As the saying goes:

An ugly woman is a jewel in the household,⁴²
A lovable one is only a source of trouble.

If I am so ugly, you must have been blind from the beginning, since no one had to persuade you to take me on. That better-looking one is hardly worth as much as my juicy cunt."

When the young squire heard this, he caught up with her and kicked her twice, as hard as he could, with his leather boot.

On leaving his presence, Yü-tsan put on a long face, as high as the rafters. From that time on, she no longer applied makeup to her face, and no longer boiled tea or prepared meals. She refused to address Meng Yü-lou as mistress but insisted on employing the pronouns you and I with her. When no one else was around, she would park her posterior on Meng Yü-lou's bed just as if it were her own, but Meng Yü-lou simply ignored her.

She also endeavored, behind Meng Yü-lou's back, to establish her superiority over Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, saying to them, "You should not address me as sister, but as aunt, since I and your mistress are of roughly equal status in the household."

She also went on to admonish them, "But only address me that way in private, and not in front of your master. You must do as I tell you every day, and perform your tasks conscientiously. If you refuse to obey my instructions, I'll put you to work with the coal shovel."

Later on, after she felt that the young squire had pointedly ignored her several times, she began to get lazy, sleeping until the sun was high in the sky before getting up, and refusing to prepare meals or sweep the floor.

Meng Yü-lou, consequently, instructed Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, saying, "You had better not depend on Yü-tsan any longer. The two of you should go to the kitchen yourselves to prepare the meals and serve them to the master."

This only had the effect of angering Yü-tsan further, and she proceeded to:

Lose her temper and become abusive,
Throwing plates and saucers around.

She would go into the kitchen and strike Hsiao-luan and curse Lan-hsiang, saying, "You lousy little slave, and you

little whore:

Even when using the pestle and millstone
to hull grain and grind it,
One must come first and then the other.⁴³

Was it your mistress who came first, or was it me? Since the three of you have usurped my place, I don't feel like exerting myself any longer. Formerly, that mistress of mine who has passed away never had the discourtesy to address me by my given name as Yü-tsan; but within a few days after the three of you moved in, you have taken to addressing me by my real name. Do you take me to be no more than a servant of yours, or what? Before the lot of you moved in, Father and I enjoyed the pleasure of:

Sharing the same bed and a single pillow;
and there was seldom a day when we did not sleep until breakfast time before getting up. The two of us were so fond of each other, we were:

Like sugar mixed with honey;⁴⁴
Like honey stirred with butter.

And there was scarcely anything in the household that did not pass through my hands. But ever since you arrived, you have:

Appropriated my honey jar,
And smashed it to pieces.

As a result, my marriage affinity has been forcibly disrupted, and I have been relegated to sleeping in the parlor on a cold bench, as though I were in a public shelter, and am no longer able to get so much as a taste of that thingamajig of my master's. I have no way of expressing the resentment this has caused me. Originally, when you were in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, you were merely his third concubine and were known by your personal name as Yü-lou, as if I didn't know all about it. Now that you're here:

You know it and I know it,
and it would be better for everyone if you were to slack off a bit, instead of behaving officiously, putting on meretricious airs, or:

Summoning this one and calling for that.

Since when was I bought by you, and thus subject to your control?"

She did not realize it, but Meng Yü-lou in her room overheard this tirade and nearly fainted with anger, her face changing color and her hands trembling, but she did not venture to protest, or to tell the young squire about it.

One day, when the weather was hot, it turned out to be one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

In the evening, the young squire proposed to have Yü-tsan heat some water in the kitchen and bring a bathtub into the bedroom so he could bathe with Meng Yü-lou.

"Have Lan-hsiang heat the water for us," objected Meng Yü-lou. "Don't have her do it."

But the young squire refused to agree to this, saying, "I am making a point of having her do it because I don't want to pamper that slave any further."

When Yü-tsan saw that the young squire wanted the water so he and his wife could:

Bathe together in the orchid-scented bath,
Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water, and
Exhaust the felicities of connubial bliss,

she was not in the best of moods.

Carrying the bathtub into the bedroom, she plumped it down on the floor and then went back to heat a large cauldron of boiling water, while muttering to herself, "Whoever saw the likes of this wanton whore? What with her impulsive capriciousness she is always imposing on me. Though it's only that wantonly juicy cunt of hers, she never lets three days go by without requiring water to bathe it with. When I used to sleep with the master, I would let months go by without exposing mine to so much as a drop of water and never felt that my Buddha's eye had been contaminated; whereas this whore has imposed on me two or three times already."

This tirade of hers commenced while she was leaving the room, and Meng Yü-lou overheard it but did not respond. When the young squire heard it, however, he became enraged. Without finishing his bath, while still stark naked, he slipped on his sandals, picked up a stick from the head of the bed, and headed after her.

Meng Yü-lou tried to stop him, saying, "Let her curse away. While you're enraged this way, I fear that while your body is all hot, if you expose yourself to the breeze, you may come down with a chill. It's hardly worth the risk."

The young squire would not be appeased, however, and said, "Don't you interfere. This slave is guilty of gross impropriety."

So saying, he went forward, grabbed her by the hair with one hand, pulled her over onto the floor, lifted up his stick, and unleashed a series of blows that fell on her like rain. Despite the fact that Meng Yü-lou tried to restrain him from the sidelines, he delivered twenty or thirty strokes to her body, which threw the maidservant into a panic.



Li Kung-pi in a Fit of Rage Beats Yü-tsan

Getting to her knees, she appealed to him, saying, "Father, don't beat me any more. I have something to say to you."
 The young squire castigated her, saying, "You lousy slave! Go ahead and say it then."
 There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

Father, suppress your rage and abate
 your anger.⁴⁵
 Listen attentively to what I have to
 say to you.
 Originally, you spent eight taels of silver
 as a bride-price for me;
 Acquiring me so that I could take charge
 of your household,
 And deal with its sesame oil, salt, soy
 sauce, and vinegar.
 Every serving of food or tea
 that you consumed,
 Was prepared and cleaned up by me.
 After my mistress passed away,
 You promoted me to the position
 of a stand-in for her.
 The two of us came to share the same
 coverlet and the same bed,
 And had wonderful times together.

It was only because you put me in charge
that I consented to do this.
How could I know that you would deceive me,
saying you would not remarry;
Only to come up, today, with this nefarious
scheme of yours,
Obliterating our past love, as if it had
never happened?
I call out, "Father,
You are too cruel at heart.
I will no longer remain in
your household,
But am prepared to marry
another husband.

When the young squire had heard her out, he grew even angrier and gave her another few severe strokes with the stick.

Meng Yü-lou remonstrated with him, saying, "As long as she is willing to go, there is no need for you to beat her any further. Don't let yourself get worked up into such a state."

The young squire, accordingly, ordered a servant to summon the go-between Old Mother T'ao to take Yü-tsan away, sell her off, and come pay him back. But no more of this. Truly:

When a mosquito gets slapped with a fan,

It is for hurting people with its mouth.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

When most kinds of birds chirp, people
are happy to hear them;
But when it is crows that start to caw,
how do people react?
Those who see them are vexed, and those
who hear them spit;
Only because they are much too garrulous
in front of them.⁴⁶

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

CH'EN CHING-CHI IS ENTRAPPED IN YEN-CHOU PREFECTURE; WU YÜEH-NIANG CREATES A STIR IN THE DISTRICT YAMEN

As the summer fades and winter comes,¹
spring turns into autumn;²
As the evening sun sinks in the west,³
the rivers flow eastward.⁴
Although one's wealth and distinction
are determined by destiny;
When one's luck runs out, the ensuing
poverty has its own roots.
If one meets with an opportunity, one
should take advantage of it;
When one has occasion for self-esteem
it is time to repent.⁵
The general and his fighting stallion⁶
are no more to be seen;⁷
The prairie grasses and wildflowers⁸
veil the soil in grief.⁹

THE STORY GOES that on that day, after the young squire Li Kung-pi had given Yü-tsan a beating, he summoned Old Mother T'ao to take her away, sold her for eight taels of silver, and used the proceeds to buy a seventeen-year-old maidservant named Man-t'ang to take charge of the kitchen in her place. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ta-chieh returned to Ch'en Ching-chi's residence and brought with her the beds and curtains, the items from her dowry, and the trunkloads of other goods:

Every third day they squabbled, and

Every fifth day they quarreled.

Ch'en Ching-chi approached his mother, née Chang, to ask if he could borrow some money from her as capital with which to start a business for himself. His maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan had also borrowed fifty taels of silver from his mother, with which to seek a new position for himself. Ch'en Ching-chi, while drunk, got into a shouting match over this at the door of his uncle's residence, which so upset his uncle that he went elsewhere to borrow the money he needed in order to seek a new position and returned the money he had borrowed to Ch'en Ching-chi's mother. This had the effect of upsetting his mother, née Chang, to such an extent that she fell ill and took to her bed, taking medications all day long, and calling in doctors to treat her. Finding herself unable to resist his obstreperous demands, she finally weighed out two hundred taels of silver and turned it over to him so that he, with the help of their servant Ch'en Ting, could open up two rooms on the street-front of their property in which to launch a piece goods store.

Every day, he got together with his cronies Lu the Second, Yang the Elder, and other:

Foxy fellows and doglike companions,¹⁰

who forgathered in the shop to strum the balloon guitar, play at dominoes or backgammon, and drink until late at night, with the result that his capital was gradually diminished. Ch'en Ting told his mother, née Chang, that he was drinking and wasting his money every day, and she believed him, so that she trusted her son no longer. Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this by claiming that Ch'en Ting, who was responsible for getting the fabrics dyed, had been embezzling the money entrusted to him and forced him and his wife to leave the household and reside elsewhere. He then engaged Yang the Elder to be his manager.

This Yang the Elder, whose formal name was Yang Kuang-yen, and whose nickname was Iron Fingernail, was a past master at:

Peddling ephemera, like the wind and rain,¹¹

Telling falsehoods, fabricating fantasies,

and getting hold of other people's money in order to spend it on himself. He was a native of Nobottom ward in Carryoff village of Makebelieve district in Nonesuch prefecture. His father was named Yang Pu-lai, or Poor-parent Yang, and his mother's maiden name was Pai. His younger brother was called Yang Erh-feng. He acquired the art of lying from the Taoist master known as the Barefaced Adept from the Fire Dragon Monastery in the Obdurate Grotto of the Vacuous

Mountains. His wife was known as Miss Died-of-fright because his propensity to lie had literally frightened her to death.

Those to whom he makes promises, end up
Catching at shadows and clutching the wind;
And bilking others of their due, he finds
As easy as groping for something in a bag.

Ch'en Ching-chi prevailed upon his mother to come up with an additional three hundred taels of silver, making a total of five hundred taels worth of capital, and trusted Yang Kuang-yen enough to propose that they go together to the canal port of Lin-ch'ing to purchase piece goods for their business.

Yang the Elder went home to collect his luggage, including a bottomless shoulder bag, filled with soft currency and "elm-pod cash."¹² Carrying a black-handled decorated bow, and riding a haughty high horse, he joined Ch'en Ching-chi in setting out for the dock at Lin-ch'ing in the hope of acquiring some hard-to-find goods.

After three li they fared by Nonesuch district;
After five li they came to Makebelieve village;

eventually arriving at Lin-ch'ing.

The large dock area of this river port of Lin-ch'ing was a bustling and flourishing place, where traveling merchants came and went:

A site at which river boats congregated;
An area where transport wagons gathered.

There were:

Thirty-two lanes lined with sporting houses; and
Seventy-two taverns featuring singing girls.¹³

Ch'en Ching-chi was still a young man and allowed himself to be led by this Iron Fingernail, Yang the Elder, into:

Visiting brothels, and
Exploring taverns;
Sleeping by daylight, and
Dissipating at night;

while neglecting the purchases they had come to make.

While visiting a brothel one day, he encountered a painted face named Feng Chin-pao:

Whose demeanor was both romantic and alluring, and
Whose beauty and talent approached perfection.

When he asked how old she was, the procuress said, "She is my own daughter, and my only source of livelihood. This year, she is just seventeen-years-old."

Ch'en Ching-chi no sooner set eyes on her than:

His heart and eyes were entranced,

and he proceeded to pay the procuress five taels of silver for the privilege of spending several nights in a row with her. When Yang the Elder saw that he was infatuated with the painted face, and reluctant to leave her, he persuaded him with flowery words from the sidelines to take her home with him. The procuress started by demanding a hundred and fifty taels of silver for her but allowed herself to be bargained down to a hundred taels, whereupon he paid her the silver and took her home with him. She was carried the whole way in a sedan chair, while Yang the Elder and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted their cartload of merchandise:

Flourishing whips and prancing on their steeds,¹⁴

with satisfaction. Truly:

The sweetheart from the Swallows' Belvedere,¹⁵
Turns round her head in vain along the road.

He is carrying off an immortal from Wu-ling,¹⁶
To make her into a loving phoenix companion.

When his mother, née Chang, saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had not purchased much in the way of merchandise but had used his capital to buy a singing girl instead, she became so upset that:

Alas and alack;
She stopped breathing and died.

Ch'en Ching-chi had no alternative but to purchase a coffin, see that her corpse was dressed for burial, hold a scripture reciting ceremony, arrange for her to lie in state until after the first weekly commemoration was over, conduct a funeral procession to the ancestral graveyard outside the city, and bury her in the same grave with her husband. His maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, out of consideration for his mother, chose to make allowances for him.

When Ch'en Ching-chi came home after performing the ceremony of revisiting the grave three days after her burial, he set up her spirit tablet in the center of what had been her three-room suite and turned the other two rooms over to Feng Chin-pao to live in, while relegating his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to a side chamber. He also purchased a maidservant named Ch'ung-hsi to wait on Feng Chin-pao, put Yang the Elder in charge of the shop on the street-front of the residence, and indulged himself and the singing girl with:

Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.

Every night, he slept with the singing girl and no longer paid any attention to Hsi-men Ta-chieh.

One day, he learned that Meng Yü-lou had married Li Kung-pi, the son of District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, and taken a good deal of property with her; and that on the expiration of Magistrate Li's three-year term of office he had been promoted to the position of assistant prefect of Yen-chou prefecture in Chekiang and had taken his credentials and set out along the internal waterways to assume his new office.

This reminded Ch'en Ching-chi that on a former occasion he had picked up a hairpin of Meng Yü-lou's, that it had been taken from him by P'an Chin-lien while he was in his cups, that she had later returned it to him, and that he still had it in his possession. It occurred to him that, using this hairpin as a piece of evidence, he could take it with him to Yen-chou and claim that Meng Yü-lou had had an affair with him and given him the pin as a gift; and that the property she had taken with her on the occasion of her marriage to Li Kung-pi included the trunkloads of gold and silver that had been entrusted to his family by their relative Yang Chien when it was threatened with confiscation.

"This Assistant Prefect Li," he thought to himself, "is merely a civil official. What sort of standing does he possess? When he learns of this serious accusation, no doubt he will order his son to turn his wife over to me with both hands. If I then bring her home with me, she and Feng Chin-pao will make a pleasing pair for me to enjoy myself with."

Truly:

If his plan prevails, it will be like seizing
the jade hare in the moon;
If his plot succeeds, it will be like snaring
the gold raven in the sun.¹⁷

If Ch'en Ching-chi had not embarked on this scheme, all might have been well; but when he chose to do so, it was a case of:

A sleepy slugabed encountering the General
of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into
Chung K'uei.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

How can he ever start out for Yen-chou
in pursuit of a jade damsel?
The human heart is difficult to fathom¹⁸
like a stone sunk in the sea.
To vanish inside a nobleman's gates is to be
as unreachable as the ocean depths;
From this point on, the amorous gentleman
is destined to fall into a pit.

To resume our story, one day Ch'en Ching-chi went through his mother's trunks and took out a thousand taels of silver. He set aside a hundred taels to cover Feng Chin-pao's expenses during his absence and arranged for Ch'en Ting to move back in to look after the house and take charge of the piece goods store out front. He then set off with the remaining nine hundred taels of silver in hand, at the Mid-autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, together with Yang the Elder and his servant Ch'en An, for Hu-chou, where they purchased half a boatload of piece goods and silk floss, and then went on to the river's mouth at Ch'ing-chiang P'u, where they moored their boat at the dock, and put up at an inn the proprietor of which was called Ch'en the Second.

That evening, after the lanterns had been lit, he had Ch'en the Second slaughter a chicken and provide wine for them, and he sat down to drink with Yang the Elder, saying, "Manager, I would like you to keep watch over the boatload of merchandise, and stay here at Ch'en the Second's inn for a few days, while Ch'en An and I take some gifts with us and go to Yen-chou prefecture in Chekiang to pay a call on my sister, who is married to the son of the assistant prefect there. I should be able to get back in five days at the most or three days at the least."

"Brother," said Yang the Elder, "go ahead and go if you like. I will be happy to remain here and wait for you at the inn. When you return, we can set off together."

Ch'en Ching-chi, though he:

Never, ever, should have done it,

set out one day, together with Ch'en An, taking some silver and presents with him, and traveled to Yen-chou prefecture, where they went into the city and found lodging in a monastery. Upon making inquiry, he learned that the Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i had assumed office a month ago, and that the boat with his dependents had arrived only three days earlier.

Ch'en Ching-chi did not dare to be remiss but purchased four platters of delicacies, two bolts of satin fabric, and two jars of wine, which he entrusted to Ch'en An to carry. He then dressed himself to befit the occasion, endeavoring to look his best, and headed straight for the prefectural yamen.

When he arrived there, he bowed to the gatekeeper, saying, "Please announce me. You can say that I am Meng the Second, a relative of the newlywed wife of His Honor Assistant Prefect Li's son, who has come to pay her a visit."

When the gatekeeper heard this, he did not dare to be remiss but promptly went inside to report his arrival. The young squire was in his study reading a book at the time.

When he heard that the visitor was a brother of his wife's, he ordered his attendants to bring the presents inside, adjusted his clothing, and said, "Invite him to come in."

He then conducted Ch'en Ching-chi into the reception hall of the prefectural yamen where they exchanged the customary amenities.

After they had assumed their positions as guest and host, he said, "How is it that, the other day, at our wedding ceremony, I did not see you, Brother-in-law?"

"I have been away for the past year," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "and have only just returned from a purchasing expedition to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region, so I did not know that my elder sister had married into your family. I am guilty of losing touch with her, but today I have respectfully prepared some meager gifts and have come to call on my sister."

"I did not know anything about you in the past," explained the young squire. "I apologize for my neglect. Forgive me. Forgive me."

A little later, after they had consumed a serving of tea, the young squire ordered his attendants to take the list of gifts and the presents inside and tell their mistress that her brother Meng the Second was there.

Meng Yü-lou, who was sitting in her room at the time, heard the gatekeeper come in and announce that Meng the Second was there.

"He hasn't returned home for the last year or two," she said. "Who else could it be? It must be that my brother, Meng Jui, has finally come home and has taken the trouble to traverse:

A thousand mountains and a myriad streams,
in order to come and see me."

When she saw that a servant had brought in the presents, along with a gift card that was signed, "Your relative, Meng Jui," she knew it must be her younger brother and said, "Invite him to come in."

After ordering Lan-hsiang to straighten up the rear reception room, Meng Yü-lou dressed herself up and prepared to come out and welcome him. When the young squire ushered him into the reception room, Meng Yü-lou was standing on the other side of the hanging screen looking into the interior, but:

Strange as it may seem,
it turned out not to be her brother, but Ch'en Ching-chi.

"I wonder what he is doing here?" she asked herself. "I'd better go out and see what he has to say. As the saying goes:

Whether a kinsman or not,
He is from my home place;
Whether palatable or not,
It is water from my home.¹⁹

Even though he is no brother of mine, he is my son-in-law."

So saying, she straightened her attire and came out to greet him.

"I did not know that you had married into this household," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so I have failed to call upon you."

Unexpectedly, while he was still uttering these words, the gatekeeper came in and informed the young squire that there was a guest waiting to see him outside.

"Pray entertain my brother-in-law," the young squire said to Meng Yü-lou, as he went out to meet his guest.

When Meng Yü-lou observed that Ch'en Ching-chi was about to kowtow to her, she hastily bowed in return, saying, "Son-in-law, you can skip the obeisance. What wind has blown you here?"

After they had exchanged the customary amenities, she offered him a seat and called for Lan-hsiang to bring out a serving of tea. When they had finished their tea, the two of them engaged in small talk together.

"How is Hsi-men Ta-chieh?" Meng Yü-lou asked.

Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to tell Meng Yü-lou all about how they had been forced to leave Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and how he had tried to recover the trunks of valuables that his family had originally deposited there. Meng Yü-lou also told him about how they had visited the ancestral graveyard on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, and how they had encountered Ch'un-mei at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where she had gone to burn paper money at Chin-lien's grave site.

She also went on to say, "When I was still in the Hsi-men household, I constantly admonished the First Lady, saying, 'If you love your daughter, you should also love her husband. He is your own son-in-law, after all; it is not as though you are supporting a stranger.' But she believed the slander that petty people purveyed to her and consequently drove you out of the household. As for your later request to recover the trunks your family had entrusted to them, I know nothing about that."

"I will not attempt to deceive you," Ch'en Ching-chi said. "It is true that I was carrying on an affair with Sister Six, as everyone knew. But when the First Lady heard about it from those slaves of hers and drove her out of the household, she ended up being murdered by Wu Sung. If she had been allowed to remain in the household, that Wu Sung, even if he had possessed:

Seven heads and eight galls,
would never have dared to break into the household and kill her. My enmity for the First Lady is as deep as the sea, and Sister Six, though dead in the Underworld, will also never forgive her."

"Enough of that," objected Meng Yü-lou. "It's something you can't do anything about. It has always been true that:

It is better to resolve an enmity
than to contract one."²⁰

As they were talking, a maidservant set up a table, and put out wine, cups, and an assortment of delicacies until its

entire surface was filled.

Meng Yü-lou then poured out a cup of wine and proffered it to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "Son-in-law, you have exposed yourself to:

The wind and dust of a long journey,²¹
and gratuitously expended a considerable sum on me. Please accept this meager cup of watery wine."

Ch'en Ching-chi took the cup in his hand, bowed to her, and poured out another cup of wine to proffer to her in return. After she expressed her gratitude, they sat down together.

Upon noticing that the woman insisted on addressing him as Son-in-law:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,

"How is it that this whore refuses to recognize her vulnerability, but persists in addressing me as Son-in-law? I'd better sound her out gradually."

At the juncture, when:

Three rounds of wine had been consumed, and

Five courses of food had been provided,

the two of them continued:

Talking back and forth,

until the conversation started to warm up. By this time Ch'en Ching-chi's face was flushed with wine. As the saying goes:

The passions born of wine are

as deep as the sea;

Giving rise to lustful daring

as big as the sky.²²

Seeing that no one else was present, Ch'en Ching-chi dropped several lines of suggestive language, saying, "Sister, your younger brother yearns for you:

Like a thirsty person longing for drink;

Like a parched person longing for coolness.

I remember, when I was residing in my father-in-law's household, how the two of us used to enjoy board games together, and play at dominoes, sitting across from each other, and feeling connected as intimately as the carapace to the turtle. Who could have guessed that today:

We would be apart from each other;²³

You to the east and I to the west?"

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "Son-in-law, that's a fine way to talk! It has always been true that:

The clear is ever clear,

The turbid ever turbid;

As in time will be seen."

Ch'en Ching-chi responded with an ingratiating smile, groped out of his sleeve a package containing lozenges of fragrant tea in the shape of embracing couples, and gave it to the woman, saying, "Sister, if you have any feeling for me, take pity on your younger brother, and agree to consume this fragrant tea."

So saying, he proceeded to kneel down in front of her. As for the woman:

A spot of red appeared beside each ear,

and the blood flew to her cheeks.

Taking the package of fragrant tea in her hand, she threw it onto the floor, saying:

"You wouldn't know a favor if you saw one.

I proffered wine to you with the best of intentions, and you turn around and play games with me this way."

So saying, she started to leave the table and head back to her room.

When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that she was not rising to his bait, he picked up the package of fragrant tea and called after her, saying, "I came to see you with the best of intentions, but you have apparently changed your mind about me. I dare say you think now that you have married a fine young man who is the son of an assistant prefect, you need not pay any attention to me; as though you never engaged in hanky-panky with me when you were the third concubine in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."

He then reached into his sleeve, pulled out the gold-plated silver hairpin that he had formerly picked up, and held it in his hand, saying, "Who does this object belong to? If you never had sexual relations with me, how did this pin of yours ever fall into my hands? Your name is actually engraved on it. You and the First Lady have been in cahoots to divide up the eight trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, including jade girdles, jewels, and the like, that belonged to Yang Chien at court, and were deposited with you to avoid confiscation at the time of his impeachment, and have brought your share of them with you upon marrying your new husband. Never you fear, when we appear in court I'll have something to say to you."

When Meng Yü-lou heard his accusation and realized that the hairpin he held really was the gold-plated hairpin in the shape of a lotus petal that she had worn on her head, but had lost in the garden on a former occasion, she wondered to herself, "How could it ever have fallen into the hands of this short-life?"

Fearing that if she made a fuss about it the servants might overhear them, she promptly put on an ingratiating smile,

came back inside, and took Ch'en Ching-chi by the hand, saying, "My good son-in-law, I was only kidding. There's no reason to get so upset."

Seeing that:

There was nobody about,
she murmured softly:

"If you've got a mind to it,
I've got the will."

The two of them then:

Without permitting any further explanation,
fell to embracing each other and kissing.

Ch'en Ching-chi:

Like a snake devouring a swallow,
stuck his tongue into her mouth and told her to suck it, saying, "Call me your darling son-in-law. Only then will I believe that you really care for me."

"Keep it quiet," the woman said. "I fear that someone may overhear us."

Ch'en Ching-chi then whispered to her, saying, "I have bought half a boatload of merchandise which is waiting for me at the dock in Ch'ing-chiang P'u. If you deign to give yourself to me, thus and so, this evening, you can disguise yourself as a gatekeeper, surreptitiously make your way outside, and come home with me on the boat, so we can become man and wife. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme. Your father-in-law is only a civil official, after all, and will seek to avoid trouble. He is scarcely likely to take the risk of trying to pursue or arrest you."

"In that case," the woman said, "so be it. Let us agree that tonight you will wait outside the rear wall of the yamen. I will let a bundle of gold and silver and other valuables down to you by a rope over the wall and then disguise myself as a gatekeeper, make my way outside, and go to embark on the boat with you."

Gentle reader take note: Truly:

If a beauty is well disposed,²⁴
Not even a barrier a myriad feet in height
will serve to deter her;
If a woman is ill disposed,²⁵
Though seated next to one, she is separated
by a thousand mountains.

If Meng Yü-lou had married a fool who was not the equal of Ch'en Ching-chi, this scheme of his might well have succeeded; but she had married the young squire Li Kung-pi, who had the prospect of a promising career before him and was also:

A man of romantic and engaging qualities,²⁶
still in the springtime of his youth, whose:

Loving devotion could hardly be surpassed.²⁷

Under these circumstances, how could he ever have thought he could seduce her? Aside from the fact that the two of them had not had any relationship in the past, the young gentleman was simply bound to fail in his endeavor. Having told the truth, and revealed his plans to her, he opened himself up to being deceived by the woman.

Truly:

Flowering branches, beneath their leaves,
conceal their thorns;
How can one ever be sure the human heart
contains no poison?

At this juncture, after the two of them had consulted together for a while, and Ch'en Ching-chi had downed several cups of wine, he said good-bye and prepared to leave. Li Kung-pi, forthwith, escorted him to the gate of the yamen and saw him off, with Ch'en An following in his wake.

Li Kung-pi then asked Meng Yü-lou, "Do you know where your brother is staying? I will go tomorrow to pay him a return call and give him some gifts for the road."

"Since when is he any brother of mine?" responded Meng Yü-lou. "He is Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law and has come with the intention, thus and so, of inveigling me into absconding with him. I have already arranged for him to wait outside the rear wall of the yamen at the third watch tonight, in order to:

Counteract his plot with one of my own,²⁸
so we can have him arrested as a thief, and thereby eliminate any further trouble from him. What do you think?"

"How can that rascal act so outrageously?" the young squire responded. "It has always been true that:

He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.
It is not I who have sought him out,
He is seeking to find his own death."²⁹

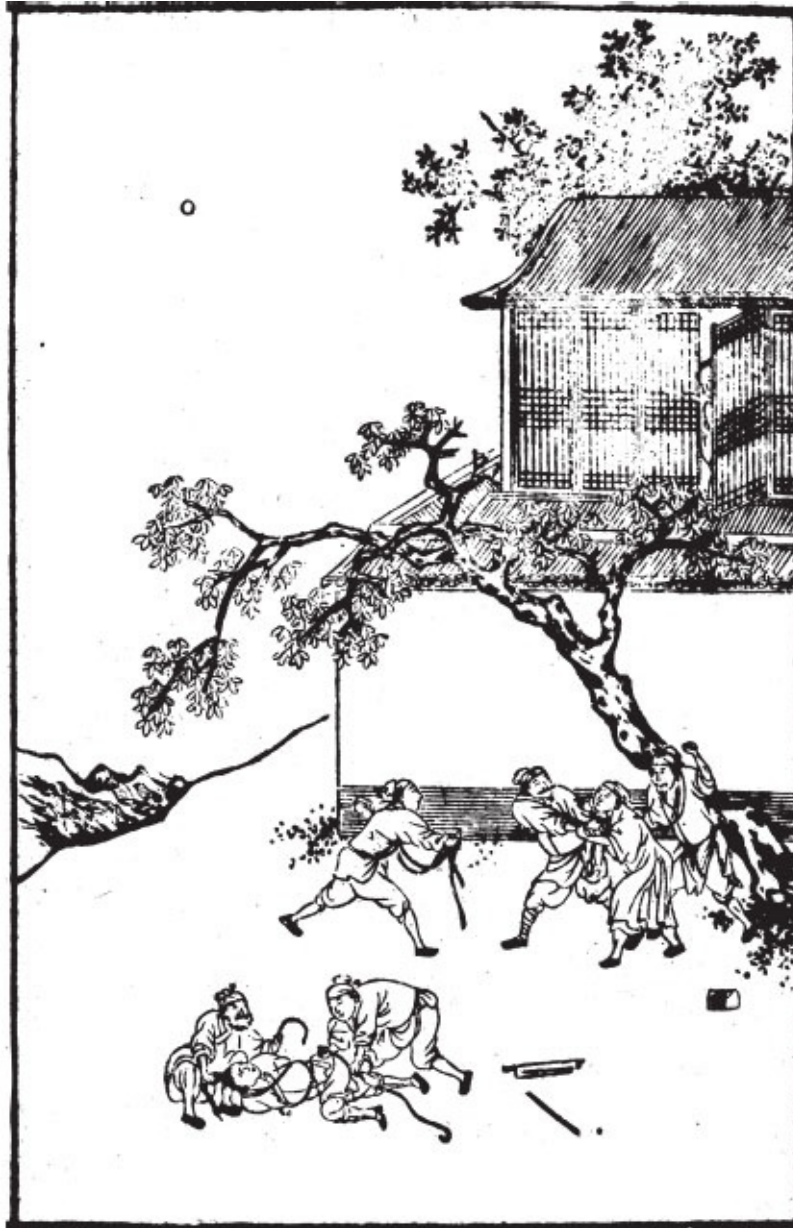
So saying, he strode outside, called together a few trusted attendants, and instructed them, thus and so, on the preparations he wished them to make.

Meanwhile, Ch'en Ching-chi, who was quite unaware of the counterplot he was up against, during:

The third watch in the middle of the night, actually proceeded to take his servant Ch'en An with him, stand outside the rear wall of the prefectural yamen, and signal his presence with a cough. Meng Yü-lou coughed in response and then threw a length of rope with a large bundle of silver attached to the end of it over the wall to him. This silver consisted of two hundred taels that had been taken from the prefectural depository for money confiscated from criminals and levied in fines.

Ch'en Ching-chi was about to tell Ch'en An to pick it up and get out of the way when:

The sound of a watchman's clapper was heard,³⁰ and four or five men suddenly appeared out of the dark shadows, calling out, "Thief! Thief!"



Ch'en Ching-chi Is Entrapped in Yen-chou Prefecture

In no time at all, they bound Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An and reported the event to Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who ordered that they be incarcerated in the jail and brought before the bench the following morning.

It so happens that the presiding prefect of Yen-chou was a man named Hsü Feng, who was a native of Lin-t'ao prefecture in Shensi province, had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1070 and was a man of absolute integrity and uprightness.

The next morning, he took his place on the bench, with two rows of lesser officials standing to either side, while Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i took the formal roll call, and the keeper of the repository reported on the theft, bringing

Ch'en Ching-chi with him, and announcing, "Last night, during the third watch, the two initially unknown but now identified culprits Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An broke open the lock to the repository, stole two hundred taels worth of the money confiscated from criminals, climbed over the wall, and attempted to escape but were apprehended and are now ready to be brought before Your Honor."

Prefect Hsü Feng ordered that they be brought forward, and Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were, accordingly, hustled into the courtroom and made to kneel before the bench.

When the prefect saw that Ch'en Ching-chi was young and had a naturally clear-cut appearance, he questioned him, saying, "Where does this rascal come from, and why should he have come to this prefectural yamen of mine during the night, and stolen this amount of money confiscated from criminals from the government repository? What does he have to say for himself?"

Ch'en Ching-chi merely responded by kowtowing and protesting that he was being treated unjustly.

"Since you are guilty of larceny," said Prefect Hsü, "how can you claim to be treated unjustly?"

Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i bowed respectfully at his side and said, "Venerable sir, there is no reason for any further interrogation. The material evidence is before our eyes. Why do you not subject them to punishment?"

Prefect Hsü then ordered his subordinates to take them down and give them a flogging of twenty strokes with the bamboo.

Assistant Prefect Li remarked:

"Man is a miserable creature;

Unless you beat him he'll never confess.

Otherwise these thieves will try to wriggle out of it."

Thereupon, the lictors standing to either side took hold of Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An, turned them over, and began to beat them with the heavy bamboo.

Ch'en Ching-chi's only response was to curse, saying, "Who could have anticipated that that whore, Meng the Third, would try to ensnare me this way? It is unjust! It is bitter!"

Prefect Hsü Feng was an official with considerable experience in his prefectural office, and on hearing these cries, he thought to himself, "There must be something behind this."

After only ten strokes of the bamboo had been administered, he called out to the lictors, "That's enough for now. Take them back to the lockup, and we can continue the interrogation tomorrow."

Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i responded to this by saying, "Venerable sir, you ought not to let them off so easily. As the saying goes:

The human heart may be as hard as steel;

But legal prosecution is like a furnace.³¹

It may not matter if you let them off overnight, but it will give them an opportunity to concoct some alternative explanation."

"That will not be a problem," said Prefect Hsü. "I know what I'm doing."

Thereupon, the prison guards proceeded to take Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An back to the lockup.

Prefect Hsü Feng had some suspicions about the situation in his mind, so he summoned a trusted subordinate and instructed him, thus and so, to go to the lockup, endeavor to ascertain what lay behind the crime that had been committed, and then report back to him.

This man, thereupon, disguised himself as a prisoner, slept in the same cell with Ch'en Ching-chi that night, and asked him what had happened, saying, "Brother, you are still in the springtime of your youth and don't look like a criminal, but this day you have fallen into the clutches of the law and seem to be the victim of a miscarriage of justice."

Ch'en Ching-chi responded by saying:

"It's a long story.

I was originally the son-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing from Ch'ing-ho district. This woman, née Meng, who is the newly married bride of Assistant Prefect Li's son, was formerly a concubine of my father-in-law's, with whom I have had a sexual liaison. Now, on the occasion of her marriage, she brought with her ten trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, as part of her trousseau, that originally belonged to a relative of my family's, His Honor Yang Chien, who had entrusted them to my father-in-law's family for safekeeping. I came here with the intention of recovering them but have been double-crossed by her, thus and so, and ended up being arrested as a thief:

Severely beaten into making a confession,³²
and rendered no longer able to see the light of day. It's really intolerable."

Having heard this, his questioner made his way back to the rear hall of the yamen and reported it to Prefect Hsü, who said, "Just as I suspected, there was a reason why this man claimed to have suffered an injustice at the hands of this woman, née Meng."

The next day, when he took his place on the bench, with two rows of lesser officials standing to either side, Prefect Hsü Feng had Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An haled before him, directed that a record be made of their testimony, declared their innocence, and ordered them to be set free.

Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who was sitting beside him, did not know what was going on and objected repeatedly, saying, "Venerable sir, the guilt of these rascals is apparent. How can you let them go free?"

But Prefect Hsü, in front of his assembled subordinates, gave Assistant Prefect Li a severe dressing down, saying, "I occupy the senior office in this prefecture and derive my authority from the Emperor. It would not be right for me, on your family's behalf, to:

Abuse the law to avenge a private dispute,³³
and falsely accuse an innocent party of larceny. Your son has married the concubine, née Meng, of his deceased father-in-law, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who brought with her as part of her trousseau, trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, that are subject to confiscation by the authorities. As Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law, the accused has come here in the hope of recovering the said property. How can you bring yourself to frame him, have him arrested for a crime he did not commit, and then expect me to collaborate in this injustice on your family's behalf? As an official, one should:

Raise sons and raise daughters,

Hoping that they will become decent adults.

To allow them to act in this way, is a violation of justice."

In front of the court, he berated Assistant Prefect Li till his face turned red with embarrassment, and:

He hung his head in mortification,³⁴

not daring to utter another word. Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were then allowed to go free.

Not long afterwards, Prefect Hsü retired from the bench, and Assistant Prefect Li returned to his own quarters with his mind in a state of extreme turmoil.

When his wife noticed this, she said, "Sir, normally when you return from the courtroom, you act as though:

Nothing in Heaven or Earth could

make you happier;

but today, you seem so unhappy. What's going on?"

"You're only a woman!" shouted Assistant Prefect Li. "What do you know about anything? You have given birth to a worthless son, and today, on his account, Prefect Hsü has subjected me to a severe dressing down in the open courtroom, in front of all the assembled subordinates. It's utterly enraging."

His wife was thrown into consternation by this response and asked, "What's it all about?"

Assistant Prefect Li merely called his son into his presence and shouted to his attendants, "Fetch a heavy bamboo cane. It's utterly enraging!"

He then addressed his son, saying, "You are responsible for bringing this woman into our household as your wife. And now, the son-in-law of her deceased husband has shown up, insisting, over and over again, that she brought with her as part of her trousseau trunkloads of gold and silver that belonged to the convicted court official Yang Chien and were entrusted to his father-in-law's family for safekeeping because they were subject to confiscation. He has come here in order to demand that you return them to him. He says that you surreptitiously removed government silver from the repository and used it to frame him as a thief. I didn't know a thing about this but have suffered a tongue lashing from Prefect Hsü in front of the entire contingent of other functionaries. This is something you have visited upon me when I have not even begun to exercise my authority for a single day. What use do I have for a worthless son like you?"

So saying, he ordered his attendants to begin beating him, and the strokes of the heavy bamboo fell on him like rain. Alas, the young squire was beaten until:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and

Fresh blood spurted out.

When the prefect's wife saw that he was being beaten until he was scarcely recognizable, she wept on the sidelines and urged her husband to desist. Meng Yü-lou, also, eavesdropped on the scene from inside the postern gate to the residential quarters in the rear and wiped away her tears.

After he had been given thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo, Assistant Prefect Li ordered his attendants, saying, "Take the young squire into custody, and expel that woman of his from the premises at once. She can remarry anyone she chooses, and thereby avoid any further scandal, and allow me to reassert my integrity."

The young squire, Li Kung-pi, could not bear the thought of being separated from her, and fell to weeping and pleading before his parents, saying, "I would rather allow myself to be beaten to death by my father than relinquish my wife."

Assistant Prefect Li ordered that the young squire should be shackled with iron chains, confined in the rear quarters of the yamen, and not allowed out, with the intention of letting him die there.

His wife wept at this, saying, "Sir, in the course of your career as an official you have reached the age of more than fifty years, and this is the only offspring that you possess. If you confine him until he dies on account of this woman, in the future, when you grow old and retire from office, on whom will you rely?"

"But if I don't do so," said Assistant Prefect Li, "he will only continue to make trouble for me with my colleagues."

"If you don't wish to allow him to remain here," responded his wife, "why not send the two of them back to our ancestral home in Chen-t'ing prefecture?"

The assistant prefect allowed himself to be persuaded by his wife and consented to let the young squire go. He was given a limit of three days in which to arrange for transportation and set out with his wife for his native place in Tsao-ch'iang district, where he was to continue his studies.

To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were released from the yamen in Yen-chou prefecture, they returned to the monastery where they had been staying, picked up their luggage, and went straight back to the inn of Ch'en the Second in Ch'ing-chiang p'u.

When they asked for Yang the Elder, they were told, "Three days ago he went to the prefectural yamen to look for you and was told that you had been incarcerated in the lockup, so he came back, took charge of his boatload of cargo, and headed for home."

Ch'en Ching-chi could hardly believe this, so he went down to the waterfront to see for himself but came up empty-handed, being unable to find the boat.

"That god-damned creature!" he exclaimed. "How could he fail to wait for me, but simply take off on his own?"

On top of everything else, having just been released from the lockup, he had nothing in the way of traveling expenses at his disposal. He and Ch'en An had no recourse but to take passage on another boat, pawn their garments to cover the cost, and scrounge for food on their way home:

As flustered as a dog who has
lost his way home;
As flurried as a fish who has
escaped the net.

Along the route, they sought for news of Yang the Elder but found no trace of him. At the time, it was already late autumn:

The trees were shedding leaves,
The metallic wind was turbulent,

and the atmosphere was desolate. There is a poem of eight lines that describes the hardships suffered by travelers in the autumn:

Stem by stem the caltrop and the lotus wither;
Leaf by leaf the phoenix tree's foliage falls.
The crickets chirp in the decaying grasslands;
The wild geese come down upon the level sands.³⁵
Drizzling rain showers drench the green woods;
The frost is heavy as the weather gets colder.
Those who do not have to journey on the roads;
Are quite unable to savor the taste of autumn.³⁶

On the day that Ch'en Ching-chi finally arrived home, the servant Ch'en Ting was standing in the doorway. When he saw Ch'en Ching-chi arrive and noticed that:

His clothing looked disheveled,³⁷ and
His face was dark with sunburn,

it gave him quite a start. After ushering him inside, he inquired about the whereabouts of his boatload of merchandise.

Ch'en Ching-chi was so angry that it took him what seemed like half a day to respond, telling him about the trial he had endured in Yen-chou prefecture, and saying, "I am lucky that the presiding officer, Prefect Hsü Feng, set me free. Otherwise:

My life would have been in jeopardy.³⁸

And now, that god-damned creature Yang the Elder has made off with my merchandise, and who knows where he has taken it?"

The first thing Ch'en Ching-chi did was to send Ch'en Ting to Yang the Elder's home to see if he could find out anything, but they merely reported that he had not returned home yet. Ch'en Ching-chi then went in person to inquire about the situation but did not gain any information and came home and entered the house in a highly agitated state.

It so happens that Feng Chin-pao and Hsi-men Ta-chieh had proven to be incompatible:

One turning south and the other facing north.

Ever since Ch'en Ching-chi had embarked on his expedition, they had quarrelled with one another, right up until the day of his return.

Hsi-men Ta-chieh claimed that Feng Chin-pao had been secretly filching money to give to the procuress of the brothel from which she had been purchased, saying, "The servant from her place comes here all the time:

Surreptitiously acquiring things on the sly,

and purchasing wine and meat for her, which she consumes in her own room, while the rest of us do without. She sleeps until noon all the time and refuses to buy anything for the household, simply leaving the rest of us to put up with it."

Feng Chin-pao, for her part, said, "Hsi-men Ta-chieh is so habitually lazy she will:

Neither pick up a bent piece of hay,
Nor glean a standing stalk of grain.³⁹

She pilfers rice to exchange for baked wheat cakes to eat, and marinated pork which she sneaks into her room to share with her maidservant Yüan-hsiao."

Ch'en Ching-chi believed this last accusation and accosted Hsi-men Ta-chieh, saying, "So, you lousy worthless whore! I guess you must be suffering from such:

Acute consumption or avid craving,

that you can't help pilfering rice to exchange for baked wheat cakes, and marinated pork to share with your maidservant."

So saying, he gave Yüan-hsiao a beating and kicked Hsi-men Ta-chieh a few times.

Hsi-men Ta-chieh was so upset by this that she chased after Feng Chin-pao and confronted her, head to head, saying, "What an adulterous whore you are! I suppose that the money you have been filching on behalf of that procuress of yours doesn't matter; but you actually have the gall to allege to my husband that I have been pilfering rice and meat for myself. This is a case of:

The curfew violator arresting the watchman.
And you have even incited my husband to kick me. I'll put my life up against yours any day, you whore. After all, what is it worth anyway?"

"What a fine whore you are!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "You offer to put your life up against hers, do you? You're not even worth as much as one of the toes on her feet."

This was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen,
and it turned out to be a catastrophe.

Thereupon, Ch'en Ching-chi, grabbed Hsi-men Ta-chieh by the hair with one hand and proceeded to pound her with his fist, kick her with his feet, and beat her with a stick. He beat her until blood oozed from her nostrils, and it seemed like half a day before she regained consciousness. Ch'en Ching-chi then retired to the quarters of his singing girl and went to sleep with her, leaving Hsi-men Ta-chieh in her own lesser quarters, where she gave way to:

Sobbing and wailing,
as she cried bitterly, while Yüan-hsiao retired to the adjacent room to sleep. Alas, in the middle of the night, Hsi-men Ta-chieh suspended a length of rope from the rafters, and:

Hanged herself until dead.

At the time of her death she was twenty-three years of age.

The next morning, when Yüan-hsiao got up, she tried to push open the door to her bedroom but could not do so. Ch'en Ching-chi and Feng Chin-pao, who were still in bed at the time, sent their maidservant Ch'ung-hsi to fetch a wooden basin from Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room, so they could wash their feet; but she, also, was not able to push the door open.

At this, Ch'en Ching-chi started to curse, saying, "That lousy whore! How can she still be asleep at this hour and refuse to get up? I'll go kick her door open and pull the hair off her head."

Ch'ung-hsi managed to look in the window and said, "She has already gotten up and is amusing herself in the room by swinging."

She then went on to say, "It looks as though she has suspended herself like a puppet on a string."⁴⁰

Yüan-hsiao also looked inside for what seemed like half a day before exclaiming, "Master, it's tragic. The mistress is hanging from the rafters over the bed and appears to be dead."

Only then was the young gentleman alarmed enough to get out of bed, along with his singing girl, kick open the door to her room, cut the rope by which she was suspended, lay her down, and attempt to revive her for what seemed like half a day. But there was not a breath left in her. There was no way they could tell when it had happened, but:

Alack and alas,
she had died. Truly:

Who knows to what place her true nature
may have flown;
Unless it is in the flying clouds and the
autumn waters?⁴¹

When Ch'en Ting learned that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was dead, he was afraid of being implicated and went to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to inform Yüeh-niang of what had happened.

When Yüeh-niang learned that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had committed suicide by hanging herself, and that Ch'en Ching-chi had brought a singing girl into his household, her feelings toward him were truly an instance of the adage:

When the ice is three feet thick,
It is not due to one day of cold.

Taking with her seven or eight of her page boys, maidservants, and servants' wives, she made her way straight to his place. When she set eyes on Hsi-men Ta-chieh's corpse, stretched out straight and stiff, she began to scream with rage, grabbed hold of Ch'en Ching-chi, and had her servants beat him until his entire body looked as though it had been gored with an awl in innumerable places. The singing girl Feng Chin-pao tried to hide under the bed, but she too was dragged out and beaten to a stinking pulp. Yüeh-niang had them smash the doors, windows, and walls of the house until they were in a shambles:

All at sevens and eights;⁴²

and also ordered them to ransack her room, and carry away the beds and curtains and other remains of her trousseau. When she arrived home, she invited her brothers, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second, to come and consult with her about the situation.

Wu K'ai said, "Sister, if you don't seize this occasion, when a member of your family has perished, to take the case to court, in the future, when he has trouble making a living, he will come back and demand those trunks from you once again.

If one does not take thought for the future,
One is sure to meet with present misfortune."⁴³

The best thing to do would be to take him to court and have the case settled once and for all, in order to:

Stave off any future catastrophe."

"Brother, what you say is right," responded Yüeh-niang, and they proceeded,

forthwith, to set about drafting an accusation.

The next day, Yüeh-niang went in person to the courtroom in the district yamen and submitted her accusation.

It so happens that the newly appointed district magistrate was named Huo Ta-li. He was a native of Huang-kang district in the Hu-kuang region, a holder of the provincial graduate degree, and a person of upright character. When he learned that the case was a serious one, involving a human fatality, he promptly took his place on the bench and accepted the accusation, which read as follows:



Wu Yüeh-niang Creates a Stir in the District Yamen

The plaintiff, née Wu, is a thirty-three-year-old woman who is the widow of the deceased Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The target of her accusation is her unworthy son-in-law, who has taken advantage of her widowhood by crediting the accusations of a singing girl, and mistreating her daughter so egregiously that she has committed suicide by hanging herself. She importunes you to show her due consideration by undertaking a thorough investigation of this case, and thereby saving her from an early death.

The son-in-law in question, whose name is Ch'en Ching-chi, originally sought refuge by residing for some years in my husband's household because his family was implicated in a legal case. He is given to drinking to excess and becoming violent, is not the sort to abide by his lot, and is wont to take his cut of both outgo and income. For this reason, fearing legal entanglements, I expelled him from the household. I failed to anticipate that this Ch'en Ching-chi would harbor such hatred for me that he would constantly mistreat my daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in his own home, and force her to put up with it for some time. Unpredictably, he also brought a singing girl from Lin-ch'ing named Feng Chin-pao into his home and gave her the master suite in which to reside. Believing whatever she said to provoke him, he resorted to humiliating his wife in every way, beating her, pulling her hair, and kicking her until her entire body was covered with bruises, and she could not bear it any longer, feeling as though she was about to die. This year, on the twenty-third day of the ninth month, during the third watch of the night, he drove his wife to commit suicide by hanging herself. If I had not brought an accusation against him, I fear that this Ch'en Ching-chi, with his fierce and uncontrollable nature, would take advantage of my widowhood, since he has actually threatened to attack me with knife in hand. These circumstances are intolerable.⁴⁴ I therefore implore that you have him arrested and brought before you in order to examine thoroughly the facts behind my daughter's death. If this case is pursued according to the law, potential felons will be deterred, law-abiding citizens will be able to live in

peace, and the dead will be relieved of their sense of injustice. This is the reason why I have brought this accusation before you, as the presiding magistrate of this district, Lord "Azure Heaven," in the hope that you will act upon it.

The district magistrate, Huo Ta-li, in his position on the bench, read the accusation, and observed that Wu Yüeh-niang was attired in mourning garments, was the widow of an official of the fifth rank, and that:

Her countenance was upright and correct, and

Her bearing both nonchalant and elegant.

He then bowed toward her, rose from his seat, and addressed her, saying, "Lady Wu, please stand up. I see that you are the widow of a duly appointed official, and I understand the charges that are enumerated in your accusation. Please return home. There is no need for you to remain here any longer. In the future, it will suffice to have a servant from your household attend the court proceedings. I will issue a warrant for his arrest here and now."

Wu Yüeh-niang promptly bowed to the district magistrate, went outside, and rode home in her sedan chair, delegating Lai-chao to monitor the court proceedings for her.

The magistrate then signed the deposition and deputed two yamen runners with a bench warrant to take Ch'en Ching-chi and the singing girl Feng Chin-pao into custody, along with the neighbors to either side of his residence, and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, who were required to attend the court in person for the scheduled hearing.

Ch'en Ching-chi was at home at the time, engaged in making the funeral arrangements. When he heard that Wu Yüeh-niang had lodged an accusation against him, and that the district yamen had sent runners with a warrant for his arrest, he was so perturbed that:

His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and

His material souls fled to the nine heavens.

Feng Chin-pao, for her part, had been so badly beaten that:

Her entire body was racked with pain,⁴⁵

and she was trying to recuperate by lying in bed. When she heard that runners had come to arrest her:

Her fear was so great,

She lost her bearings.

Ch'en Ching-chi impulsively offered money to the runners in order to treat them to wine and food, but they proceeded to truss him up, together with the singing girl, with a single length of rope, and drag them off to the district yamen, along with their next-door neighbors Fan Kang, who lived to the left, and Sun Chi, who lived to the right, and the head of the mutual security unit, Wang K'uan.

When the district magistrate Huo Ta-li saw that the wanted persons had been duly arrested, he promptly took his place on the bench, while Lai-chao knelt up front, and Ch'en Ching-chi, Feng Chin-pao, and the rest knelt at the foot of the steps.

After rereading the accusation, the district magistrate called Ch'en Ching-chi before him and said, "So you are Ch'en Ching-chi."

He then went on to ask, "Which of you is Feng Chin-pao?"

Feng Chin-pao replied, "I am Feng Chin-pao."

The district magistrate then proceeded to interrogate Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "What a despicable rascal you are. How could you have believed the allegations of that singing girl, and beaten Hsi-men Ta-chieh so severely that she hung herself? What have you got to say in your defense?"

Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him and said, "I beseech Your Honor, Lord 'Azure Heaven,' to investigate the facts in this case. How could I have dared to beat her so severely as to cause her death? It is all because a manager of mine has absconded with the capital I entrusted to him, so that I arrived home in a bad temper and asked her to prepare a meal for me, which she refused to do, that I kicked her a couple of times. Then, in the middle of the night, she:

Hanged herself until dead."

"Since you have taken this singing girl into your household," exclaimed the magistrate, "why should you have imposed upon your wife to prepare a meal for you? It doesn't make any sense. The accusation lodged by the Lady Wu states that it was only because you had beaten her daughter nearly to death that she hung herself. Yet you still refuse to acknowledge it."

"The Lady Wu and I are enemies," protested Ch'en Ching-chi. "That is why she is falsely accusing me. I hope that Your Honor will investigate the facts of the case."

The magistrate was enraged at this and said, "The fact is that her daughter is dead. Who else do you propose to blame for it?"

He then ordered his attendants to take Ch'en Ching-chi down and give him twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo; and he had Feng Chin-pao haled before him, put into the squeezers, and given one hundred strokes on them. When these procedures had been carried out, the runners were ordered to take the culprits off and lock them up.

The next day, he deputed the docket officer Tsang Pu-hsi to take a clerk, along with the head of the mutual security unit, and the next-door neighbors, and proceed to Ch'en Ching-chi's home, where the corpse was brought out and subjected to a formal inquest. It was found that since Hsi-men Ta-chieh's entire body was covered with bruises, and there were rope marks around her throat, it must have been true that Ch'en Ching-chi had kicked and beaten her so severely that she could not bear it any longer and had:

Hanged herself until dead.

Depositions were taken, bond was posted for the witnesses, and the inquest report was duly filled out and submitted upon

their return to the district yamen.

The magistrate was incensed at this and ordered that both Ch'en Ching-chi and Feng Chin-pao should be stripped and subjected to another ten strokes of the bamboo. He then issued a provisional finding that Ch'en Ching-chi, who was judged guilty of the crime of beating his wife to death, should be sentenced to strangulation; and that Feng Chin-pao should be sentenced to a hundred strokes of the bamboo and sent back to serve in the brothel from which she had come.

Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into a panic by this and wrote a note in his prison cell directing Ch'en Ting to scrape together the sum of a hundred taels of silver from the capital of his piece goods store and Hsi-men Ta-chieh's head ornaments, and deliver it secretly to the district magistrate.

That night, the district magistrate altered the deposition so that the provisional judgement read that the defendant had coerced his wife to death, which was only a miscellaneous capital crime, redeemable by five years of penal servitude, or commutation in return for a payment to be used for the transport of charcoal.

When Wu Yüeh-niang learned of this, she knelt in front of the yamen gate and pled for reconsideration of the finding.

The district magistrate responded by calling her before him and saying, "My lady, your daughter was found to have rope marks around her throat, so how can you claim that her husband is guilty of beating her to death? To do so is surely to make a travesty of justice. If you are afraid that he will continue to molest you in the future, I will issue a written injunction prohibiting him from ever visiting your premises again."

He then had Ch'en Ching-chi brought before him and enjoined him, saying, "I have chosen to spare your life today, but it is essential that you should:

Correct your faults and renew yourself.

You must never again make trouble for the household of the Lady Wu. If you are ever brought before me for doing so in the future, I will certainly not spare you. You must immediately purchase a coffin for your wife, see that her corpse is dressed for burial, arrange for a funeral procession, and take care of her burial. When you report back to me, I will then forward the necessary documents to the higher authorities."

Ch'en Ching-chi, having been spared execution, turned over the sum of money required to commute his sentence and returned home, where he had Hsi-men Ta-chieh's corpse encoffined, arranged for her to lie in state until the first weekly commemoration was over, held a scripture recitation in her honor, and had her taken outside the city to be buried. Altogether, he had endured incarceration for half a month, had been compelled to expend a considerable sum of silver, and had been deprived of the singing girl Feng Chin-pao. His belongings had been completely cleaned out, he had been forced to sell his home, he had barely escaped with his life, and he no longer dared to bring charges against his mother-in-law. Truly:

Disaster and good fortune have no gateways,
people bring them on themselves;⁴⁶
One must be aware that when joy reaches its
zenith, it gives birth to sorrow.⁴⁷

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Storms may be stirred up in untroubled waters
within domestic confines;
The value of rectitude and worth of kindness⁴⁸
should never be forgotten.
When the Blue Bridge was inundated by water⁴⁹
a meeting was expected;
But the three lovers have become separated
like Orion and Antares.⁵⁰

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

WANG HSÜAN RELIES ON RIGHTEOUSNESS TO HELP THE POOR; ABBOT JEN IN THE DESIRE FOR PROFIT INVITES DISASTER

Who can say that in our mundane existence
destiny is fickle?
Good luck and bad, misfortune and fortune,
travel hand in hand.¹
It is only due to the lure of romance that
we do ourselves in;
It is not the case that the human heart is
straight as a needle.
One may assume one's official conduct to be
devoid of injustice;
But how can one know what the Way of Heaven
may reveal about it?²
If one learns early that success and failure
are dictated by fate,
One may be able to walk freely even during
the dark of night.

THE STORY GOES that Ch'en Ching-chi, from the time that Hsi-men Ta-chieh committed suicide, Wu Yüeh-niang took him to court, and the singing girl Feng Chin-pao was sent back to the brothel, felt that he had barely escaped with his life. He had been forced to put his house up for sale and had exhausted his capital, had disposed of his wife's head ornaments, and did not even have any furniture left. He also claimed, once again, that Ch'en Ting had been embezzling the money entrusted to him and dismissed him. He did not have enough money to cover his daily expenses, but merely:

Sat at home frittering away his resources.³

He also felt driven to visit Yang the Elder's home to inquire about the whereabouts of his half boatload of goods.

One day, upon arriving at the door of Yang the Elder's home, he called out, "Is Yang the Elder at home or not?"

Who could have anticipated that Yang Kuang-yen, having made off with Ch'en Ching-chi's half boatload of goods and sold them for cash, hid out in one place or another until he learned that Ch'en Ching-chi's wife had committed suicide in her home, that his mother-in-law had lodged an accusation against him in the district yamen, and that he had endured half a month of incarceration. At this, he promptly returned home, but did not venture outside.

When he heard Ch'en Ching-chi calling for him at the door, and demanding to know what had become of the boatload of cargo, he sent his younger brother Yang Erh-feng out to confront him, saying, "You persuaded my elder brother to accompany you on a business trip, and nothing has been heard of him for the last several months. I don't know whether you either threw him into the river, or drowned him in the canal, but you actually have the nerve to come here and demand to know what has become of the boatload of cargo. Is a human life more important, or that cargo of yours more important?"

This Yang Erh-feng had always been a tough customer, both a gambler and a "knockabout." His biceps were:

Bulging lumps of purple flesh;⁴

and his chest was covered with:

Tousled lengths of brown hair.

He was a "bare stick" pure and simple. Striding outside, he took hold of Ch'en Ching-chi with one hand and demanded to know the fate of his elder brother. Ch'en Ching-chi, in a state of panic, tore himself loose and started to run toward home.

Yang Erh-feng responded by picking up a three-cornered shard of tile and scratching open the skin on his skull with it, so that:

His face was covered with flowing blood.⁵

He then raced after Ch'en Ching-chi, yelling, "I'll fuck your mother's cunt! Since when have I ever seen any silver of yours? If you come farting around my place, I'll give you a real drubbing with my fists."

Ch'en Ching-chi fled homeward, as though:

Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,

There was no place for him to hide;

and saw to it that the main gate was:

Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that

Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.
He then permitted Yang Erh-feng to roundly abuse his parents, and try to smash open the gate with a large brick, without allowing so much as the sound of a breath to escape from his nostrils. On top of everything else, he had hardly recovered from a lawsuit and was as nervous as a man who:

Dreams of a length of rope and fears it is a snake,
so all he could do was put up with it. Truly:

Tender plants are afraid of the frost⁶
and frost fears the sun;
One wicked person will be ground down
upon encountering another.⁷

Shortly after this, he managed to sell his spacious house for seventy taels of silver and bought a small dwelling in an obscure alley in which to live. Later on, he was compelled to get rid of one of his two maidservants, selling off Ch'ung-hsi, and retaining Yüan-hsiao to sleep with him at night. In less than half a month after this, he was forced to dispose of his smaller dwelling, and move into a boarding house. On top of this, his servant Ch'en An left him, since he no longer had any business to conduct, and Yüan-hsiao died. As a result, he found himself:

Completely on his own.

His household belongings and furniture had all been sold, leaving him:

As poor as though he had been utterly cleaned out.⁸

It was not long before he did not even have enough money to pay his rent and had to move into a homeless shelter in order to survive.

When the other beggars in the shelter observed that he was the profligate scion of a wealthy family, and that he had a naturally clear-cut appearance, they made room for him to sleep on the heated k'ang and gave him some baked wheat cakes to eat. The patrolman on duty that night happened to come in and offered him a job as a night watchman, sounding his clapper and ringing his bell.

It was already late winter in the twelfth month at the time. There was a heavy snowfall, and the wind was gusting, making it extremely cold. Ch'en Ching-chi, after sounding his clapper for a time, and letting the patrolman go, set out to ring his bell as he patrolled the local streets and alleys. What with the wind and snow, and the ice that had formed on the ground, he was so frozen that all he could do was to:

Hunch his shoulders and tighten his back,

as he trembled and shivered with the cold. At the fifth watch, when the cocks crowed, he came upon an ailing beggar who was lying on the ground beneath a wall and feared that he might be dead. The local neighborhood head told him to keep watch over him, and to light a bundle of straw to keep him warm.

Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been sounding the watches all night long without any rest, promptly proceeded to sprawl out on the ground and go to sleep. Unexpectedly, he started to dream of the:

Glory and luxury, wealth and honor,

he had enjoyed as a resident of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and the fun and games he had indulged in during his affair with P'an Chin-lien. When he awoke from the dream with tears in his eyes, the other beggars asked him what he was crying about.

Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this query by saying, "Brothers, listen to my explanation."

There is a song suite beginning with the tune "Powdery Butterflies" that testifies to this:

During the ninety coldest days of winter,
Snow fills the sky and everything is frozen.
A wild wind shakes Heaven and agitates the Earth,⁹
Chilling me to the point that I am frozen stiff.
My heart is palpitating,
And I find it almost impossible to contend with.
I cannot bear the hunger in my stomach;
I cannot stand the coldness of my body.
Living thus, half exposed to the elements,
It is really cold.
I cannot bear this sense of desolation,
And would like to find a way to death,
But in this flustered state, I cannot
spare my worthless life.

To the tune "Playful Children," Paracoda One

Before I know it, the evening bell sounds;
At the evening bell people begin to rest.
Who is it that is calling for me?
It is the neighborhood head Chang Ch'eng.
He calls for me urgently,
And I respond repeatedly.
"Who is going to sound the watches for me
tonight?" he asks.
It would seem that I am in luck, for once,
For he is giving me some baked wheat cakes.

Paracoda Two

I am grateful to the neighborhood head for his
concern over my exposure,
And giving me the task of sounding the clapper
to mark the watches;
So I am willing to let him use me this way.
As long as he is able to provide me with
something to eat,
What do I care about the poor and humble
nature of this task?
I am willing to engage in shouting the hour
and ringing the bell.

Paracoda Three

When I sit for a while my hands and
feet grow numb;
When I stand for a while my stomach
begins to hurt.
The baked wheat cakes are cold, and I have to swallow
them without any tea to wash them down.
Before the third watch is over, the patrolman on night
duty demands that I light him on his way.
All I can manage is to pay him forty cash,
In order to bribe him into letting me off.

Paracoda Four

At the fifth watch when the cocks crow,
And people begin to walk along the streets,
Going hither and thither, every which way,
I happen to come upon an ailing beggar
lying beneath a wall.
I am told to keep him warm without interruption,
And it is only when I detect a warm breath
from his mouth that I can relax.
I no sooner close my eyes than I have
an intimate dream,
From which I suddenly awake and
weep until dawn.

Paracoda Five

The beggars ask me, "What are you crying about?"
And I tell them the story of my life
from start to finish.
"My ancestors, for generations, have possessed
substantial wealth.
If you were to mention the Ch'en family
that deals in pine resin,
Who would not have been awestruck at the name?
They resided among the gentry;
My grandfather dealt in salt from
the Huai region,
And my father devoted himself to forming
influential connections.
But since he gave birth to me, I have been given to
excessive drinking and fits of violence.

Paracoda Six

First I lost my grandfather, who used
to discipline me,
And later I also lost my father.
My mother doted on me,
And let me do as I pleased.
I became proficient at every kind of
drinking and gambling,
And was familiar with all the taverns
and bawdy houses.
Everything I did was of this kind.
I had no sooner married than my relatives
became implicated in a lawsuit,
And I fled to the home of my in-laws in order to avoid
a heavier risk by seeking a lighter.

Paracoda Seven

While I was residing as a son-in-law in
the Hsi-men household,
I manipulated the breeze and the moonlight,
seducing my mother-in-law.
In financial matters, I trusted someone
who took advantage of me.
I also gambled away quantities of yellow
gold and precious jade,
And provided rice and fuel to cover the
expenses of the brothels.
After having beaten my wife to
the point of death,

She committed suicide, and her family
brought a suit against me.
I had to expend a great deal of money,
Before contriving to escape with my life.

Paracoda Eight

I sold my spacious home,
And bought a small dwelling;
Moved into a boarding house,
But could no longer afford it.
I took no thought for the future, or how
to preserve what I had left.
Out of hunger, cold, and despair, my
concubine fell ill,
And eventually died in my quarters,
unable to stay alive.
Everything I possessed was utterly
cleaned out,
But I had not lost my taste
for wine and meat,
And had no alternative but to sell off
my ancestral grave sites.

Paracoda Nine

I cannot carry the light,
Or support the heavy;¹⁰
Work as a laborer,
Or engage in farming.
Rather than undertaking anything, I am
reluctant to make a move.
When at leisure with nothing to do,
all I hanker after is food;
When I fall asleep, I do not get up
until the sun is already red.
My doglike nature is as adamant
as steel.
I have grievously wronged all of my ten
relatives and nine kinsmen.¹¹
So should I freeze or starve to death, who
will bother to care about me?

Paracoda Ten

My landlord is unrelenting in
demanding my rent,
And does not think I will be
able to stay.
His earthenware pots and broken bowls
are utterly useless;
And he has attempted repeatedly to
drive me out the door.
My frozen bones and drenched flesh
are without a refuge,
And I have felt compelled to commit
myself to a homeless shelter.
If only my luck should ever happen to
change for the better,
I would then never be able to forget the
kindness of my benefactor.

For ages I have endured privation and pain
at the death of my wife;
I have no clothes on my back¹² and my mouth
is without nourishment.
My horse is dead, my slaves have fled, and
my home has been sold;
All by myself,¹³ I have been forced to move
into unknown territory.
In the morning, I frequent the marketplace
begging for leftovers;
At night, I sleep in the open, up against
the dilapidated walls.
Since there is no other course open to me
in the days to come;
I must live in a homeless shelter and beat
the watchman's clapper."

To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi was reduced to spending his nights in the homeless shelter, and his days begging for food on the streets.

It so happens that inside the city wall of Ch'ing-ho district there lived an elderly gentleman named Wang Hsüan, whose courtesy name was T'ing-yung. He was more than sixty years old:

His family holdings were substantial;¹⁴
he possessed a charitable disposition; and he was:

Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth.

He had a wide circle of acquaintances, derived pleasure from his philanthropy, and devoted himself to:

Aiding the poor and rescuing the wretched;¹⁵

Enjoying goodness and respecting the gods.

His two sons had both:

Set up households and established themselves.

His eldest son was named Wang Ch'ien and had inherited the office of battalion commander of the local Horse Pasturage Battalion of the Court of the Imperial Stud. His second son was named Wang Chen and was currently a government student in the prefectural school. The old gentleman had hired a manager and set up a pawnshop on the street-front of his residence. Every day, what with:

His elegant clothing and ample diet,¹⁶

His leisure and lack of obligations,

he was free to:

Attend scripture readings in Buddhist temples,

Or discourse on the Way in Taoist sanctuaries.

When he had nothing else to do, he would situate himself at the gate of his residence and dispense medicine to the sick, or finger his rosary and recite the Buddha's name. Because there were two apricot trees in his rear garden, he called himself the Layman of the Apricot Hermitage.



Wang Hsüan Relies on Righteousness to Help the Poor

One day, he was standing at his gate wearing a double-layered scholar's cap on his head, and a patchwork Taoist gown on his body, when Ch'en Ching-chi happened to pass by and proceeded to go down on his knees and kowtow to him.

Wang Hsüan hastily bowed to him in return, saying, "Brother, who are you? Old and decrepit as I am, my vision is too blurred to recognize you."

Ch'en Ching-chi, trembling and shivering, stood to one side and said, "I would not deceive you, venerable sir. I am the son of Ch'en Hung, the dealer in pine resin."

The old gentleman pondered this for what seemed like half a day before saying, "So you are the respected son of Ch'en Hung are you?"

Noticing that:

His clothing looked disheveled, and

His countenance seemed haggard,¹⁷

he said, "My worthy nephew, how have you been reduced to such a state?"

He then went on to ask, "Are your father and mother well?"

"My father passed away in the Eastern Capital," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "and my mother is also dead."

"I have heard that you were living in your father-in-law's household," said Wang Hsüan.

"My father-in-law is dead," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and my mother-in-law expelled me from the household. When her

daughter died, she lodged an accusation against me, and I was forced to endure a lawsuit. I have had to sell our home and have been robbed of what capital I possessed. As a result, I have been idle for some time, and unable to make a living."

"My worthy nephew," said Wang Hsüan, "where are you living at present?"

Ch'en Ching-chi hesitated for what seemed like half a day before saying, "I will not deceive you, venerable sir. The case is thus and so."

"How sad, worthy nephew," said Wang Hsüan. "So you have been forced to beg for your sustenance. I recall that your family was originally one of considerable substance. At the time when I was acquainted with your father, worthy nephew, you were still young, your hair was done up in a topknot, and you were going to school. Since then, you have fallen into such a state. How regrettable! How regrettable! Are you without any relatives who might be able to help you out?"

"That is the case," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "My maternal uncle Chang Kuan has not seen fit to visit me for some time, so I would not feel comfortable approaching him."

After questioning him for some time, the old gentleman ushered Ch'en Ching-chi into the parlor of his dwelling, ordered a page boy to set up a table and lay out some refreshments, and then urged his guest to eat his fill.

When he noticed how thinly clad he was, he got out a Taoist gown of black wool, a felt cap, a pair of felt stockings, and a pair of woollen shoes; weighed out a tael's worth of silver, along with five hundred copper cash; and gave them all to him, saying, "Worthy nephew, these clothes, and shoes and stockings, are for you to wear. These copper cash are for your living expenses, and ought to enable you to rent half a room to live in. This tael of silver can be used to start a little business of some kind, in order to feed you, and supply your daily expenses. That would be better than living in a homeless shelter, where you will have no chance of improving yourself. When your monthly rent becomes due, you can come to see me, and I will take care of it for you."

Ch'en Ching-chi got down on the floor and kowtowed to him in gratitude, saying, "Your humble nephew understands."

So saying, he took his leave but neither looked for a room to rent nor tried to start a business. Day by day, he spent the five hundred copper cash in taverns and noodle shops, until they were all gone. And as for the tael of silver, he had it melted down and compounded with baser metals and then tried to peddle it in the streets but was arrested by the police, accused of petty larceny, taken to the office of the local ward adjutant, and subjected to the squeezers and a beating. As a consequence, he was not only utterly wiped out, but also left with a buttocks completely covered with welts. In less than two days, he was compelled to pawn his woollen robe and stockings in exchange for something to eat and was reduced, as before, to begging in the streets.

One day, he happened once more to pass by the gate of Wang Hsüan's residence. Wang Hsüan, who was standing there at the time, looked on as Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him and noticed that he was no longer wearing the robe and stockings he had given him, but had nothing but the felt cap on his head, that the feet in his sandals were bare, and that he appeared to be not only chilled but:

Both impoverished and emaciated.

The old gentleman addressed him, saying, "Master Ch'en, how is your business going? I imagine your rent must be due, and you have come here to get it from me."

Ch'en Ching-chi found himself to be:

At a loss for words,

for what seemed like half a day; and it was only after he had been asked time and time again that he replied, saying, "Thus and so, I have been completely wiped out."

"Ai-ya! Worthy nephew," the old gentleman responded, "that is no way to support yourself. Since:

You cannot lift the light,

Or support the heavy,

engaging in some business, however insignificant, is better than having to beg for your food. That way you can avoid becoming a laughingstock to others, and bringing shame on the reputation of your ancestors. Why don't you do as I suggest?"

So saying, he once again ushered him inside and had his page boy An-t'ung provide him with enough food to eat his fill.

He also gave him a pair of trousers, a white cotton shirt, a pair of foot bindings, a string of copper cash, and a peck of rice and said, "Take these things with you, and be sure to start up a small business of some kind. You can sell kindling and charcoal, or beans and melon seeds, in order to make a living for yourself, which would be better than having to beg for your food this way."

Although Ch'en Ching-chi gave his verbal consent to these suggestions, took the money and rice in hand, and left the old gentleman's residence, it did not take more than a few days for him to consume it all, sharing the ready-cooked meat and noodles with his fellow beggars in the homeless shelter. He also gambled away the white cotton shirt and the trousers he had been given.

During the first month of the new year, he was once again out walking the streets, while wrapping his arms around his shoulders to keep warm. Although he was somewhat embarrassed at the prospect of seeing the old gentleman again, he went up to the wall under the gable of the old gentleman's gatehouse and stood there warming himself in the sun. The old gentleman regarded him with a sardonic eye but did not speak to him. Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded:

Hesitantly and punctiliously,

to make his way forward, after which, he knelt down on the ground and kowtowed before him.

When the old gentleman saw that he looked just as destitute as before, he said to him, "Worthy nephew, this is not a viable plan for the future.

One's appetites are as deep as the ocean;
The days and months fly by like shuttles.¹⁸

How can one ever hope to fill up a bottomless pit? Come inside. I have something to say to you. There is a place that would not only provide you with undisturbed leisure, but also with a haven in which to stay. My only fear is that you may not consent to go there."

Ch'en Ching-chi knelt down and wept, saying, "If my venerable uncle should see fit to take pity on me, no matter where this place may be, if it will only accommodate me, I will consent to go there."

Wang Hsüan responded, saying, "The place in question is not far from our city. On the dock at Lin-ch'ing there is a Yen-kung Temple, a Taoist establishment dedicated to the worship of the river god Yen-kung.¹⁹ That is:

A location teeming with fish and rice,²⁰
where river boats congregate in large numbers. The temple is amply supplied with money and provisions, and endowed with a secluded and elegant atmosphere. Abbot Jen, the head priest of the temple, is an old acquaintance of mine, and he has two or three disciples and acolytes serving under him. I propose to provide appropriate gifts and escort you there in order for you to become a disciple of his and enter the priesthood. If you were to study the sacred texts, learn to perform religious music, and thus be able to confer blessings upon people, it would be a good thing."

"If my venerable uncle is willing to help me out that way," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "that would really be wonderful."

"In that case," said Wang Hsüan, "you can go now. Tomorrow is an auspicious day. If you come here early in the morning, I will escort you there."

After Ch'en Ching-chi had gone, Wang Hsüan promptly summoned a tailor and had him make up two sets of Taoist garments, a Taoist cap, and shoes and stockings for him.

The next day, Ch'en Ching-chi showed up as he had promised, and Wang Hsüan had him take a bath in an empty room, comb his hair, put on the Taoist cap, change into a new jacket and new trousers, don a black silk Taoist robe, and slip into felt stockings and a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes. He also prepared four trays of preserved fruit, a jug of wine, and a bolt of fabric, and sealed up five taels of silver. He then mounted his horse, hired a donkey for Ch'en Ching-chi to ride, and, with his page boys An-t'ung and Hsi-t'ung following them, and two carriers bearing the gift boxes, set out for the Yen-kung Temple on the dock in Lin-ch'ing. It was only a day's journey of seventy li. By the time they arrived at the Yen-kung Temple, it had begun to grow late. Behold:

The image of the sun is about to sink;
The luxuriant shade has already fallen.
The sunset clouds, reflected in the water,
dispense their red glow;²¹
The setting sun, as it crosses the hills,
engenders bluish mists.
Amid the shadows of the verdant willows,²²
One hears the birds returning to the woods.
In the villages with their red apricots,
One sees the cattle herding into the fold.²³

Truly:

On the banks of the streams fishermen
head into the woods;
On the meadows the herd boys ride home
astride their calves.²⁴

Upon coming to the Lin-ch'ing dock, Wang Hsüan crossed the great bridge over the Kuang-chi lock, gazed at the innumerable boats that were moored on the canal, and arrived in front of the Yen-kung Temple, where he dismounted and prepared to go inside. Behold:

The verdant pines are luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses are dense.
To either side there are peaked red walls,
Upon the facade are three vermilion gates.

Truly, it was an imposing temple. Behold:

The gate of the temple soars aloft,
Its halls and porticos rise boldly.
Displayed on high is an imperial plaque
in letters of gold;
And a picture of officials, leaving and
entering the court.²⁵
The thirty-foot-wide great hall,²⁶
Contains effigies of the twelve Dragon Kings;
The two colonnades that flank it,

Have images of myriads of aquatic creatures.
Flagstaffs stretch up toward the heavens;
The words on the flags catching the wind.
In all four quarters and the eight directions,²⁷
The spring and autumn sacrifices are
 offered on schedule;
When rains are seasonable and winds favorable,
The common people perform sacrifices
 along the waterways.
The efficacy of a myriad years of burning incense²⁸
 has been acknowledged;
In the four quarters both officials and commoners
 depend on it for peace.

The young servants beneath the gate of the temple had spotted the arrival of the visitors and went inside to report it to the abbot's quarters. Abbot Jen promptly adjusted his clothing and came out to receive them. Wang Hsüan directed Ch'en Ching-chi and the bearers of the gifts to wait outside.

In no time at all, Abbot Jen ushered Wang Hsüan into the reception hall of his quarters, known as the Pine Crane Studio, where he greeted him, saying, "Venerable layman, why has it been so long since you last came to my humble temple? What good fortune has led you to deign to visit me today?"

"It is only because I have been tied up with mundane matters at home," responded Wang Hsüan, "that I have been remiss in paying you a visit for so long."

After exchanging the customary amenities, they sat down in the positions of host and guest, and a young servant presented them with a serving of tea.

When they had finished their tea, Abbot Jen said, "Venerable layman, it is already late in the day, and you might as well stay overnight."

So saying, he ordered a servant to take his visitor's horse back to the stable in the rear and see that it was fed and housed for the night.

Wang Hsüan then said:

 "If I did not have a reason to do so, I would not
 visit the Hall of the Three Treasures.

It is because I have a favor to ask of you that I have come to pay you this visit. But I don't know whether or not you will agree to it."

"Venerable layman," responded Abbot Jen, "what would you like me to do? Just tell me what it is. I would not presume to reject your command."

"At present," said Wang Hsüan, "there is a young man named Ch'en Ching-chi, who is the son of an old friend of mine. He is just twenty-three years old, is clean-cut by nature, and is as clever as can be. The only problem is that his parents passed away too early so that he has not been properly brought up. His family was quite affluent, so he is not a person from an undistinguished background, and he came into a substantial inheritance, but lost everything as the result of a lawsuit and has been reduced to homeless destitution. Out of regard for my former friendship with his father, I would like to introduce him into your prestigious temple to become a disciple of yours. But I don't know what you may think of this proposal."

"Venerable layman," replied Abbot Jen, "whatever you suggest, I would not venture to oppose. But it has been my misfortune that, though I already have two or three disciples on hand, they are not very intelligent, and none of them are likely to succeed. This has been a source of constant annoyance for me. I wonder whether this young man is a straightforward person or not?"

"As for this young man," responded Wang Hsüan, "I would not deceive your reverence, but you don't need to worry; he is always serious and content to abide by his lot. He possesses a timorous disposition and is straightforward about everything. He would make a good disciple."

"When do you propose to bring him here?" asked Abbot Jen.

"He is waiting outside the temple gate right now," responded Wang Hsüan.

"I have also brought some paltry gifts. I humbly beseech you to accept them with a smile."

This flustered Abbot Jen into asking, "Venerable layman, why did you not say so before?"

He then went on to say, "Invite him to come in."

Thereupon, the bearers proceeded to carry in the gifts, and Abbot Jen saw that the card accompanying them read, "Respectfully presented with a bow by your pupil Wang Hsüan: a bolt of coarse satin, a jug of insipid wine, a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two boxes of fruits, and five taels of white gold."

Abbot Jen promptly bowed in gratitude, saying, "Venerable layman, what need was there for you to put yourself to the trouble of presenting me with all these lavish gifts? You put me in a position in which it would be:

 Discourteous to refuse, and
 Embarrassing to accept."

Whom should he see at this juncture but Ch'en Ching-chi, who wore a gilt-ridged Taoist cap on his head, a black silk Taoist robe on his body, a pair of shoes with cloud-patterned toes and white socks, and a silk belt around his waist. He

had:

Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes;
His teeth were white and his lips were red, and
His face looked as though it were powdered.

On coming in, he went up to Abbot Jen, knelt down on the floor, and proceeded to perform:

Four brace makes eight kowtows.

Abbot Jen asked him, "How old are you?"

"I was born in the year of the horse," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so next spring I will be twenty-three years old."

Upon seeing that he did indeed seem to be clever, Abbot Jen bestowed a Taoist appellation on him, so that he became known as Ch'en Tsung-mei.

It so happens that Abbot Jen already had two disciples at his command. The senior disciple was called Chin Tsung-ming, and the junior disciple was called Hsü Tsung-shun. So Ch'en Ching-chi took his place with them and was known by the appellation Ch'en Tsung-mei.

Abbot Jen called the other disciples out, and they exchanged greetings, after which he formally accepted the gifts he had been offered. A young servant then lit the lanterns, set up a table, and laid out the foodstuff, after which they fell to drinking wine. The surface of the table was covered with cups and platters, along with an assortment of foods including chicken, pig's trotters, goose, duck, fish, shrimp, and the like.

Wang Hsüan did not drink very much, although the abbot and his disciples took turns urging him to do so.

After a while, he said:

"I cannot handle the effects of the wine,"

excused himself, and went to his room, where a bed had been set up for him, and went to sleep for the night.

Early the next morning, a young servant brought water for him to wash his face in, and by the time he had combed his hair and performed his ablutions, Abbot Jen came in to offer him a serving of tea. Before long, breakfast was laid out, and they drank another two rounds of wine together.

After his horse had been fed, and the bearers had been paid for their efforts, Wang Hsüan prepared to make his departure and called Ch'en Ching-chi over in order to instruct him, saying, "While here, you must devote yourself to mastering the scriptures, and obey your master's instructions. I will come visit you from time to time and will see that you are supplied with new clothing and footwear at the change of seasons."

He also turned to Abbot Jen and said, "If he fails to obey your instructions, discipline him as you see fit. I will certainly not endeavor to defend his shortcomings."

He also admonished Ch'en Ching-chi in private, saying, "After I am gone,

I want you to:

Cleanse your heart and reform your ways.

You must devote yourself to the task at hand. If you fail once again to live up to my expectations, I will concern myself with you no more in the future."

Ch'en Ching-chi assented, saying, "Your son understands."

Wang Hsüan thereupon said farewell to Abbot Jen, went outside, mounted his horse, left the Yen-kung Temple, and set off for home.

From this time on, Ch'en Ching-chi led the life of a Taoist novice in the Yen-kung Temple. He observed that Abbot Jen:

Was elderly with a ruddy nose;
Possessed an imposing stature;
Had a clear, resounding voice,²⁹
And fully bearded countenance;
Was glib and devoted to drink;

and concerned himself only with:

Welcoming guests and seeing off visitors.

All other matters, both great and small, were left in the hands of his senior disciple Chin Tsung-ming.

At that time, the government had just completed the necessary repair work and reopened the Grand Canal. At Lin-ch'ing two locks had been constructed to control the water where the canal met the Wei River. Crew members from both government and private boats on the canal, on reaching the locks would come to the Yen-kung Temple, in order to seek the protection of the spirits, to fulfill their vows, to seek their fortunes by interpreting the hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*, or casting divining blocks.³⁰ There were also those who came in order to perform good deeds, by donating money and rice, contributing incense, lamp oil, paper money, and candles, or furnishing pine resin and rush mats.

Abbot Jen was in the habit of taking the surplus supplies from the temple treasury and assigning them to his disciples with which to set up shop on the dock, while keeping the profits from these transactions for himself. His senior disciple Chin Tsung-ming was also not one to be content with his lot. He was about thirty years old, was in the habit of maintaining singing girls from the local brothels as his mistresses, and was:

A libertine devoted to wine and sex.³¹

He also had two innocent young novices at his disposal, with whom he was accustomed to sleep at night, but as time passed he had become tired of them. When he encountered Ch'en Ching-chi and observed that:

His teeth were white and his lips were red,

His face looked as though it were powdered;
that he was:

Clean-cut, unusual, and;
Didn't miss a wink,

he arranged for them to share the same room. In the evening, he would ply him with drink for half the night until he was utterly soused, and then go to sleep on the same bed with him. At first, they slept head to foot and foot to head, but he objected to the smell of Ch'en Ching-chi's feet and had him come share the same pillow with him. But before they had been asleep very long, he complained about Ch'en Ching-chi's breath, and had him turn over so that his bottom ended up against his belly. Ch'en Ching-chi pretended to be asleep and paid no attention to him, but he went on to manipulate his organ until it rose up as hard and straight as a stick, rubbed some saliva on the head of his glans, and proceeded to thrust it into his anus. It so happens that when Ch'en Ching-chi had been residing in the homeless shelter, the beggar boss Hou Lin, whose nickname was Flying Demon, had sodomized him, so that his anus was already enlarged. As a result, Chin Tsung-ming's organ had penetrated him before he knew it.



Chin Tsung-ming Opts to Sodomize a Youthful Acolyte

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:
From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,
“This rascal is asking for it; he is trying to take such egregious advantage of me. Who does he take me for? I’ll give him something to savor in return and thereby make him pay for his fun.”

Ch’en Ching-chi, thereupon, made a show of crying out in protest, and Chin Tsung-ming, fearing that Abbot Jen would hear him, promptly put his hand over his mouth, saying, “Good brother, be quiet. Whatever you demand from me, I will agree to.”

“If you want to have a fling with me,” responded Ch’en Ching-chi, “and don’t want me to reveal it, you’ll have to agree to three conditions.”

“My brother,” responded Chin Tsung-ming, “not to mention three conditions; even if you impose ten conditions, I’ll agree to them all.”

“The first condition,” said Ch’en Ching-chi, “is that if you want to carry on with me, you will no longer sleep with those other two novices. The second condition is that I be given control over the keys to all the doors on the premises, both large and small. The third condition is that you will not raise objections to my going anywhere I want. If you agree to all these conditions, I will let you do what you wish with me.”

“That’s no problem,” said Chin Tsung-ming. “I’ll agree to everything.”

That night the two of them proceeded to:

Tumble and toss this way and that,³²

for fully half the night. Ch’en Ching-chi had been a habitu   of the world of breeze and moonlight ever since his youth, so there wasn’t much he didn’t know about anything. On this occasion, what with:

Vows under the covers to be as faithful as the hills,

Promises by the pillowside to be as true as the seas;

Obscene noises and lascivious words,

Sucking at this and toying with that;

he managed to please Chin Tsung-ming to the point that:

His delight knew no bounds.

The next day, as promised, he turned over the keys to Ch’en Ching-chi, and he no longer spent the night with the other two novices, but slept on the same bed with him every day.

As time passed:

One day became two,

Two days became three.

One day, it so happened that Abbot Jen and his two disciples were scheduled to go to someone’s home to pray for blessings and perform good works, and the abbot chose to leave Ch’en Ching-chi behind to look after the temple as a crafty means of testing his integrity.

Abbot Jen thought to himself, “The venerable layman Wang Hs  an said that he was conscientious, and I would like to see whether he is conscientious or not.”

As he was about to go out the gate, he instructed him, saying, “You stay here and look after that flock of chickens I am raising in the backyard. They are actually phoenixes, and, before long, when I have:

Achieved merit and fulfilled my tasks,³³

I hope to ascend to Heaven upon one of them, and pay court to the Jade Emperor. Those crocks that are secreted in one of the rooms contain liquid poison. If any one of my disciples should commit a serious offense, I would not beat him, but merely give him a dose of this liquid poison to drink, which would cause him to pass away on the spot. You must conscientiously look after everything, and when I return after the midday repast I will bring you something to eat.”

When he had finished speaking, the abbot and his disciples left the temple.

Ch’en Ching-chi closed the door behind them and laughed to himself, saying, “How could he think that I would not see through these things; claiming that those crocks of glutinous millet wine are actually liquid poison, and that those few chickens in the backyard are phoenixes, on which he hopes to mount to Heaven?”

Thereupon, he proceeded to kill one of the fattest chickens, pluck it clean, and cook it in a pot; and then used a basin to dip up some of the wine and heat it on the fire. After which, pulling apart the limbs of the chicken with his hands, and dipping the flesh into a mixture of garlic and vinegar, he feasted until he might well have ejaculated:

“Is it not delightful?”

As he ate, he uttered four lines to describe his pleasure:

With a brass basin I scoop up

the clear wine,

Like mist veiling the bright moon;

I dip the slow-cooked chicken

in garlic sauce,

Like wind sweeping away the clouds.

While he was eating, he heard his master Abbot Jen calling for him outside the gate, upon which, he hastily cleared away the utensils and went out to open the door for him.

Abbot Jen noticed that his face was red and asked him what had happened, but Ch’en Ching-chi merely hung his head in silence.

“Why don’t you speak?” Abbot Jen asked him.

“I will explain the situation to you, master,” said Ch’en Ching-chi. “After you left, one of those phoenixes in the backyard managed to fly away somehow, which left me in a state of panic. I climbed up onto the roof to look for it for what seemed like half a day, but could not find it. Fearing that when you came back you would give me a beating, I thought of slitting my throat with a knife but was afraid of the pain it would cause. I thought of hanging myself but was afraid the rope might break and I would fall down. I thought of jumping into a well but was afraid the mouth might be too small and would catch me by the neck. Unable to think of any viable alternative, I ended up by dipping out two bowls worth of the liquid poison in those crocks of yours and drinking them down.”

“How did you feel after drinking them?” Abbot Jen asked.

“Since drinking them down,” said Ch’en Ching-chi, “for what seems like half a day, I have felt;

Neither dead nor alive,
just as though I were drunk.”

On hearing this explanation, Abbot Jen and his two disciples laughed to themselves, saying, “He turns out to be straightforward after all.”

Consequently, Abbot Jen put up the money to buy an ordination certificate for him, so that from then on, as an ordained Taoist monk, he was free to do as he pleased. Truly:

You may peddle a load of truths for three days
without making a sale;
While in a single day three loads of falsehoods
may actually sell out.

As a result, Ch’en Ching-chi frequently took money in hand and went out to enjoy himself on the dock.

While there, he ran into a “cribber” from the licensed quarter named Ch’en the Third, who told him, “The madam of Feng Chin-pao’s establishment has died, and she has been sold to the Cheng Family Brothel, where she is known as Cheng Chin-pao. At present she is doing business in a large tavern on the dock. Why don’t you go take a look at her?”

As for the young scamp:

His old feelings for her had not changed.

Taking some silver in hand, he allowed Ch’en the Third to conduct him straight to the tavern. Nothing might have happened if he had not gone there, but since he did go, it was a case of:

Five hundred years ago, these lovers
were fated to meet;
After their affair of the past, they
are to be reunited.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In this life one must not begrudge
raiment of golden threads;
In this life one should not betray
the years of one’s youth.³⁴
If you see flowers you would like to
pluck, just pluck them;
Don’t wait till the flowers fall to
pluck the bare branches.³⁵

It so happens that this tavern was the most prominent tavern in Lin-ch’ing and was called the Hsieh Family Tavern. It had more than a hundred rooms and was surrounded with green balustrades. It backed on a hill, overlooked the Grand Canal, and was known for:

The liveliness of the teeming crowds, and
The coming and going of boat traffic.
What did this magnificent tavern look like?
Sculpted eaves reflect the sunlight;
Painted rafters fly into the clouds.
Green balustrades connect beneath
the balcony windows;
Kingfisher blinds are rolled high
above the casements.
Those blowing pipes and playing flutes,
Are all noble scions or royal princelings;
Those holding cups and raising beakers,³⁶
Are bands of courtesans and dancing girls.³⁷
Barely visible to drunken eyes,
Soaring into azure Heaven, are ten thousand
mountainous clouds;³⁸
Stimulating to poetic thoughts,

Like tumbling drifts of snow, are the waves
of mist-bound water.
By the white duckweed crossing,³⁹
One hears trawlers sounding their clappers;
By the red smartweed beachhead,⁴⁰
One hears fishermen beating their bulwarks.
By the tavern side, on the verdant willows,
the wild birds are crowing;
Before the gate, amidst the green poplars,
piebald steeds are tethered.⁴¹

Ch'en the Third led Ch'en Ching-chi to an upper floor of the tavern, and into a room, furnished with an ebony table and red lacquered benches, where they sat down together. He then summoned a waiter to wipe off the table, supply cups and chopsticks, and lay out a serving of first-class wine and delicacies, after which he sent him downstairs to summon the powdered face for him. Before long, they heard footsteps on the stairs, and Feng Chin-pao came in, holding a little gong in her hand. Upon seeing Ch'en Ching-chi, she paid him a respectful obeisance.

As the saying goes:

When one lover meets another,
Before they know it, all of a sudden, they will
shed two streams of tears.⁴²

Truly:

The sounds of a few amorous words are like
warbling orioles;
Tears drop like a strand of pearls falling
off their string.⁴³

Ch'en Ching-chi no sooner caught sight of her than he pulled her aside to sit down with him and asked, "Sister, where have you been all this time since I saw you last?"

Feng Chin-pao dried her tears and said, "After I was released from the district yamen, it was not long before my mother, having suffered from shock, fell ill and died. I was subsequently sold into Auntie Cheng the Fifth's establishment as a powdered face. In recent days, however, patrons have been few, and I have been forced to go out onto the Lin-ch'ing dock to seek for customers among the drinkers in the tavern. The other day, I learned from Ch'en the Third that you had come here and opened a money-changing shop. I have been wanting to see you but did not anticipate that you would turn up for a drink in the tavern today, so that I would be able to run into you. I have been longing to death for you."

So saying, she started to weep all over again.

Ch'en Ching-chi pulled a handkerchief out of his sleeve and proceeded to wipe away her tears with it, saying, "My sister, you can stop worrying. I am all right again. After emerging from that lawsuit, and losing all my property, I have sought refuge in the Yen-kung Temple, where I have taken orders as a Taoist monk. My master Abbot Jen has entrusted me with major responsibilities, and I will be able to come see you frequently in the future."

He then went on to ask, "Where are you residing now?"

"I am living just west of the bridge here," responded Feng Chin-pao, "in the place called My Own Tavern operated by Liu the Second. It has over a hundred rooms, and unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls from all over, including the licensed quarter, reside there. During the day, they come out to frequent the various taverns in search of business."

As they talked, the two of them moved closer to each other as they continued drinking. Ch'en the Third went to heat more wine and then came back upstairs with a balloon guitar in hand. Feng Chin-pao then proceeded to play her musical instrument and sing a song to the tune "The Whole Realm Rejoices" in order to entertain Ch'en Ching-chi as he drank his wine.

Tears fall in two streams;
Two streams of tears fall.

Three cups of parting wine;⁴⁴

Parting wine in three cups.

The male and female phoenixes are disunited;

Disunited are the male and female phoenixes.

Behind the mountain ridge the setting sun

is gradually sinking;

Gradually sinking behind the mountain ridge

is the setting sun.

The sky is growing dim and the earth dark.⁴⁵

Dillydallying, they are reluctant to part;

Reluctant to part, they are dillydallying.⁴⁶

When the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, they could not help taking a small room and:

Doffing their clothes for the game of clouds and rain.

Ch'en Ching-chi had not had access to a woman recently and had thirsted for such an opportunity for some time. On reencountering Feng Chin-pao, he:

Exhausted himself to please her;

Addicted to the clouds and rain,
He was reluctant to call a halt.

Behold:

One of them stirs his jade arms into motion;
The other gently wriggles her willowy waist.
His pair of pupils spouts fire;⁴⁷
Her starry eyes look dissolute.
One of them, his chest soaked with sweat,
Strives mightily to win two or three bouts.
One of them, emitting cosmetic fragrance,
Moans with satisfaction thousands of times.
The engagement is protracted,
As the "divine turtle" penetrates deeply
 it is harder than ever;
As the conflict is prolonged,
The gush of his "silvery stream" spurts
 well into her interior.
Although he had often challenged singing
 girls in furious battles,
None of them had ever risen to the level
 of this one's intensity.

It was not long before their engagement was over, and they put their clothes back on. Ch'en Ching-chi saw that it was getting late and took his leave of Feng Chin-pao, after rewarding her with a tael of silver, and giving Ch'en the Third three hundred copper cash.

As he was leaving, he said to Feng Chin-pao, "Sister, I plan to come and see you as often as possible, and we might as well meet here in the future. If you should hanker after me, just send Ch'en the Third to summon me."

So saying, he went downstairs and paid Hsieh the Third, the manager of the tavern, three candareens of silver for the wine they had consumed, after which he returned to the temple. Feng Chin-pao accompanied him as far as the bridge before coming back. Truly:

People may wear out their eyes in
 the desire for money;
Or ravage their faces with tears
 for the sake of lucre.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

LIU THE SECOND DRUNKENLY BEATS CH'EN CHING-CHI; SUN HSÜEH-O BECOMES A TROLLOP IN MY OWN TAVERN

When flowers bloom they do not disdain
the plots of the poor;
The moon shines on mountains and rivers
so that all are bright.
In this world the heart of man alone
remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven
show him favor.
The foolish, the deaf, and the dumb
everywhere prosper;
While the clever and the intelligent
suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth
determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled
by fate rather than man.¹

THE STORY GOES that, from the time that Ch'en the Third led Ch'en Ching-chi to the Hsieh Family Tavern where he met with Feng Chin-pao, the two of them resumed their former affair. From then on, no three days passed by without their getting together. If Ch'en Ching-chi happened to be tied up at the temple and failed to show up, Feng Chin-pao would send Ch'en the Third to deliver a gift, or a love letter, and request that he come, and he would reward her with five mace or a tael of silver. Later on, he also undertook to supply her with fuel and rice, and to pay her rent. When he returned to the temple, his face was often red. When Abbot Jen asked him where he had been drinking, Ch'en Ching-chi would tell him that he had been enjoying three cups of wine with the manager of the rice shop, in order to reward him for his labors. His fellow disciple Chin Tsung-ming would also cover up for him and continued, needless to say, to have his fun with him in the evenings. As the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he managed to pilfer nearly half of the assets in Abbot Jen's strongbox without his being aware of it.

One day, it was one of those occasions when:

Something was destined to happen.

Liu the Second, the proprietor of My Own Tavern, who was known as the Turf-protecting Tiger, was the brother-in-law of Chang Sheng, a trusted servant in the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command. He specialized in operating brothels on the Lin-ch'ing dock:

Relying on his power to oppress the weak,²

and acting as a loan shark. He would lend money to the singing girls in the brothels at thirty percent interest, and if they failed to pay up when due, he would renegotiate the contract, adding the unpaid interest to the original amount of the loan, and charging interest on the interest. He was:

Given to drinking to excess and becoming violent,

so people did not dare to cross him. He was:

A foreman among the beaters of trollops;

A leader among the abusers of drunkards.³

Upon seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi, though still a white-faced youngster, was a disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple and was maintaining the powdered face Cheng Chin-pao as his mistress in Hsieh the Third's tavern, he drank himself into a stupor, proceeded to clench his bowl-shaped fists, and headed for the Hsieh Family Tavern, demanding to know the whereabouts of Cheng Chin-pao.

This threw Hsieh the Third into such consternation that he bowed hastily in response and said, "Uncle Liu the Second, she is residing in room number two on the second floor."

Liu the Second then proceeded, with giant strides, to ascend the steps. Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao were in the room at the time, drinking together, and enjoying each others' company. They had closed the door to the room and left the blind hanging outside.

Liu the Second tore down the blind with his hands and called out in a loud voice, demanding that Cheng Chin-pao should come out. This flustered Ch'en Ching-chi to such an extent that he was barely able to breathe through his nostrils.

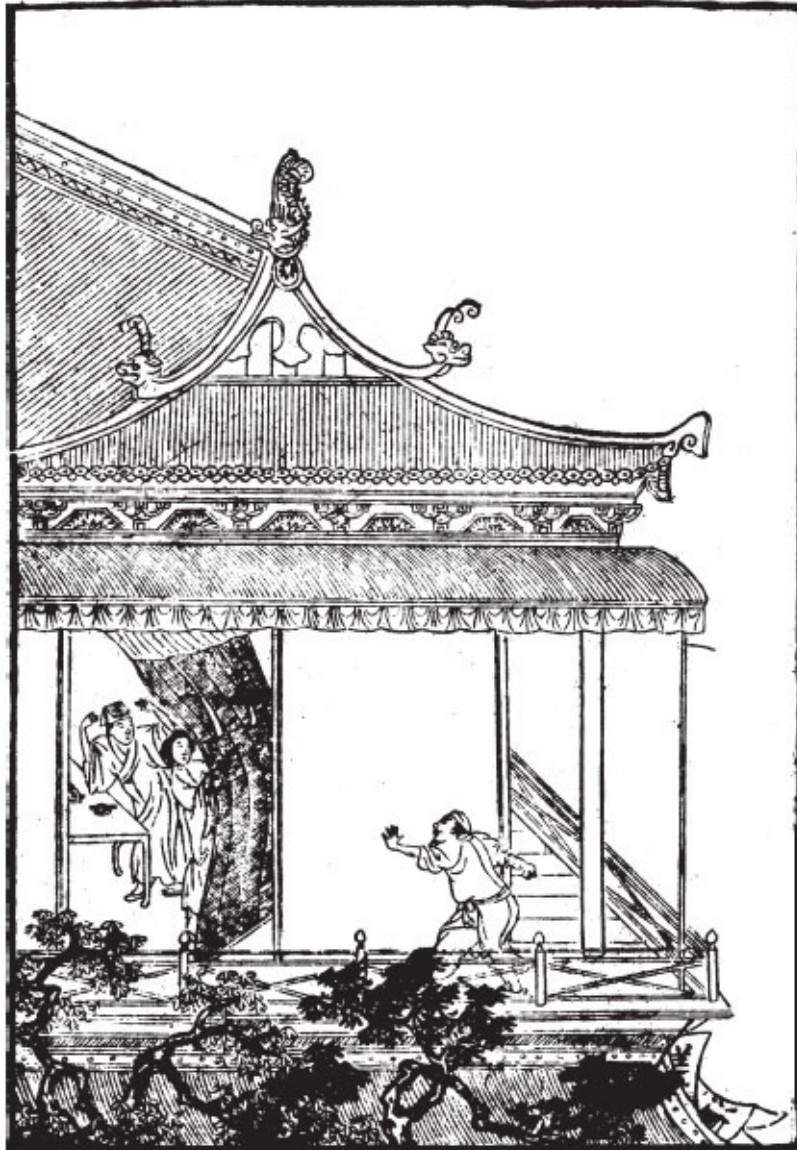
Liu the Second then kicked open the door with his foot, and Cheng Chin-pao felt compelled to come outside, saying, "Uncle Liu the Second, what have you got to say to me?"

"You lousy whore!" said Liu the Second, "you owe me three month's rent and have been hiding out here in order to avoid me."

"Uncle Liu the Second," responded Cheng Chin-pao with an ingratiating smile, "you can go home, and I will have my procuress, Auntie Cheng the fifth, deliver the rent to you."

But Liu the Second proceeded to strike her a blow in the chest with his fist, knocking her to the floor, and banging her head on the steps until:

The flow of blood inundated the ground,
saying, "You lousy whore! I will not wait to have it delivered to me but am demanding to have it right now."



In the Lofty Tavern Liu the Second Wreaks Havoc

Seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi was in the room, he strode inside and overturned the table, smashing the dishes to smithereens.

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "Who are you to come in and wreak havoc in this way?"

"Fuck you, you 'sweetie'⁴ of a Taoist priest," cursed Liu the Second, whereupon, he proceeded to grab him by the hair and hold him down while he:

Struck him with his fists and kicked him with his feet,
innumerable times. The other customers on the upper floor of the tavern were stupefied by what they saw.

The owner of the tavern, Hsieh the Third, on observing that Liu the Second was drunk, did not initially dare to

interfere, but when he realized that he was beating someone until he was scarcely recognizable, he came upstairs and endeavored to intervene, saying, "Uncle Liu the Second, venerable sir, pray abate your wrath. He is unfamiliar with your reputation and has offended you by mistake. You would do well to make allowances for him and let him go, for my sake."

Liu the Second paid no attention to him but continued to beat Ch'en Ching-chi with all his strength until he had:

Rendered him senseless to the nth degree.⁵

He then summoned the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit and had them arrest Ch'en Ching-chi and the powdered face, truss them up together with a single length of rope, and lock them up for the night, instructing them to escort them to the yamen of the Regional Military Command early the next morning.

It so happens that Commandant Chou Hsiu had been ordered by imperial edict to protect his territory, apprehend thieves and bandits, and oversee the canals and waterways in his jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, the fact that Ch'en Ching-chi had been arrested was still unknown to Abbot Jen in the Yen-kung Temple, who thought that he was probably staying overnight in the rice shop, having chosen not to return.

To resume our story, the next day, the local constable, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, and the couriers who patrolled the Grand Canal took charge of Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao, hired donkeys for them to ride on, and set out early in the morning to escort them to the yamen of the Regional Military Command. Upon arriving there, they showed the relevant documents to the head servants Chang Sheng and Li An and explained that the culprits had been in a brawl with Uncle Liu the Second, and that one of them was a Taoist priest from the Yen-kung Temple named Ch'en Ching-chi, and the other a singing girl named Cheng Chin-pao.

The soldiers on duty demanded money of them, saying, "We are the corps of twelve personnel who are responsible for administering punishments and are prepared to accept whatever you choose to give us, but you cannot afford to regard the two head servants lightly."

"I did have money on my person," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "but last night while Liu the Second was beating me, someone made off with it. The clothes I was wearing have all been torn to tatters, so where could I conceal any money? All I've got now is the silver hairpin that holds my topknot in place. I'll pull it out, and you can present it to the two head servants."

The jailers took the hairpin and showed it to Chang Sheng and Li An, saying, thus and so, "He could not come up with so much as a candareen but merely presented us with this silver-plated pin."

"Call him to come here so I can interrogate him," said Chang Sheng.

In no time at all, the soldiers hustled him inside and made him kneel down before him.

"What disciple of Abbot Jen are you?" asked Chang Sheng.

"I am his third disciple," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

"How old are you this year?" he went on to ask.

"I am twenty-three years old," replied Ch'en Ching-chi.

"If you are as young as all that," said Chang Sheng, "you ought to be devoting yourself to your duties as a Taoist priest, and studying the scriptures, rather than going out whoring, and drinking, and creating disturbances. What sort of insignificant yamen do you take the commandant's yamen to be, that you should allow yourself to be brought here without any money in hand? This hairpin of yours is:

Hardly enough to discolor the water.

What would I want with it?"

So saying, he tossed it back to him and told the jailers, "Wait a little, until His Honor takes his place on the bench, and then see that this case is given priority. It is obvious that this servile cur of a Taoist priest is a penny-pinching sort himself, though he feels free to solicit money and provisions from:

The patrons in the four directions.

Quite aside from the fact that you have been brought here because you are accused in a law case, even if you were coming to have a drink or attend a feast, you would be expected to bring along a handkerchief with which to wipe your mouth. When the time comes to administer punishment, see to it that this rascal is beaten and subjected to the squeezers as severely as possible."

He also called Cheng Chin-pao before him, but she had been accompanied by the pimp from the Cheng Family Brothel, who had expended three or four taels of silver on the staff of the yamen, both high and low.

"Since you are a singing girl," said Chang Sheng, "it is only natural that you should go where the pickings are good in order to support yourself. That's no big deal. It all depends on the mood of His Honor. If he is angry, you may be subjected to a session or two with the squeezers; while if he is well disposed, he may simply let you go."

The jailer standing to one side said to her, "If you give me another mace of silver, should you be subjected to the squeezers, I will see to it that your two thumbs are spared."

Li An then said to the jailer, "You take her out of sight and wait. His Honor is about to take his place on the bench."

Before long, lo and behold, the cloud-shaped gong sounded and Commandant Chou Hsiu came in and took his place on the bench. The functionaries, soldiers, and jailers were neatly arrayed to either side in strict formation. Behold:

The walls are decked with crimson silk;

The tables covered with purple drapery.

At the head of the chamber are suspended

red hangings;

On all four sides there hang kingfisher-

hued screens.⁶
The judge adheres strictly to the law;
The admonitory stone tablet is incised with
four lines in the Emperor's hand.⁷
The officers are meticulous and honest;
Beside the external abatisses are displayed
two of the commandant's standards.
The soldiers and jailers stand sedately;
The functionaries are arrayed imposingly.
Holding their staffs, they stand before the steps
ready to perform their duties;
With writing materials in hand, they wait on the
sidelines to hear the judgment.
Though only the officers of one region;
They resemble a courtroom full of gods.⁸

On this occasion:

Without coincidences there would be no stories.

It was a case of:

Five hundred kalpas ago, these lovers
were fated to meet;
It is those who are predestined to do so
who come together.

Ch'un-mei, after entering Commandant Chou Hsiu's household, had given birth to a son during the eighth month of the previous year, and the young squire was now half a year old.

His face was smooth as a jade cap ornament, and

His lips looked as though they were rouged.

The commandant cherished him as:

A pearl in the palm;

and valued him more than:

A priceless treasure.

Not much later, his first wife died, and the commandant formally raised Ch'un-mei to the status of his legitimate wife and moved her into the master suite of five rooms. He also bought two wet nurses to take care of breast feeding his infant son, one of whom was named Yü-t'ang, and the other Chin-kuei; and two maidservants to wait on his wife, one of whom was named Ts'ui-hua, and the other Lan-hua. He also had two singing girls as concubines, who were fifteen or sixteen years old, one of whom was named Hai-t'ang, and the other Yüeh-kuei, who also waited upon Ch'un-mei in her new quarters. His senior concubine, Sun Erh-niang, had only a single maidservant to wait on her, named Ho-hua. But no more of this.

At the time, the young squire enjoyed having Chang Sheng hold him in his arms and take him outside to play, and when Commandant Chou Hsiu was holding court, Chang Sheng would stand to one side and allow him to look on at the proceedings.

On that day, when Commandant Chou Hsiu took his place on the bench and ordered that the tablet announcing the category of cases to be heard should be hung up, the local constables brought in the prisoners from their jurisdictions for trial, and Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao were the first to be called before him.

When the commandant had read the deposition and saw that there were wounds on Ch'en Ching-chi's face, he said, "You rascal, you are a Taoist priest, yet you:

Do not abide by the Rules of Purity.

How can you indulge in sleeping with prostitutes, drinking, and creating disturbances in my jurisdiction?

This kind of behavior is unacceptable.

Lictors, take him down, give him twenty strokes of the bamboo, and revoke his ordination certificate. As for that singing girl, née Cheng, subject her to fifty blows on the squeezers, and have her sent back to work at the brothel from which she came."

The jailers standing to either side came forward, turned Ch'en Ching-chi over, stripped off his clothes, bound him with a length of rope, flourished their bamboo rods, and shouted for the beating to begin. At this juncture:

Strange as it may seem,

Chang Sheng was standing on the platform in front of the courtroom looking on, with the young squire in his arms, when the child broke away from him, approached Ch'en Ching-chi, and poked him out of a desire to be hugged. Chang Sheng fearing that the commandant would see what was going on, went over and picked him up, but the child started to cry out loud and continued to cry as he carried him back to Ch'un-mei in the rear compound.

"What is he crying about?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"His Honor is conducting affairs in the courtroom," responded Chang Sheng, "and had just ordered that the Taoist priest named Ch'en from the Yen-kung Temple should be given a beating, when the child went over and poked him out of

a desire to be hugged. When I took him away, he started to cry.”

Upon hearing that the culprit was named Ch'en, Ch'un-mei:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,

Gently lifted her beige skirt,

and made her way out to a position from which she could observe the proceedings from behind a hanging screen.

When she saw that the voice and the appearance of the person being beaten in the courtroom resembled those of Ch'en Ching-chi, she wondered, “Why should he have taken orders and become a Taoist priest?”

She then called over Chang Sheng and asked him, “What is this person's name?”

“According to the deposition of this Taoist priest,” responded Chang Sheng, “he is twenty-three years old, and his secular name is Ch'en Ching-chi.”

Ch'un-mei thought to herself, “So it really is him after all.”

She then turned to Chang Sheng and said, “Go ask His Honor to come see me.”

At the time, as the commandant presided over the court, Ch'en Ching-chi had only been given ten strokes of his sentenced beating, and Cheng Chin-pao was still being subjected to the squeezers.

When Chou Hsiu heard that his wife was calling for him, he ordered the jailers to suspend the beating and went to see her.

“That Taoist priest you are beating is a cousin of mine,” said Ch'un-mei. “Please forgive him for my sake.”

“My wife,” responded Chou Hsiu, “why didn't you let me know before? I have already had him given ten strokes, and there is no remedy for that.”

He then went back to the courtroom and ordered the jailers to let them both off, and to have the singing girl sent back to the brothel from which she came.

He then privately instructed Chang Sheng to call back the Taoist priest and also said, “Go ask your mistress if she would like to see him.”

Ch'un-mei was about to have Chang Sheng call him into the rear compound to see her, when she suddenly remembered something.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but

In her heart she thought to herself:

“If I am able to eradicate the obstacle before my eyes,

I may be able to replace it with the love of my heart;⁹

If the obstacle before my eyes cannot be eradicated,

How can I ever replace it with the love of my heart?”

Thereupon, she said to Chang Sheng, “You can let that person go for the time being. I will call him back another time.”

She also ordered him not to revoke his ordination certificate.

Ch'en Ching-chi, having endured ten strokes with the bamboo, left the commandant's yamen and hastily made his way back to the Yen-kung Temple.

How could he have known that someone had told Abbot Jen, “That disciple of yours, Ch'en Tsung-mei, has been maintaining the harlot Cheng Chin-pao as his mistress in the Hsieh Family Tavern, which has annoyed the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, the owner of My Own Tavern, into beating him into a stinking pulp. Along with the woman, he has been tied up and escorted to the yamen of the Regional Military Command. On the grounds that:

This kind of behavior is unacceptable,

the commandant is sending soldiers to hold you for interrogation, and revoke your ordination certificate.”

When Abbot Jen heard this, on the one hand, he was old and susceptible to fright, while on the other hand, he was suffering from obesity. When he opened his strongbox and found that it was nearly empty, he received such a shock that the phlegm in his heart rose up to choke him, and he:

Fell to the floor in a faint.

His disciples rushed to his assistance and engaged a physician to come and administer a dose of liquid medicine, but he remained:

Oblivious to human affairs.

Later that night, alas:

He stopped breathing and died.

At the time of his death he was sixty-two years old.

The day after this, when Ch'en Ching-chi arrived back at the temple, the neighbors on the left side said to him, “Do you still dare to go into the temple? Your master, on your account, thus and so, has suffered such a severe shock that he died during the third watch last night.”

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he was:

As flustered as a dog who has

lost his way home;

As flurried as a fish who has

escaped the net;

and made his way back to Ch'ing-ho district. Truly:

The case of the deer was one that the minister

of Cheng was unable to solve;
Whether the butterfly was Chuang Chou, or vice
versa, cannot be determined.¹⁰

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei had seen Ch'en Ching-chi in the commandant's yamen, she had intended to keep him there, but an obstacle to doing so suddenly arose in her mind. She consequently sent Chang Sheng out to tell Ch'en Ching-chi to go his way for the time being. She then went back to her room, removed her headdress, took off her embroidered garments, and threw herself down on the bed, where she proceeded to stroke her chest and hug the covers, giving vent to moans and cries of pain. This had the effect of throwing the entire household, both high and low, into a state of consternation.

The commandant's secondary concubine Sun Erh-niang came in to see her and said, "First Lady, you have seemed to be in good health. What has happened to you?"

"You can go," responded Ch'un-mei. "Just leave me alone."

Later on, when the commandant came in from the courtroom and saw that she was lying on the bed and groaning with pain, he too became flustered, took hold of her hand, and asked, "What is it that is troubling you?"

When she did not reply, he went on to ask, "Has anyone been annoying you?"

Once again, she did not make a sound in response.

The commandant then said, "It must be because I have given your cousin a beating just now that you are upset."

Yet again, she did not respond.

The commandant:

At a loss for what to do,¹¹

went outside and took Chang Sheng and Li An to task, saying, "If the two of you knew that he was your mistress's cousin, why didn't you tell me about it before I had him beaten ten strokes, and thus made your mistress unhappy? I told you to keep him here so that he could meet with your mistress. Why have you let him go instead? I demand an explanation from the two of you."

"I reported the situation to the mistress," said Chang Sheng, "and she said that I should let him go for the time being. It was only then that I let him go."

So saying, he went into the room and wept bitterly as he pled with Ch'un-mei, saying, "Mistress, I beg you to say a word to His Honor on our behalf. Otherwise, he is bent on punishing us."

Ch'un-mei, thereupon:

Opening wide her starry eyes, and

Raising up her moth eyebrows,

called the commandant into her presence, and said, "It's just that I've been feeling out of sorts and has nothing to do with the two of them. It's only because that rascal:

Is not the sort to abide by his lot,

and has gone so far as to go about masquerading as a Taoist priest, that I want to test his patience for a while before acknowledging him."

The commandant, upon hearing this, no longer held Chang Sheng and Li An to blame but, seeing that Ch'un-mei was continuing to groan with pain, sent Chang Sheng to summon a doctor to come and take her pulse.

The doctor said, "Your venerable wife is suffering from a condition engendered by the six desires and seven passions, that has produced a heavy feeling of congestion in the chest."

The medication he prescribed was prepared for her, but she refused to take it, simply letting it grow cold. Her maidservants did not dare to reproach her for this but brought the commandant in to try to get her to take it, whereupon, she did swallow one mouthful but refused to take any more.

When the commandant left the room, his concubine Yüeh-kuei brought the medication over to her again and said, "Mistress, please take the medicine."

But Ch'un-mei picked it up and threw it in her face, reviling her with the words, "You lousy wanton slave! Why should you keep on trying to get me to swallow this bitter liquid? There's nothing in my stomach."

She then made her kneel in penance before her.

Sun Erh-niang came in and asked, "What has Yüeh-kuei done that has caused the mistress to make her kneel this way?"

The concubine Hai-t'ang explained, "When she tried to get the mistress to take her medicine, the mistress said, 'My stomach is empty, so why should you try to force this medicine on me?' That's why she has made her kneel."

"Mistress," inquired Sun Erh-niang, "have you really not eaten anything today? Yüeh-kuei could not have known that. You ought not to beat her. Pray forgive her this once, for my sake."

She then said to Hai-t'ang, "Go into the kitchen and boil some congee for the mistress to eat."

Ch'un-mei then allowed Yüeh-kuei to get up from her kneeling position, while Hai-t'ang went into the kitchen and, carefully and conscientiously, prepared a small pot of thick congee made from nonglutinous rice, along with four saucers of side dishes. After putting the congee in a large bowl, and providing a pair of ivory chopsticks, she brought the steaming hot congee into the room.

At the time, Ch'un-mei was asleep on the bed, with her face to the wall, and she did not venture to disturb her but waited until she turned over before offering it to her, saying, "Mistress, the congee is here. Won't you eat some of it?"

But Ch'un-mei kept her eyes closed and did not respond.

Hai-t'ang appealed to her once again, saying, "The congee is getting cold."

Won't you get up, Mistress, and have some congee?"

Sun Erh-niang, who was standing by her side, said, "Mistress, you haven't had anything to eat for half a day. If you are feeling any better now, why not get up and have something to eat? It will help to maintain your stamina."

Ch'un-mei hastily crawled into an upright position, told the wet nurse to bring over a lamp, and took the bowl of congee into her hands. After swallowing only one mouthful, she shoved it onto the floor, but fortunately the wet nurse caught it in her hands, so that it did not break.

She then raised her voice and shouted at Sun Erh-niang, "You urged me to get up and have some congee for no good reason. Just take a look at the fine batch of congee that lousy slave boiled up. I'm not recuperating from childbirth, so why should she come up with such a thin batch of congee that I can see my face in it?"

She then said to the wet nurse Chin-kuei, "You give that slave four slaps in the face for me."

There and then, she actually did give Hai-t'ang four slaps in the face.

Sun Erh-niang then said, "Mistress, if you don't want to eat the congee, what would you like to eat instead, in order to relieve your hunger?"

"You want me to eat something," responded Ch'un-mei, "but my abdomen is feeling congested, and I can't keep anything down."

After a little while, she called over her junior maidservant Lan-hua and said to her, "I'd like to try some soup flavored with wing tips of chicken. Go into the kitchen and get that whore of a slave to wash her hands and make me a bowl of soup flavored with wing tips of chicken. Have her put in a good number of marinated bamboo shoots, and see that it is both sour and spicy."

Sun Erh-niang said, "Mistress, since you have told her what to do, she will go and have Sun Hsüeh-o make it for you. When you hanker after some particular dish, it will be as good as medicine for you."

Lan-hua did not dare to be remiss but went straight to the kitchen and said to Sun Hsüeh-o, "The mistress has ordered you to make some soup flavored with chicken wing tips for her. Hurry up and do it. She is waiting to have it."

Sun Hsüeh-o thereupon proceeded to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,

after which, she killed two little chickens, plucked them clean, removed their wing tips, and cut them into slivers with a sharp knife. She then mixed in pepper, minced scallions, coriander, marinated bamboo shoots, oil, soy sauce, and the like, in order to make a clear broth, with which she filled two bowls, and placed them, while still steaming hot, on a red lacquer tray, for Lan-hua to take back to the master suite.

After looking them over by the light of a lamp, Ch'un-mei swallowed a mouthful but immediately cried out in an angry voice, "Go ask that whore of a slave what kind of soup she thinks she has made? It is as clear and flavorless as water and has no taste at all. You all may have been trying to get me to eat something, but all you are doing is making me angry, for no good reason."

This had the effect of causing Lan-hua to fear a beating, and she promptly returned to the kitchen, where she told Sun Hsüeh-o, "The mistress objects to the tastelessness of the soup and is ranting abusively about it."

Sun Hsüeh-o did not say a word, but proceeded to:

Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,

as she put the pot back on the stove, made another bowl of soup, to which she added additional pepper, making it redolently fragrant, and gave it to Lan-hua to take back to the master suite. Ch'un-mei once again objected that it was too salty, and picking up the bowl she threw the soup onto the floor. Luckily, Lan-hua was quick enough to dodge out of the way, or it would have splashed all over her.

Ch'un-mei said irately, "You go and tell that slave that I know she is annoyed at having to cook for me, but if she doesn't do any better this time, she will have to answer for it."

When Sun Hsüeh-o heard this:

Though she never, ever, should have done it,

she mumbled out loud, "Sister, since when did you become so high and mighty as to impose on other people this way?"

She did not anticipate that Lan-hua, upon returning to the master suite, would repeat this remark of hers to Ch'un-mei.

If Ch'un-mei had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it, she immediately:

Pricked up her willow brows,

Opened wide her starry eyes, and

Ground her silver teeth to smithereens,

As her powdered face turned bright red.

"Go drag that whore of a slave in here for me," she shouted.

In no time at all, three or four wet nurses and maidservants succeeded in dragging Sun Hsüeh-o into the room.

Ch'un-mei, in a rage, grabbed hold of her by the hair, tore off her headdress, and cursed her, saying, "You whore of a slave! How can you ask how I became so high and mighty? It was not the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing that elevated me to this status. I bought you in order to serve me, and you have been unhappy to do so. You were told to make me some soup, but what you produced was either too tasteless, or overly salty. Yet you have the nerve to ask in front of a maidservant when I became so high and mighty as to impose on other people. What further use do I have for the likes of you?"

She then sent for the commandant and had him force Sun Hsüeh-o to kneel in the courtyard, after which, she summoned Chang Sheng and Li An from the front compound and ordered them to strip off her clothing, and give her

thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo. The servants, accordingly, lined up to either side and lit brightly shining lanterns, while Chang Sheng and Li An stood by with their heavy bamboos in hand.

When Sun Hsüeh-o objected to taking off her clothes, the commandant, who was afraid of angering Ch'un-mei, did not venture to intervene, but Sun Erh-niang, who was standing to one side, pled with Ch'un-mei, saying, "Mistress, order her to be beaten as many strokes as you like, but spare her the humiliation of having her underclothes removed. If she is stripped completely naked in front of the servants, it will not redound to His Honor's credit. I pray you, Mistress, to:

Lift high your gracious hand,
though it is true that she is at fault."

But Ch'un-mei refused this request and adamantly insisted that she be stripped naked to be beaten, saying, "If anyone should try to stop me, I will first dash my child to death, and then hang myself with a length of rope, leaving her behind in my place."

Thereupon, without ordering the beating to proceed, she threw herself to the ground, where she lay in a faint, stretched out at full length:

Oblivious to human affairs.

The commandant, in a state of panic, hastily lifted her up, saying, "Go ahead and beat her however you want. Don't get so upset over it."

Thereupon, the pitiable Sun Hsüeh-o was:

Forcibly turned over on the ground,¹²

stripped of her clothing, and subjected to thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo. She was beaten until:

The skin was broken and the flesh was split.

Ch'un-mei then dispatched a young jailer to summon Auntie Hsüeh in the middle of the night and instructed her to take Sun Hsüeh-o off empty-handed and offer her for sale.

Taking Auntie Hsüeh aside, she said to her, "I want no more than eight taels of silver for her. Take this whore of a slave away, and do your best to sell her into a house of prostitution. I don't care how much money you make on the transaction, but if you dispose of her anywhere else, and I hear about it, I won't have anything more to do with you."

"Who else do I depend on for my livelihood?" said Auntie Hsüeh. "I can hardly refuse to do as you say."

That very night she took Sun Hsüeh-o home with her, where she continued to weep pitifully:

In sorrow and distress,
until the day dawned.

"There's no point in crying any more," Auntie Hsüeh urged her. It's just your bad fortune to have ended up in the hands of your enemy. His Honor is not ill-disposed toward you, but unluckily your old enemy, harboring her old resentment, is out to hurt you, and His Honor feels that:

The situation is out of his control.

Since she has borne him a son, he feels obliged to accommodate her every wish. Even his secondary consort Sun Erh-niang feels that she must give way to her. As the saying goes:

Even a worker who pilfers the rice will sometimes
rise to become head of the granary.

There is nothing more to be said about it. You should swallow your resentment and stop crying."

Sun Hsüeh-o dried her tears and thanked Auntie Hsüeh, saying, "I only hope that sooner or later you can find a good customer for me, who will be able to support me."

"She ordered me repeatedly," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "to sell you into a house of prostitution. But I feel that:

Those who raise sons and raise daughters,
Should be governed by Heavenly principle.

I will endeavor either to find a monogamous match for you, so there will be but:

One husband and a single wife;

or marry you to a merchant with limited capital, who will be able to support you."

Sun Hsüeh-o thanked Auntie Hsüeh for this with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of good will.

Two days later, Old Mother Chang, the proprietress of an inn next door to Auntie Hsüeh's residence, came over to see her and asked, "What woman are you harboring in your place that cries so piteously?"

Auntie Hsüeh invited her inside and said, "This is the lady in question. She comes from a prominent household but was unable to get along with her mistress and has been driven out and turned over to me to find her a husband. She is hoping for a monogamous match, involving but:

One husband and a single wife,

in order to avoid such rancorous conflicts in the future."

"There is a cotton merchant from Shantung lodging at my inn," said Old Mother Chang. "His name is P'an the Fifth, he is thirty-six years old, has several cartloads of cotton wool to sell, and often stays at my place. The other day he told me that he has a mother who is more than seventy years old and is unwell, and that his wife died half a year ago, so that he has no one to look after her. He has repeatedly asked me to arrange a match for him, but I have been unable to find anyone suitable. It seems to me that this lady is about the same age and would make a good wife for him."

"I will not deceive you," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but this lady comes from a prominent household and is adept at both

rough and refined domestic work. As for needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, not to mention:

Skill with cooking pots and stoves,¹³

That naturally goes without saying.

In addition to which, she makes excellent soups. At present, she is just thirty-four years old, and her owner is asking only thirty taels of silver for her, so she ought to be a good match for him."

"Does she have trunkloads of personal belongings?" asked Old Mother Chang.

"She has only the clothing she is wearing and the hairpins and bracelets she has on," replied Auntie Hsüeh. "She is without any other luggage."

"In that case," said Old Mother Chang, "I will go back and tell him about her, and propose that he come over to see her for himself."

After concluding this discussion, and drinking her tea, she sat a little longer and then went home. That evening, she told her lodger about it.

The next day, after breakfast, she actually did bring her lodger over to see for himself. When he saw that Sun Hsüeh-o was both attractive and young, he promptly offered to pay twenty-five taels of silver for her, and to give Auntie Hsüeh an additional tael of silver as her go-between's fee. Auntie Hsüeh did not bother to bargain with him but proceeded to weigh the silver and write out a contract, allowing him to take her away that very night, so they could leave the next morning.



Sun Hsüeh-o Becomes a Trollop in My Own Tavern

After the transaction was concluded, Auntie Hsüeh had someone alter the wording of the contract, weighed out a mere eight taels of silver, and then had this amount delivered to Ch'un-mei in the commandant's household, and report

that she had sold her into a house of prostitution.

P'an the Fifth took Sun Hsüeh-o back to Old Mother Chang's place to spend the night, and during the fifth watch the next morning he thanked Old Mother Chang and took his leave of her, after which, the two of them got into a cart and headed straight for Lin-ch'ing. It was the sixth month at the time, so the days were long, and the sun had just begun to set when they arrived at the dock and made their way to My Own Tavern.

This establishment had more than a hundred rooms, in which unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls from all over, including the licensed quarter, were housed. Sun Hsüeh-o was led into a half-sized chamber containing an earthen k'ang, on which there sat a fifty- or sixty-year-old woman. There was also a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl from the establishment waiting upon her, whose hair was done up in two curled knots on either side of her head, who was made up with white face powder and red lips, was garbed in soft damask clothing, and was standing by the k'ang strumming a balloon guitar.

When Sun Hsüeh-o saw this, she gasped in distress, for she realized that this man P'an the Fifth must be a white slaver, who had bought her in order to make her into a powder-faced singing girl. She was renamed Yü-erh and, like the other young girl, whose name was Chin-erh, was expected to make her living by taking a little gong with her every day, and frequenting the taverns on the dock in order to attract customers, and sing to them.

No sooner did she enter the door than P'an the Fifth:

Without discussing the pros and cons of the matter,¹⁴
proceeded to give her a beating, and restrict her to her bed for two days, while giving her only two bowls of rice to eat. She was then given instruction in how to play musical instruments and sing, and when she was not up to the mark, she was beaten again, until her body was covered with red and blue bruises. Only after she began to get the hang of it was she given fine clothing, properly made up, and made to stand by the gate:

Leaning upon the door with a smile,¹⁵ and

Provoking attention with her brows.

Truly:

If one's real work had ever found favor in the eyes

of one's contemporaries;

One would not have had to spend money on rouge

in order to paint portraits.¹⁶

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In straitened circumstances one has no place
to run and no place to flee;

No matter whether one goes south or comes north¹⁷

it will all be to no avail.¹⁸

On this night where have the varicolored clouds
ended up being scattered to?

One's dreams follow the path of the bright moon
as it sinks above the brothel.¹⁹

While Sun Hsüeh-o was working in My Own Tavern, it just so happened, one day, that:

As providence would have it,

Commandant Chou Hsiu sent Chang Sheng to the canal port of Lin Ch'ing to purchase ten piculs of distiller's yeast, with which to brew homemade wine. When the proprietor of My Own Tavern, the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, saw that his brother-in-law Chang Sheng had come to pay him a visit, he immediately had one of his best rooms swept clean and furnished with wine and delicacies, table utensils, seasonal fruits of various kinds, vintage wine, and fresh fish for the occasion, and invited Chang Sheng to come in for a drink.

The wine steward who was in charge of the drinks knelt down in front of Liu the Second and inquired, "Uncle, which of the singing girls from downstairs should I invite up to serve the drinks?"

Liu the Second responded by saying, "Have Old Sister Wang, Chao Chiao-erh, and P'an the Fifth's two girls, Chin-erh and Yü-erh, the four of them, come up to wait on Brother-in-law Chang."

The wine steward assented and made his way downstairs. It was not long before they heard the sound of laughter coming from the stairwell as the four singing girls, made up as flowerlike beauties, and dressed in outfits of light silk and soft damask, came up the stairs and proceeded:

Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,

to kowtow four times before the guest, and then stand to one side.

When Chang Sheng opened his eyes wide and took a good look at them, he thought to himself, "One of these powdered faces:

Strange as it may seem,

looks just like that Sun Hsüeh-o who used to work in His Honor's kitchen until the young mistress drove her away. How did she ever end up here, engaged in this line of work?"

Sun Hsüeh-o, also, upon surveying the scene, recognized Chang Sheng but chose not to say anything.

Chang Sheng then inquired of Liu the Second, "Where do these powdered faces come from?"

"Brother-in-law," said Liu the Second, "there is no reason for me to deceive you. These two, who work for P'an the

Fifth, are named Yü-erh and Chin-erh. This one is called Old Sister Wang, and the other is called Chao Chiao-erh.”

“I recognize Old Sister Wang,” said Chang Sheng, “and this Yü-erh from the P’an establishment also looks familiar to me.”

He then called Yü-erh over to him and whispered to her, “Are you not Sun Hsüeh-o from His Honor’s residence? How did you happen to end up here?”

No sooner did Sun Hsüeh-o hear his question than she began to:

Shed two streams of tears,
and said:

“It’s a long story.”

She then proceeded, thus and so, to explain what had happened, saying, “I was tricked by Auntie Hsüeh, who sold me for twenty-five taels of silver, only to end up here:

Entertaining at parties and endeavoring to sing:

Engaging customers and catering to their wishes.”

Chang Sheng had noticed how attractive she was in the past and felt himself drawn to her, while Sun Hsüeh-o did her best to cater to him as she served the drinks, and the conversation between them started to warm up. Sun Hsüeh-o and Chin-erh then took up their balloon guitars and proceeded to sing a song for Chang Sheng as he drank his wine, to the tune “Four Pieces of Gold”:

In my last incarnation, I imagine,
I must have owed him a love debt due
in this life;
For he has abandoned me along the way,
So that our lover’s knot cannot be tied.
To speak of it floods my cheeks with tears;
When depressed, my sorrow is as deep as the sea.
As for our myriad oaths of fidelity,
What has become of them now?
You wretched scoundrel!
How can you ignore the love I have lavished
upon you all this time?²⁰

After the song was finished, the two of them, what with:

The raising of glasses and passing of cups,
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,

continued to drink until they began to feel the effects of the wine. As the saying goes:

Worldly wealth, painted faces, and wine
in the sing-song houses;
Who is there who is not deluded
by these three things?²¹

Chang Sheng became enamored of Sun Hsüeh-o, and the two of them spent the night together in a room at the tavern. Sun Hsüeh-o, employing her mastery of the arts of the bedchamber, and whispering oaths of fidelity into his ears, gave herself over to Chang Sheng.

They exhausted themselves to please each other,
Like fish sporting in the water,

in ways that:

Were too multifarious to describe in detail.

The next day, by the time they got out of bed and performed their ablutions, Liu the Second had already brought up a serving of wine and delicacies in order to provide his brother-in-law with a pick-me-up. After they had sated themselves on this repast, served in:

Large platters and large bowls,

Chang Sheng got together his luggage, fed his horse, packed up the shipment of distiller’s yeast, and prepared to depart, along with his attendants.

As he was about to go out the door, he gave Sun Hsüeh-o three taels of silver and said to Liu the Second, “See that you look after her well, and don’t let anyone take advantage of her.”

From this time on, whenever Chang Sheng came to the canal port of Lin-ch’ing on business, he would get together with Sun Hsüeh-o in My Own Tavern; and afterwards, as he traveled back and forth, he agreed to pay P’an the Fifth a few taels of silver every month, in order to maintain her as his mistress, and prevent her from taking on any other customers. Liu the Second, out of a desire to please his brother-in-law, did not even demand any rent for her and went so far as to fleece his other customers in order to pay for her keep, and provide Sun Hsüeh-o with fuel and rice. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Who could know at the time the way in which
he would indulge his desires?
Given to lust, and relying on his influence,
his acts are unconscionable.
Calamity does not seek people, they
court it themselves;
Beauty does not delude people, they

delude themselves.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

P'ING-AN ABSCONDS WITH JEWELRY FROM THE PAWNSHOP; AUNTIE HSÜEH CLEVERLY PROPOSES A PERSONAL APPEAL

Some words of admonition:

If you are fortunate, do not expect to enjoy it forever;
When your fortune runs out, you will be poverty-stricken.
If you have authority, do not expect it to last forever;
When your authority runs out, you will face your enemies.
One's good fortune should only be relied on providently;
One's authority should always be exercised deferentially.
In this human world of ours, authority and good fortune;
May seem to begin well enough, but often end in calamity.¹

THE STORY GOES that Sun Hsüeh-o was sold into the life of a singing girl working out of My Own Tavern. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.

To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ta-chieh committed suicide, and Wu Yüeh-niang took Ch'en Ching-chi to court for it, Lai-chao, the head servant in the household, also passed away, and his wife "The Beanpole" took her son Little Iron Rod and remarried someone else. Lai-hsing was then made responsible for the gate. The maidservant Hsiu-ch'un left the household after being turned over to Nun Wang to serve as a novice. Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu had also died, and he had been some time without a spouse. The wet nurse Ju-i was in the habit of taking the baby Hsi-men Hsiao-ko into his quarters to play, and to enjoy snacks there. Lai-hsing would also provide wine and drink with her. The two of them flirted with each other, back and forth, until they ended up consummating an affair. This happened on more than one occasion, and when Ju-i returned to the rear compound, her face would be red.

When Yüeh-niang became aware of what was going on, she gave her a dressing down; but on the grounds that:

Domestic scandals should not be noised abroad,²

she presented her with an outfit of clothing, four hairpins, a silver brooch in the shape of the character for long life, and an ornamental comb for her hair; selected an auspicious day for the occasion; and gave her to Lai-hsing as his wife. During the day, she continued to work in the kitchen, look after Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, and serve in the rear compound; while at night, she would go out to his quarters in the front compound and sleep with him.

One day, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, it was Yüeh-niang's birthday, and Sister-in-law Wu, along with Wu the Second's wife, and the three nuns, came to celebrate it with her and were served drinks in the parlor of the master suite. That evening, arrangements were made for them all to stay overnight in Meng Yü-lou's former quarters on the other side of the courtyard, so they could listen to the nuns recite a precious scroll for them.

During the second watch, the maidservant Chung-ch'iu, who had been assigned to look after their tea, was called for by Yüeh-niang but did not respond. When Yüeh-niang went into the master suite to look for her, what should she see but Tai-an, who was making out vigorously with Hsiao-yü on the edge of the k'ang. Upon seeing her push open the door and come in, they became so flustered they hardly knew what to do with themselves.

Yüeh-niang chose not to say a word about it, merely remarking, "You lousy little stinker! Why haven't you gone to the kitchen and taken care of the tea? The nuns in the other room over there have been reciting a precious scroll all day long and need some tea to drink. What are you doing in here?"

"Chung-ch'iu has been tending the stove," responded Hsiao-yü, "and I told her to prepare the tea."

With her head hanging sheepishly, she then proceeded to make her way outside, while Tai-an headed through the ceremonial gate to the front compound.

Two days later, after Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and the three nuns had returned home, Yüeh-niang had Lai-hsing vacate his quarters and refurbished them for Tai-an to reside in, while moving Lai-hsing into what had been Lai-chao's quarters, so he could take charge of the front gate. She then had two sets of bedding made for Tai-an, along with an outfit of new clothing, a newly blocked hat with a new hairnet, and a new pair of boots and stockings. She also allowed Hsiao-yü to put up her hair and gave her a fret to wear over it, while providing her with several gold and silver hair ornaments, four silver hairpins with gold heads, bracelets, pendant earrings, finger rings, and the like, along with two outfits of varicolored silk and satin clothing. After choosing an auspicious day for the event, she then gave her to Tai-an as his wife. During the day, she continued to wait on Yüeh-niang in the rear compound, but when the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds was about to be locked for the night, she would go out to sleep with Tai-an. This

maidservant constantly secreted goodies of every kind and took them out for Tai-an to eat. Yüeh-niang saw what she was doing but pretended not to notice. As the sayings go:

Those who dote on another do not see clearly;
Those who are covetous can never be satiated.³
When veal and wine are not doled out equally;



Tai-an Seduces Hsiao-yü and Is Allowed to Marry Her

Even the finest teams will split and scatter.⁴
If the household is not governed impartially;
The male and female servitors will resent it.

To resume our story, when P'ing-an saw that Yüeh-niang had favored Tai-an by giving him Hsiao-yü as a wife, providing him with quarters of his own to live in, and bestowing new clothing upon him, he resented the fact that, though at the age of twenty-one he was two years older than Tai-an, she had not seen fit to provide him with a wife, or with quarters of his own.

One day, in the pawnshop, he was present when Manager Fu Ming accepted a set of gold head ornaments and a gilded buckle from a customer, in return for a loan of thirty taels of silver, which he agreed to redeem, with the added interest, in a month. Manager Fu Ming, along with Tai-an, then proceeded to stow them away in the shop's large storage cabinet.

What they did not anticipate was that P'ing-an:

On seeing their value, developed ideas, and surreptitiously made off with them, along with the box they were in, and made his way to the brothel of Wu Ch'ang-chiao, or Longfoot Wu, in the Southern Entertainment Quarter, where he patronized the two unlicensed prostitutes that worked there, one of whom was named Hsüeh Ts'un-erh, and the other Pan-erh, and spent two nights with them. When the pimp of the establishment observed that he was spending money so recklessly, that his box contained gold head ornaments, and that he was flaunting silver ingots in order to buy wine, and gifts for the proprietress, he reported him to the local constable, who confined him to his room, boxed his ears twice, and took him into custody.

It was one of those occasions when:

Something was destined to happen.

Who could have anticipated that just at this juncture, Wu Tien-en, who had recently been appointed to the position of a suburban police chief, happened to be riding by in the street, preceded by a pair of runners bearing placards announcing his office. When he saw what was going on, he asked who the shackled culprit might be.

The constable knelt down before him and reported, thus and so, saying, "The person in question appears to have stolen some things and fled to the Southern Entertainment Quarter, where he has been patronizing prostitutes, and paying for them with gold and silver head ornaments. Having found this suspicious, your humble servant has put him under arrest."

"Bring him along with you so I can interrogate him," ordered Wu Tien-en.

P'ing-an was then taken to the police headquarters, where Wu Tien-en took his place on the bench, with armed lictors arrayed to either side, and the local constable dragged his tethered prisoner before him.

P'ing-an recognized Wu Tien-en and thought to himself, "Since he was formerly a manager in my master's household, he is sure to let me go."

The first thing he said was, "Your humble servant is P'ing-an from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."

"Since you are a servant from his household," said Wu Tien-en, "what have you been up to in this brothel with these gold objects?"

"My mistress," said P'ing-an, "had lent these head ornaments to a relative to wear and sent me to bring them back to her. I was late in returning, and the city gates were closed when I got there, so I went to that brothel to seek a place to stay overnight. I could not have expected to be arrested by the local constable."

Wu Tien-en derided him, saying, "Slave that you are, you're talking nonsense. Your household is amply supplied with this sort of head ornaments, and other objects of gold and silver. What reason would they have for turning over head ornaments like these to a slave like you in order to spend in a brothel? I imagine you must have stolen these things. You had better explain yourself if you want to avoid punishment."

"It is a fact," responded P'ing-an, "that a relative of the family borrowed these head ornaments, and the First Lady sent me to bring them back. I would not dare to tell a lie."

Wu Tien-en was enraged at this and reviled him, saying, "This slave is really a thief. Without a beating, he will not confess."

He then shouted at his attendants, "Put the squeezers on this slave for me."

The squeezers were then fastened onto him, and when they were applied he:

Howled like a stuck pig,

calling out, "Your Honor, stop applying the squeezers to me. If you only let me do so, I will tell you the truth."

"If you tell me the truth," responded Wu Tien-en, "I will stop squeezing you."

P'ing-an then testified, saying, "Your humble servant actually did steal a set of gold head ornaments that someone had left at the pawnshop, along with a gilded buckle."

"Why did you steal them?" asked Wu Tien-en.

"I am twenty-one years old this year," responded P'ing-an, "and the First Lady had promised to find a wife for me, but she has not done so. Meanwhile, she has given one of the maids from her own quarters as a wife to another household servant named Tai-an, who is only nineteen years old. It was because I was so upset over this that I stole these head ornaments from the pawnshop."

"I imagine," pronounced Wu Tien-en, "that this page boy Tai-an must have been engaging in hanky-panky with Mistress Wu, and it must be for that reason that she has given her maidservant to him as a wife. Tell me the truth about it. Since it has nothing to do with you, I will let you off."

"I don't know anything about that," responded P'ing-an.

"You are not telling the truth," pronounced Wu Tien-en. "Subject him to the squeezers once again."

The attendants put the squeezers back on, which threw P'ing-an into such consternation that he called out inarticulately, "Your Honor, don't subject me to the squeezers again. I'll tell you all about it."

"Here we go again," said Wu Tien-en. "Simply tell me about it then. I dare say it has nothing to do with you."

The squeezers were then released, and P'ing-an said, "It is true that the First Lady has been engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an. He started out by seducing her maidservant Hsiao-yü, but when the First Lady discovered it, she chose not to say a word about it but actually bestowed a lot of clothing and jewelry upon her and gave her to him as a wife."

When Wu Tien-en heard this, he had the docket officer take a record of his testimony and make up a formal deposition. He then incarcerated P'ing-an in the police office to await the issuing of arrest warrants for Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, and Hsiao-yü, so that he could hold a hearing on the case.

To resume our story, one day, when it was discovered that the head ornaments in question were missing from the

cabinet in the pawnshop, Manager Fu Ming, in a state of fear and consternation, questioned Tai-an about it.

"I have been looking after the wholesale pharmaceutical shop," responded Tai-an, "while you have been earning your livelihood over there. I don't know anything about it."

"I put that box of head ornaments in the storage cabinet," said Manager Fu Ming. "How could they have disappeared this way?"

He then proceeded to look all over for P'ing-an but could find no trace of him. This disturbed Manager Fu Ming so much that he took to:

Burning incense and swearing oaths;

and when the owner sent a servant to redeem the head ornaments he had pawned, Manager Fu could only say that he hadn't been able to find them yet.

When the servant had returned several times without being able to retrieve the head ornaments, he stood outside the door of the shop and made a fuss, saying, "Those things were left with you two months ago, and my master is prepared to pay you back both the original sum for which they were pawned and the interest; so how can you refuse to turn over the head ornaments and buckle to me? They are worth seventy or eighty taels of silver."

When Manager Fu Ming learned that P'ing-an had not returned home that night, he realized that he must have stolen the missing objects and sent people out to look everywhere for him, but they were unable to find him.

When the servant of the owner returned once again and made a fuss outside the door, Manager Fu suggested to Yüeh-niang that they should give him fifty taels of silver to settle the matter, but he refused to accept the offer, saying, "Those head ornaments are worth sixty taels of silver and the buckle, along with the precious stones and pearls with which they are inlaid, are worth another ten taels. So you should pay seventy taels of silver as compensation."

Manager Fu Ming offered to pay him an additional ten taels of silver, but he refused to accept it and insisted on continuing to wrangle with him.

Just as they continued to argue about it, someone showed up and reported, saying, "The page boy P'ing-an from your household stole the head ornaments in question and went off to the Southern Entertainment Quarter where he has been patronizing prostitutes. He has been arrested by Police Chief Wu Tien-en, who is currently holding him in detention. You ought to send someone as quickly as possible to identify the stolen goods."

When Wu Yüeh-niang heard that Wu Tien-en was now serving as a police chief, she recalled that he had originally been employed as a manager by their household, and she invited her elder brother Wu K'ai to come and consult with her about it.

They forthwith wrote out a claim certificate and sent Manager Fu Ming off with it, the next day, to retrieve the missing goods, saying to him:

"If the original objects are only recovered,

There will be no reason for further dispute;

or for anyone to continue farting around this way in front of our door."

Manager Fu Ming took the document with him and set out for the police office, expecting that Wu Tien-en, out of consideration for the fact that they had formerly been colleagues, would allow him to retrieve the head ornaments. He could hardly have anticipated that Wu Tien-en would, on the contrary, revile him as an old dog, and an old slave, order the lictors to drag him down for a beating, and strip off his clothing, so that his bare buttocks were exposed for what seemed like half a day.

Only then did he allow him to get up, before saying to him, "The page boy from your household has testified that your mistress, née Wu, has been carrying on an illicit affair with Tai-an. I have already reported this to the prefectural and district authorities and am planning to issue a warrant summoning her here to respond to his testimony. And yet, old dog bone that you are, you have the nerve to come here and attempt to retrieve the stolen goods."

After being reviled as a slave and an old dog a thousand, if not ten thousand times, Manager Fu Ming hastened home in a state of consternation as fast as he could go. Upon arriving there, he did not dare to conceal the truth of the matter but told Yüeh-niang, thus and so, all about it.

If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard this account, truly, it was just as though:

The eight-boned structure of her skull had been

split asunder;

Only to have poured into it half a bucketful

of icy snow.

She was so upset that her hands and feet became paralyzed, on top of which, she observed that a servant of the owner of the head ornaments had come back to the door, where he engaged her in:

A vituperative altercation,

saying, "Your household has lost track of the head ornaments and has not only failed to return the original objects but has also failed to pay anything in compensation, while tricking me into running back and forth time and again. One day you trick me into coming to pick up the objects, and another day you tell me to wait until you have recovered them. But truly, where do you expect to recover them from? How can you be so unreasonable?"

Manager Fu Ming did his best to placate him, saying, "If you will just have patience for a few days, we will recover the head ornaments for you. And if we fail to do so, we are willing to pay double their worth in compensation."

The servant said, "Wait until I report back to my master," and then went his way.

As for Yüeh-niang, she:

Felt worry piled upon worry, and
Her eyebrows remained contracted.

After sending a page boy to ask her elder brother Wu K'ai to come consult with her, she suggested to him that he should pull strings on her behalf by speaking to Wu Tien-en and persuading him to drop the case.

"I'm afraid he is unlikely to respond to any string pulling," responded Wu K'ai. "The only thing that may move him is a bribe."

"It is thanks to us that he obtained his official position in the first place," said Yüeh-niang. "We gave him a loan of a hundred taels of silver at the time, for which my husband would not even accept a promissory note; and now he is:

Requiting kindness with enmity."

"Sister," said Wu K'ai, "it is pointless to say that. From time immemorial, he is scarcely the only one to:

Forget favor and break faith."

"Brother," responded Yüeh-niang, "I can only rely on you to do your best to find a way of handling this. Give him several tens of taels if you must, in order to recover those head ornaments and return them to their owner: thus preventing any further wrangling over it."

She then proceeded to offer Wu K'ai a meal, before sending him on his way. When Yüeh-niang saw her elder brother to the gate, by fortunate coincidence, she caught sight of Auntie Hsüeh, who was carrying her box of trinkets and leading a young maidservant, as she passed by on the street.

Yüeh-niang called her to a halt and asked her, "Auntie Hsüeh, where are you headed? And why have you not come here to visit for so long?"

"Venerable Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "that's a fine way to talk. I've been extremely busy the last few days and have had too much to do. The young lady, formerly from our household, has sent jailers or servants to summon me several times, but I have been too busy to go."

"Just look at you, Auntie," said Yüeh-niang. "What nonsense you talk. Since when has she become a young lady?"

"Right now," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "she is no longer the young lady, but has been promoted to the status of principal wife."

"How has she become a principal wife?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Venerable Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "I guess you don't know about it yet. It was just her good luck that after she bore him a son, his first wife died, and His Honor the commandant moved her into the master suite and made her his legally recognized principal wife, superior in status to his secondary lady, Sun Erh-niang. He has purchased two wet nurses and four maidservants to wait upon her, in addition to which she is served by two former singing girls whom he has deflowered. If she wishes to punish any of them, she subjects them to the rod, and His Honor does not dare to interfere, not wishing to do anything that might anger her. The other day, for some unknown reason, she had Sun Hsüeh-o given a beating, plucked her hair out, and called for me in the middle of the night to take her away, after selling her to me for no more than eight taels of silver. At present, Sun Erh-niang has only one maidservant, named Ho-hua, to wait upon her, while Ch'un-mei has four or five, in addition to the two wet nurses, and still objects that she has too few. Sun Erh-niang doesn't dare to complain about this but merely addresses her as, 'Mistress this' and 'Mistress that,' all day long in order to placate her; and the other day, she said to me, 'Auntie Hsüeh, try to find another young maidservant to wait on me. I regret to say that the one I have isn't able to do much of anything except tend the stove.' Things are complicated in those quarters of hers. Today, while I was still asleep early in the morning, she sent a jailer over twice to summon me to her place as quickly as possible. She wanted me to supply her with a pair of ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays and inscribed with images of auspicious clouds, and a silver pin for holding her chignon in place, in the shape of nine phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks, and with pendants of green and red precious stones set in plaques of gold. She gave me the sum of five taels of silver for this purpose, but I have managed to misplace it somewhere and have not yet given her the pieces she ordered. When I go to see her, she is sure to give me a dressing down. Right now, I'm on the way to deliver this maidservant to Sun Erh-niang."

"Come back to the rear compound with me," said Yüeh-niang, "so I can have a look at that ornament with kingfisher feather inlays."

So saying, she escorted Auntie Hsüeh back to the parlor in the rear compound and offered her a seat. Auntie Hsüeh then opened her box of trinkets and showed the pieces in question to Yüeh-niang. They were, indeed, exquisitely crafted. The first item was about four fingers wide, which was enough to cover a fret, with its gold and turquoise hues setting each other off, its kingfisher feather inlays protruding, and its back plated with gold. The item with the nine phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks, and its gem-studded pendant plaques, was exceptionally well fashioned.

Auntie Hsüeh said, "This ornamental piece cost three taels and five mace of silver to make, while the other piece, inscribed with auspicious clouds, cost only one tael and five mace of silver, but I still haven't located the money she gave me."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said to Yüeh-niang, "The man who is trying to retrieve those pawned head ornaments has come back again and is out front making a fuss about it. He says that the owner cannot wait any longer to get them, and that if they are still not forthcoming tomorrow, he will hold Manager Fu Ming accountable and will take him off somewhere to settle the matter. Uncle Fu the Second is so upset at the prospect that he has gone home, and the servant of the owner has also departed after delivering his threats."

"What is that all about?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.

Yüeh-niang gave a long sigh and then told Auntie Hsüeh, thus and so, "That slave of ours, P'ing-an, absconded with a set of gold head ornaments and a gilded buckle that someone had deposited in our pawnshop and fled to a brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter outside the city where he patronized a pair of prostitutes. He has been arrested by the police chief Wu Tien-en and is being held in the lockup there. The owner has sent someone to redeem the pawned head ornaments, but they are unavailable, so he has been making a fuss in front of the gate. The police chief Wu Tien-en is malevolently trying to shake us down by not letting us retrieve the stolen objects, and threatening our manager with a beating, with an eye to extorting money from us. I have been unable to come up with a solution to the problem. Ever since my husband died:

Misfortunes and losses have befallen me,
and I have been taken advantage of by others. It is really hard to take."

As she spoke, tears fell profusely from her eyes.

"My Good Lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "There is a road open to you if you do not refuse to take it. If you will write a note to our young lady, I will also explain the situation to her, and she will get His Honor the commandant to issue an order to the police department, which should enable you to retrieve not just one set of head ornaments, but as many as ten, if need be."

"Commandant Chou Hsiu is a military officer," said Yüeh-niang. "I doubt if he has jurisdiction over the police department."

"Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "You may not know it yet, but the Emperor has recently issued an edict conferring a wide range of powers on Commandant Chou. He has the right to call the roll and issue commands to the personnel in charge of the local area, the rivers and canals, the troops and horses, and the stocks of money and grain throughout his jurisdiction. Moreover, the apprehension of bandits and felons both east and west of the Grand Canal is in his hands."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said, "If he does actually possess these powers, Auntie Hsüeh, I will indeed trouble you to convey my regards to Sister P'ang Ch'un-mei. Tell her that:

One guest does not trouble two hosts,
and ask her to put in a word on my behalf with His Honor Chou Hsiu, requesting that he try to retrieve this set of head ornaments from the police department for me. If you will do so, I will reward you with five taels of silver."

"My good Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "it is not money that motivates me. When I saw how distressed you were just now, I could hardly bear it. Get someone to write out a note for you. I don't need any tea but will go straight to the commandant's household and speak to the young lady about it. If I am successful, you can give me whatever you want. Even if I am unsuccessful, I will come back and report to you."

Yüeh-niang then told Hsiao-yü to provide a serving of tea for Auntie Hsüeh.

"It's getting late," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I don't need any tea. Just get one of your senior servants to write out a note for you, and I'll take it with me. You don't know how busy I am."

"I understand," said Yüeh-niang. "You've been out and about for half a day already. Have a pastry before you go."

Hsiao-yü then proceeded to set up a table, and lay out a serving of tea and pastries. Yüeh-niang kept her company as she drank her tea, and Auntie Hsüeh gave two pastries to the young maidservant she had with her.

"How old is this maidservant?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"She is just eleven this year," replied Auntie Hsüeh.

It was not long before Tai-an, in the front compound, finished writing the note; and Auntie Hsüeh, having finished her tea, tucked it into her sleeve, said good-bye to Yüeh-niang, and went out with her box of trinkets. After exiting the gate, and:

Rounding bends and turning corners,
she made her way straight to the commandant's residence.

Ch'un-mei was still lying on a heated k'ang, not having risen yet, when whom should she see but her senior maidservant Yüeh-kuei, who came in and announced, "Auntie Hsüeh has come to see you."

Ch'un-mei then told her junior maidservant Ts'ui-hua to open the casements, so that the sunshine brightly illuminated the gauze covered windows.

Upon coming inside, Auntie Hsüeh remarked, "Young Lady, I see that you haven't gotten up yet."

She then put down her box of trinkets, got down on her knees, and kowtowed to her.

"There's no need for any of that," said Ch'un-mei. "What are you kowtowing to me for?"

She then explained, "I've been feeling out of sorts and have gotten up later than usual today," and she went on to ask, "Have you brought those ornaments with inscribed auspicious clouds and nine phoenixes that you have had made for me, or not?"

"My Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "those two ornaments took quite a lot of trouble to make. It was only last night that I was able to pick them up from the jeweler's shop. I was planning to deliver them to you today but did not expect you to send a jailer after them."

She then took them out and handed them to Ch'un-mei to look over. Ch'un-mei felt that the ornament with the kingfisher feather inlays and inscribed auspicious clouds was not as striking as she would have liked but put them back in their cardboard box and handed them to Yüeh-kuei to put away.

She then ordered a serving of tea for Auntie Hsüeh to drink. Auntie Hsüeh then called in the young maidservant she had brought with her and told her to kowtow to the lady.

"Where is she from?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"The Second Lady has spoken to me several times," explained Auntie Hsüeh, "telling me that Ho-hua is only able to cook, and asking me to find another young girl for her, whom she can teach to do needlework. That is why I have brought this youngster with me. She is the daughter of a country family and is only eleven years old this year. As trainable material, with the proper discipline it should be possible to teach her to do whatever is needed."

"If you had found her a girl from the city," remarked Ch'un-mei, "she might have turned out to be cleverer. What do these country girls know? Just the other day, a certain Old Mother Chang tried to sell me two young maidservants from the countryside. One of them was a ten-year-old, and the other eleven; and their names were Sheng-chin and Huo-pao; but neither of them turned out to be any good. Their parents wanted five taels of silver for each of them and were waiting outside to collect the money. I told the go-between to tell their parents to let them stay overnight, so I could test them out, and see how they responded; and have them come back the next day to collect their silver. I insisted on keeping them overnight, and my maidservants, just as though they:

Didn't know any better,

gave them some pork-ball soup and rice gruel to eat. Early the next morning, my maidservants started to kick up a fuss, and I scolded them, saying, 'What are you making such a fuss about?' It turned out that Sheng-chin had befouled her bedding with shit, and that Huo-pao had pissed in her pants till they were so stiff with dried urine that they could hardly be removed. It made me want to laugh on the one hand but also gave me the creeps; and when Old Mother Chang came back, I had her take them away."

She then went on to inquire, "How much are you asking for this maidservant of yours?"

"Not much at all," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "Merely four taels of silver. Her father is planning to enlist in the army."

Ch'un-mei then said to Hai-t'ang, "Take her over to the Second Lady's room. We'll arrange to pay for her tomorrow."

She also said to Yüeh-kuei, "Bring that large flagon of Chin-hua wine, and pour some of it for Auntie Hsüeh in order to fend off the cold. And bring in a box of whatever pastries are available for her to eat. At this early hour in the morning it would never do to douse her with wine on an empty stomach."

"Sister Yüeh-kuei," said Auntie Hsüeh, "don't pour any wine for me until I've finished talking to your mistress. I've already had something to drink elsewhere."

"Tell me," said Ch'un-mei, "where have you been drinking?"

"Just now," said Auntie Hsüeh, "the First Lady detained me at her place and gave me something to eat and drink. She wept as she told me, thus and so, how the page boy P'ing-an has stolen a set of gold head ornaments that someone had left in the pawnshop, along with a gilded buckle, and run off to amuse himself by sleeping with prostitutes; only to end up being arrested by the local constable, taken to the police station, and forced to endure a beating in the squeezers. The original owner sent someone to retrieve the stolen objects and kicked up a fuss when he was unable to do so. She then sent Manager Fu Ming to try to recover the missing objects from the police station. The police chief, Wu Tien-en, formerly served as a manager in their household, and when her husband was still alive, he enabled him to gain his official position; but now he has turned against them ungratefully and subjected her page boy to the squeezers, in the hope of getting him to implicate her in some sort of misconduct. He not only refused to relinquish the stolen objects without being paid for them but also threatened Manager Fu Ming with a beating, which frightened him so that he is hiding out in his home. She asked me to come convey her respects to you. She doesn't know whether His Honor has any jurisdiction over the police station in question but hopes that you will take pity on her, since she is now all alone in the world, and ask His Honor if he can do anything about it. If he succeeds in recovering the stolen objects so she can return them to their original owner, the First Lady will come in person to express her thanks to you."

"Do you have a note explaining the situation with you?" asked Ch'un-mei. "It doesn't matter though; His Honor is out on duty right now, but when he comes home tonight, never fear, I will speak to him about it."

"I do have an explanatory note from her," said Auntie Hsüeh, as she pulled it out of her sleeve.

When Ch'un-mei had finished reading it, she casually placed it on the windowsill.

Before long, Yüeh-kuei brought in a tray with four dishes of delicacies, and, taking up a large silver goblet, proceeded to fill it to overflowing with wine, and present it to Auntie Hsüeh.

"I can't handle a thing as large as that," said Auntie Hsüeh.

"It's not as large as that thing of your husband's," Ch'un-mei said with a laugh. "Since you're able to handle that all right, why can't you handle this? No matter what, I want you to handle it for me. If you refuse, I'll tell Yüeh-kuei to hold your nose and pour it down your throat for me."

"You'd better let me have some pastries first," said Auntie Hsüeh, "in order to provide a lining for my stomach."

"Old Mother," responded Ch'un-mei, "all you do is tell lies. You just told me that you had been given something to eat where you came from, and now you claim that you need to line your stomach."

"The two pastries I had there," said Auntie Hsüeh, "were not enough to last until now."

"Auntie Hsüeh," said Yüeh-kuei, "if you will drink this large goblet of wine, I will give you some pastries to eat. Otherwise, my mistress will say I am of no use and is likely to give me a beating."

Auntie Hsüeh had no recourse but to let her pour the entire goblet of wine down her throat, which gave her the sensation that:

Her heart was hopping like a little fawn.

Ch'un-mei pursed her lips and told Hai-t'ang to pour out another goblet of wine and give it to her to drink.

Auntie Hsüeh pushed it aside and said, "My Good Lady, I can't drink another drop."

Hai-t'ang then addressed her, saying, "You managed to drink what Yüeh-kuei offered you. If you don't drink what I offer you, the mistress will beat me instead."

This threw Auntie Hsüeh into such a state of consternation that she got down on her knees, so her torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post.

"That will do," said Ch'un-mei. "Bring a pastry over for her to eat, so she can manage to get down the rest of the wine."

Yüeh-kuei did as directed, saying, "Auntie Hsüeh, no one is more considerate of you than I am. I have saved these corn flour pastries with rose-flavored stuffings for you to eat."

She then presented her with a large plateful of stuffed rose-flavored cream puff pastries.

Auntie Hsüeh ate only one of them, after which Ch'un-mei said to her, "You can tuck the rest into your sleeve and feed them to that cuckold of yours when you get home."

Auntie Hsüeh then drank the wine and endeavored to hide her embarrassment as she took the servings of smoked pork and salt-cured goose from the platter, wrapped them up, first in absorbent grass paper and then in cloth, and stuffed the package into her sleeve. Hai-t'ang obstinately insisted on getting her to drink another half goblet of wine. Only upon seeing that she was about to throw up did she desist and clear away the utensils.

Ch'un-mei then said to Auntie Hsüeh, "Come back to check on things tomorrow, and we will weigh out the silver for the young maidservant you brought with you."

She also sent Hai-t'ang to ask for Sun Erh-niang's opinion of her, and, upon returning, she reported, "She said she would like to keep the maidservant and requested that you would pay the asking price for her."

As Auntie Hsüeh was about to say farewell and go out the door, Ch'un-mei said to her, "Auntie, you must not persist in:

Pretending to be both deaf and dumb.

That pair of ornaments inscribed with auspicious clouds that you brought me is not well enough made. You should bring me a set of better ones to look at another day."

"I understand," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "My Lady, would you please have one of your maidservants accompany me, lest the dog should bite my leg."

Ch'un-mei laughed at this, saying, "Our dog knows what he is doing. He stops biting when he reaches the bone."

She then sent Lan-hua to escort Auntie Hsüeh as far as the postern gate.

To make a long story short, at sunset that day, Commandant Chou Hsiu came back from his round of inspection, accompanied by a squad of cavalry with their identifying insignia, carrying blue command standards, and followed by another contingent holding long spears with decorated handles. When he entered the rear hall, the attending maidservants took his official cap and outer garments, after which he went into the master suite to see Ch'un-mei and his young son and was:

Delighted in his heart,

as he sat down to join them. Yüeh-kuei and Hai-t'ang brought him a serving of tea, after which he recounted the events of his tour of inspection that day. Before long, a table was set up, and a meal was served; after which, the candles were lighted, goblets were brought out, and they proceeded to have a drink together.

Upon his asking if anything had happened that day, Ch'un-mei fetched the note and gave it to the commandant to read, saying, "It seems that over at Wu Yüeh-niang's place, thus and so, the page boy P'ing-an stole some head ornaments and has been arrested and incarcerated by the police chief Wu Tien-en, who has not allowed her to reclaim the stolen objects, and beaten the page boy in order to induce him to falsely accuse Yüeh-niang of engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an. In the hope of extorting money from her, he is threatening to forward the case to the prefectural and district authorities."

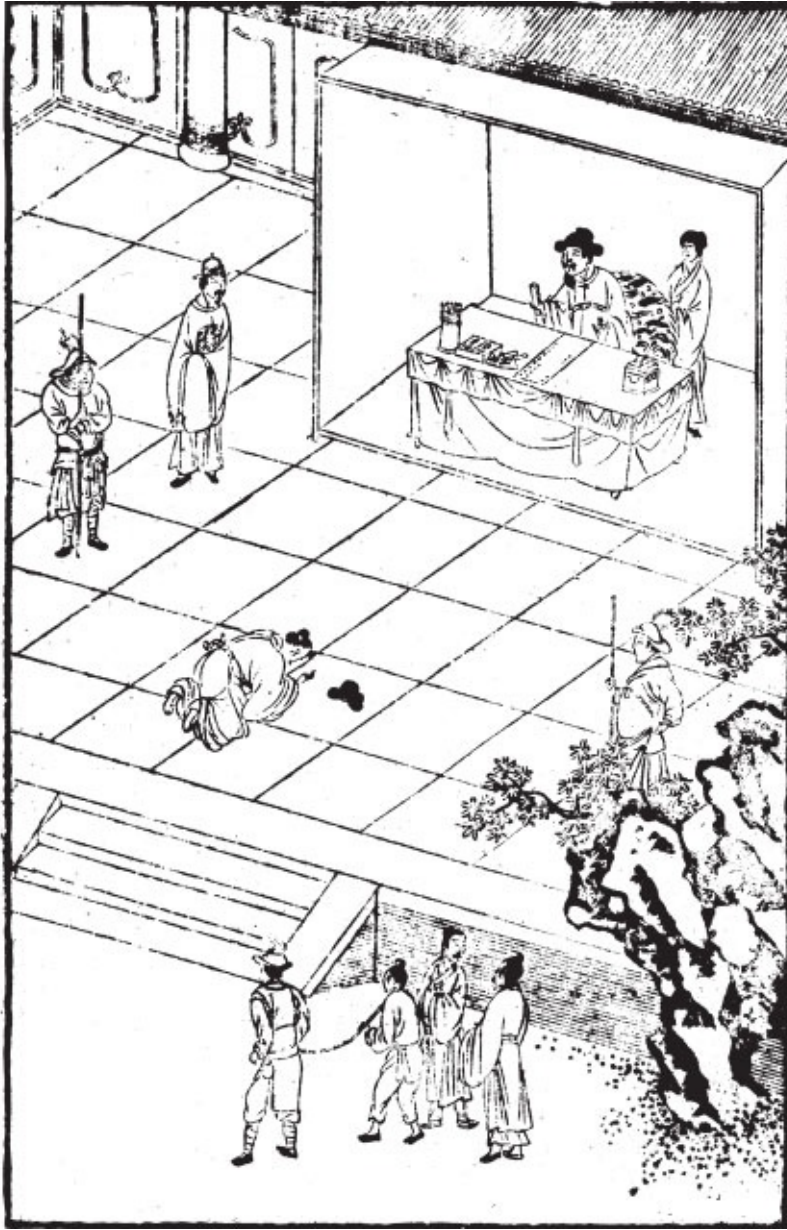
When the commandant had finished reading the note, he said, "This case falls within the jurisdiction of my office. How can he propose to forward it to the prefectural or district authorities? This rascal, Police Chief Wu Tien-en, is acting outrageously? I will issue a summons for him tomorrow and deal with him myself."

He then went on to say, "I have heard that this police chief Wu Tien-en used to work as a manager in their household. It was only because he was sent by his employer to deliver some gifts to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital that he was able to obtain this office. How can he do such an about-face and bring a false accusation against his former benefactors?"

"It is just as you say," remarked Ch'un-mei. "See what you can do to take care of the matter on her behalf tomorrow."

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, he sent a message to Wu Yüeh-niang telling her to draft a written deposition on the matter and have it delivered to him. He then made out a certified document in the courtroom, written on stationery with decorative borders, and placed it in an envelope. The document read: "The Office of the Regional Military Command of Shantung, with regard to a case of larceny, requests the appearance of the relevant police chief and the culprit before his court. Delivered by the inspectors Chang Sheng and Li An. The above request is mandatory."



Wu Tien-en Acts Treacherously and Suffers Disgrace

The two of them, thereupon, took the document with them and proceeded to go first to Wu Yüeh-niang's residence. Yüeh-niang treated them to wine and food and gave each of them a tael of silver as a reward for their efforts. Since Manager Fu Ming was still confined to his bed at home, Yüeh-niang's brother, Wu the Second, agreed to accompany them to the police station.

Police Chief Wu Tien-en, on seeing that P'ing-an had been incarcerated for two days without anyone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household offering to grease his palm about the situation, was in the very act of ordering a clerk to draft a document forwarding the case to the prefectural and district authorities, when the two emissaries from the office of the Regional Military Command showed up and delivered the certified document to him. When he saw that the inscription in red ink on the envelope indicated that both he and the culprit were ordered to appear before the commandant, and opened and read the enclosed deposition by Wu Yüeh-niang, he was thrown into a state of panic. Doing his best to placate Li An and Chang Sheng, he gave them each a tip of two taels of silver, wrote up a document about the case, and then took the accused with him as he made his way to the office of the Regional Military Command. Upon arriving there, he had to wait for what seemed like half a day before the commandant took his place on the bench, with soldiers and jailers lined up to either side, and ordered them to be brought before him.

Police Chief Wu Tien-en handed up the document he had drafted, and after the commandant had read it, he said, "This case is one that falls under the jurisdiction of this office. Why have you not forwarded it to me for a decision, but

chosen to procrastinate this way, no doubt in the hope of obtaining a bribe? It is clear that you are guilty of malfeasance."

Police Chief Wu Tien-en pleaded, "Your humble servant was just in the process of drafting a document to forward to Your Honor when your summons unexpectedly arrived."

"You dog of an official!" the commandant cried at him. "This conduct of yours is detestable. How high an official are you to try to manipulate the law this way, in defiance of your superiors? I have been commissioned by the Emperor himself to protect this territory, apprehend thieves and bandits, command the military forces, and oversee the canals and waterways. My jurisdiction over these matters is clearly established. How can you feel entitled to arrest a suspect without reporting it to higher authorities, and have the culprit tortured and beaten in the endeavor to get him to falsely implicate innocent parties? It is obvious that you are guilty of malfeasance."

When Police Chief Wu Tien-en heard this accusation, he tore off his official cap and proceeded to kowtow before him at the foot of the steps.

"I really ought to prosecute you, you dog of an official," said the commandant, "but I will let you off this once. If you commit the same offense in the future, however, I will see to it that you are indicted and arraigned."

He then had P'ing-an brought before him and said, "You slave, you are not only guilty of stealing objects but have also given false evidence implicating your employer. If every slave were like you, people would not dare to employ servants."

Turning to his attendants, he said, "Give him thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo; and seal up the stolen objects so that their original owner can send someone to repossess them."

He then called Wu the Second before him and gave him a receipt entitling him to take custody of the objects in question, and gave a card to Chang Sheng to take back to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, indicating that he had performed the favor that had been asked of him. Wu Yüeh-niang gave Chang Sheng some wine and something to eat and rewarded him with a tael of silver, after which he went back to report to Commandant Chou Hsiu and Ch'un-mei.

Police Chief Wu Tien-en not only had arrested P'ing-an in vain but had lost quite a few taels of silver for his pains. Wu Yüeh-niang saw to it that the head ornaments and the buckle were returned to their owner, who recognized them as his original objects and took them away without saying a word. When Manager Fu Ming had arrived home, he came down with an acute intestinal fever and was bedridden for seven days when, because it was not properly treated:

Alas and alack,

he died. When Yüeh-niang realized how much trouble it had caused her, she directed that the pawnshop should accept the repayment and redemption of property that had already been pawned but should not pay out anything in return for pawned objects in the future. She merely had Wu the Second and Tai-an continue to operate the wholesale pharmaceutical shop at the front of their property and employed whatever proceeds were made from day to day to cover her household expenses. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.

One day, Wu Yüeh-niang summoned Auntie Hsüeh and offered her three taels of silver as a reward for her successful intervention.

"I don't want it," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "I fear that if word of it gets to the commandant's household, the young mistress will think ill of me."

"I am much indebted to you," responded Yüeh-niang, "but:

Heaven would hardly condone letting you go
unrewarded for your pains.

I will not mention it to her the next time I see her, that's all."

Thereupon, she bought four platters of delicacies, along with a freshly slaughtered pig, a jug of southern wine, and a bolt of satin fabric, and entrusted them to Auntie Hsüeh to deliver to the commandant's household as an expression of her thanks to Ch'un-mei. Tai-an donned a black silk jacket, put the card with the list of gifts into a gilt lacquer box, and accompanied her on her way to see Ch'un-mei. Upon arriving there, Auntie Hsüeh led him into the rear hall where Ch'un-mei came out, wearing a gilt-ridged cap, gold hairpins and combs, and the ornament with its nine phoenixes on her head, an embroidered jacket on her torso, and a brocade skirt, and accompanied on either side by the maidservants and wet nurses in her service. Tai-an promptly proceeded to kneel down on the floor and kowtow to her.

Ch'un-mei ordered a table to be set up and provided with tea and delicacies for Tai-an and then said to him, "What I did didn't amount to anything. Your mistress ought not to have done all this on my behalf. What need was there for her to take the trouble to send all these gifts to me? I am sure that my husband Commandant Chou will also refuse to accept them."

"My mistress says," responded Tai-an, "that the settlement of that problem caused by P'ing-an the other day was entirely owing to the efforts expended on her behalf by His Honor and Your Ladyship. This doesn't amount to anything. These:

Paltry and insignificant gifts,
are proffered to the two of you to dispense as you see fit."

"I do not feel right about accepting them," said Ch'un-mei.

"Venerable Lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "if you refuse to accept them, the sender will hold it against me."

Ch'un-mei then invited the commandant to come in and consult with her, after which, they agreed to accept the pig, the wine, and the delicacies, but to return the bolt of fabric. They then gave Tai-an a handkerchief and three mace of silver for his pains and also rewarded the bearer who had carried the gift box with two mace of silver.

Ch'un-mei then asked him, "How is your mistress's infant son doing?"

"The little boy is a very playful sort," responded Tai-an.

She then went on to ask, "Tai-an, when did you put up your hair and start wearing a hair net; and when did you and Hsiao-yü get married?"

"It was during the eighth month," replied Tai-an.

"When you get home," said Ch'un-mei, "be sure to convey my greetings to your mistress, and tell her how grateful I am for her generous gifts. I would like to invite her to come by for a visit, but the commandant is going to leave on another tour of inspection sometime soon. Next year, during the first month, on her son's birthday, I intend to come pay her a visit."

"If you plan to do so," said Tai-an, "I will not only tell my mistress about it when I get home but also offer to come escort you there when the day arrives."

When they had finished speaking, Tai-an prepared to leave, and Auntie Hsüeh said to him, "You go ahead. The mistress wishes to say something else to me."

Tai-an thereupon escorted the bearer of the gift box on the way home and, on seeing Yüeh-niang, told her, thus and so, "The commandant accepted only the pig, the wine, and the delicacies but has returned the bolt of fabric. Ch'un-mei invited me back to the rear compound, gave me a serving of tea and something to eat, asked how Hsiao-ko was doing, and how things were going in the household, rewarded me with a handkerchief and three mace of silver, and the carrier of the gift box with two mace of silver, and asked me to convey her greetings to you, and thank you for your generous gifts. Initially, she refused to accept any of the gifts, but Auntie Hsüeh and I finally persuaded her to accept the delicacies, the pig, and the wine, although she insisted on my bringing back the bolt of fabric. She would have invited you to come by for a visit, but the commandant is due to set out on another tour of inspection in a few days. Next year, during the first month, on Hsiao-ko's birthday, she plans to come here for a visit."

He then went on to explain, "She occupies the master suite of five rooms; was wearing a brocade skirt, an embroidered jacket, and a gilt-ridged cap; looks plumper than she used to; and is waited on by a considerable number of maidservants and wet nurses."

"Did she really say that she is planning to come visit us next year?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"She really did say just that," responded Tai-an.

"When the day comes," said Yüeh-niang, "we will have to send someone to escort her here."

She then went on to ask, "Why has Auntie Hsüeh not appeared?"

"When I prepared to leave," said Tai-an, "she was still seated there engaged in conversation and told me to go on without her."

From this time forth, the two households resumed their social relations without interruption. Truly:

The way of the world responds to cold and warmth;

Human prestige is thereby enhanced or diminished.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Success and failure, flourishing and decay,
are controlled by fate;
Everything is determined by the year, month,
day, and hour of birth.
Those who harbor ambition in their breasts
may achieve their goals;
But those whose purses are devoid of money
cannot depend on talent.⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

CH'UN-MEI ENJOYS VISITING THE POOLS AND PAVILIONS OF HER OLD HOME; COMMANDANT CHOU HSIU SENDS CHANG SHENG TO LOOK FOR CH'EN CHING-CHI

Households that are solid without but hollow within
must cover their deficiencies;
In entertaining guests and responding to associates
their expenditures are great.
When one's horses have died and one's servants fled
it is hard to host a banquet;
When towers are foundering and buildings collapsing
pipes and voices are silenced.
One's leased farmland and rented commercial outlets
must revert to their owners;
One's collections of antiques, or gold and jewelry,
are given to female peddlers.
If one wishes to borrow something temporarily from
some well-to-do household;
How can one ever hope to open one's mouth without
suffering embarrassment?

THE STORY GOES that:

Light and darkness alternate swiftly;

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles,

and, before long, it was the twenty-first day of the first month of the following year. Ch'un-mei, after consulting with Commandant Chou Hsiu, prepared a sacrificial table, replete with four kinds of preserved fruit, and a jug of southern wine, and sent their servant Chou Jen to deliver it to Wu Yüeh-niang. In the first place, it was the third anniversary of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; and in the second place, it was Hsiao-ko's birthday. Yüeh-niang accepted the gifts and rewarded Chou Jen with a handkerchief and three mace of silver; after which, she hastened to arrange for Tai-an to don his black livery and deliver an invitation to Ch'un-mei to come pay her a visit. The invitation read as follows:

Deeply moved by your bountiful gifts, our humble household has hastily prepared a meager potation as a deferential compensation for your generous largess. It is our ardent wish that you will deign to mount your elegant equipage and condescend to pay us a visit. Our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.
Respectfully indited by the lady, née Wu, of the Hsi-men household and addressed to the dressing table of the virtuous and venerable consort of His Honor Chou Hsiu.

When Ch'un-mei had read the invitation, she waited until noon before setting out. When she did so:

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,

including gold phoenixes, hairpins and combs, and pearl earrings; her torso was clad in a full-sleeved scarlet robe, decorated with a motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*, over a skirt of kingfisher-blue variegated brocade, from which suspended jade pendants tinkled, and which was secured with a gold girdle; while on her feet she wore shoes of scarlet embroidery with high white satin heels. She rode in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers and invested with a black satin gold lamé canopy, escorted by soldiers holding rattan rods who shouted to clear the way, accompanied by servants and attendants carrying her dressing case, and closely followed by two smaller sedan chairs for her maidservants.

Wu Yüeh-niang had invited Sister-in-law Wu to join her and had also engaged the services of two singing girls to play their instruments and sing for the entertainment of her guest. Upon hearing that Ch'un-mei had arrived, Yüeh-niang, likewise, dressed herself elaborately in mourning garments in order to receive her. She wore a five-ridged cap with a number of gold and turquoise head ornaments on her head, two pearl earrings dangled beside her ears, and the two sides of her collar were clasped together with a gold chatelaine. On her torso she wore a white satin jacket, over a long trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue satin brocade; and on her feet she wore a pair of jade-colored satin high-heeled shoes. With Sister-in-law Wu, she then went out to the reception hall in the front compound to receive her guest.

Ch'un-mei's large sedan chair was carried all the way to the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds before she alighted from it and proceeded to the reception hall to proffer her greetings, with her servants accompanying her on either side. Upon arriving there, she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.

Yüeh-niang promptly kowtowed in return, saying hastily, "The other day I put you to a great deal of trouble on my behalf, and yet you would not even accept the bolt of course fabric I offered you.

And now, deeply moved by your bountiful gift of a sacrificial table:

I will never be able to thank you enough."

"You embarrass me," protested Ch'un-mei. "My husband has nothing better than these paltry gifts to offer.

They are no more than tokens of our esteem.

I have wanted since some time ago to invite you over for a visit, but my husband was about to leave on a tour of inspection, so I failed to do so."

"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "when is your birthday? When the day comes, I would like to buy some presents and come to see you."

"My birthday is on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month," responded Ch'un-mei.

"I will be sure to come visit you that day," said Yüeh-niang.

When the two of them had finished with these amenities, and Ch'un-mei had accepted two obeisances from her, she insisted that Yüeh-niang should stand up; after which she proceeded to kowtow to Sister-in-law Wu, who likewise returned the courtesy.

"Sister-in-law Wu," objected Ch'un-mei, "you ought not to do that," and she helped her up with one hand so she could accept her obeisance.

"Sister," responded Sister-in-law Wu:

"The present cannot be compared to the past.

You embarrass this old body to death."

After accepting only half an obeisance from Ch'un-mei, she conducted her to the seat of honor. Yüeh-niang and her sister-in-law then sat down to keep her company in their positions as hosts. The servants' wives, the maidservants, and the wet nurse then came in to pay their respects to their visitor, and Ch'un-mei observed that the wet nurse Ju-i was carrying Hsiao-ko in her arms.

"Little Brother," said Yüeh-niang, "won't you come and kowtow to Sister Ch'un-mei, in order to thank her for coming to celebrate your birthday today?"

Hsiao-ko actually climbed off Ju-i's lap and went over to bow to Ch'un-mei.

"A fine little rascal you are," remarked Yüeh-niang, "refusing to kowtow to our sister, but merely offering her a bow."

Ch'un-mei responded by hurriedly pulling out of her sleeve a brocade handkerchief, as well as a gold brooch decorated with the eight auspicious symbols, which she had them attach to his cap.

"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "I have put you to even further trouble," and she bowed to her in gratitude.

After this, Hsiao-yü and the wet nurse Ju-i came forward and kowtowed to her. Ch'un-mei responded by giving Hsiao-yü a gold-headed hairpin, and Ju-i a pair of silver flower ornaments.

"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "you may not know it yet, but I have given our wet nurse to Lai-hsing as his wife. Lai-hsing's former wife Hui-hsiu became ill and died."

"She has always hoped with all her heart to remain in this household," remarked Ch'un-mei, "so that is appropriate."

A maidservant then brought in a serving of tea, and after they had consumed it, Yüeh-niang said, "Sister, please come back and sit in my parlor in the rear compound. It is cold in this reception hall."

When Ch'un-mei arrived in the rear compound, the first thing she saw was Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, before which lamps and candles had been lit, and the sacrificial table had been set up. Ch'un-mei burned some paper money before it and shed a few tears; after which, standing screens were placed around the company, the charcoal in the brazier was ignited, an Eight Immortals table was set up, and the tea service was laid out. This consisted of deftly prepared steamed shortcake, rare sweets, mouth-watering delicacies, and exotic fruits, in saucers with incised gold ornamentation, with ivory chopsticks, and high-grade tender leaf tea, served in snow-white cups. Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu kept Ch'un-mei company as she enjoyed her tea, after which, they led her into the interior of the master suite to change her clothes. When she had taken off her outer gown, the servants' wives who had accompanied her opened the dressing case she had brought with her, and she changed into a green jacket of patterned brocade, over a skirt of lilac-colored brocade, before sitting down with her hosts in Yüeh-niang's room, and chatting for a while.

"How is your young son doing?" asked Yüeh-niang. "Why didn't you bring him with you today?"

"I would have brought him with me," responded Ch'un-mei, "so he could kowtow to you; but his father pointed out that the weather is frigid and was afraid that he might catch a cold. He doesn't want to stay in his quarters but likes to have the servant on duty take him out to the courtroom, or carry him outside. The last few days he has been crying a great deal, but I don't know why."

"Doesn't he miss you when you are away?" inquired Yüeh-niang.

"Whatever happens," said Ch'un-mei, "he has two wet nurses who take turns looking after him."

"His Honor Chou Hsiu is well along in years," said Yüeh-niang, "and must be very pleased that you have borne him this little son. It is also your good fortune as a woman. I have heard that his secondary consort Sun Erh-niang has also borne him a daughter. How old is she now?"

"That child of Sun Erh-niang's is called Yü-chieh," responded Ch'un-mei, "and she will be four years old on her next birthday. This child of mine is called Chin-ko."

"I have heard," said Yüeh-niang, "that His Honor also has two other concubines at his disposal."

"Those two are really only maidservants who are learning to sing," said Ch'un-mei. "They are merely fifteen or sixteen years old and are constantly up to mischief."

"Does His Honor bother to sleep with them very often?" asked Yüeh-niang. "My Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "he hardly has the time to do so. He is:

Usually abroad, and
Seldom at home.

At the present time, all over the realm, there have been:

Outbreaks of thieves and bandits;¹

and he has been ordered by imperial edict to be responsible for many things, including the protection of the territory within his jurisdiction, the policing of the canals and waterways, the arrest of thieves and bandits, and the training of infantry and cavalry. Consequently, he is constantly going out on tours of inspection and is utterly exhausted."

When they had finished speaking, Hsiao-yü brought in a serving of tea for them to drink.

Ch'un-mei then said to Yüeh-niang, "My Lady, would you please take me for a tour of my former mistress's quarters in the garden, beneath the artificial hill."

"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "the artificial hill and the garden are no longer the artificial hill and the garden that they used to be. Ever since my husband passed away, there has been no one to look after them, and they have been allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation. The stone markers have fallen over and the trees have died. Without a reason for doing so, I don't go there anymore."

"It doesn't matter," said Ch'un-mei. "I'd just like to go and take a look at my former mistress's quarters."

Yüeh-niang was unable to dissuade her and felt compelled to send Hsiao-yü to go fetch the keys to the garden gate and the gate of the grotto underneath the artificial hill. When the gates had been opened, she and Sister-in-law Wu accompanied Ch'un-mei for a tour of the garden, where they lingered for what seemed like half a day. Behold:

The encircling walls were tumbling down;
The terraces and kiosks were collapsing.
The painted walls to either side were
covered with green moss;
The floriate tiles on the ground were
hidden by verdant grass.
The rock formations before the hill,
Had been so damaged that they no longer
looked impressive;
The summer bedsteads in the pavilions,
Had been leaked on until their frames
had become wobbly.
The door of the rock grotto was
covered with cobwebs;
The water in the fishponds was
swarming with frogs.
Foxes frequently elected to sleep in the
Cloud Repose Pavilion;
Squirrels scampered back and forth in the
Hidden Spring Grotto.



Ch'un-mei Visits the Garden of Her Former Home

One suspected that for years it had not
 been visited by humans;
 But it was obvious that all day long it
 was frequented by clouds.²

After looking around for a while, Ch'un-mei made her way into the former quarters of Li P'ing-erh, where she saw that the second floor was littered with broken-down furniture, the rooms on the ground floor were locked, and the ground in the yard was covered with a tangle of uncultivated grass. Only then did she venture into her former mistress P'an Chin-lien's quarters, where she found that the second floor was still stocked with pharmaceuticals and incense, while the ground floor had only two clothes cabinets and did not even have a bed.

She then asked Hsiao-yü, "What has become of that bed of my mistress's? Why do I not see it?"

"When the Third Lady remarried," said Hsiao-yü, "she took it with her."

Yüeh-niang then came forward to explain the situation, saying, "When Father was still alive, he took that bed with retractable steps that the Third Lady had brought with her as part of her dowry and gave it to Hsi-men Ta-chieh when she married into the Ch'en family. Later, when the Third Lady remarried, I let her have your mistress's bed to take with her."

"I have heard," said Ch'un-mei, "that when you learned of Hsi-men Ta-chieh's death, you had that bed brought back to your place."

"As for that bed," said Yüeh-niang, "I was short of money and sold it for a mere eight taels of silver, which I had to

spend on the lictors from the district yamen."

Upon hearing this, Ch'un-mei nodded her head and could not prevent her starry eyes from feeling sour.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but

In her heart she thought to herself,

"It was the disposition of my mistress to:

Contend for supremacy without conceding defeat,

and she made a point of urging her husband to buy that bed for her. I had really hoped that I might be able to acquire this bed of hers as a souvenir, but it has unexpectedly fallen into someone else's hands."

Unable to control her distress, she asked Yüeh-niang, "What has become of that inlaid mother-of pearl bed of the Sixth Lady's?"

"It's a long story,"

responded Yüeh-niang. "Ever since my husband passed away, every day:

There are merely expenditures,

Without any sources of income.

As the saying goes:

If a family lacks a means of subsistence,

Even bushels of gold will not sustain it.

Being short of money, I had it taken away to be sold."

"How much did you sell it for?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"I only got thirty-five taels of silver for it," responded Yüeh-niang.

"It's too bad," remarked Ch'un-mei. "That bed, I remember Father's saying, originally cost more than sixty taels of silver; and now it has been sold for so much less. If I had only known that you were getting rid of it, I would have been willing to pay you thirty or forty taels of silver for it. I would have really liked to have it."

"My good Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "no matter how proficient people may be:

They cannot foresee future developments."

When they had sighed over this for what seemed like half a day, whom should they see but the servant Chou Jen from Chou Hsiu's household, who came to fetch Ch'un-mei, saying, "Mistress, His Honor would like you to return home as soon as possible. Your son has been crying after you."

Ch'un-mei promptly agreed to return to the rear compound, and Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to lock the garden gate, after which she accompanied her back to the parlor in the master suite, where already:

Screens displayed their peacocks' tails,

Curtains showed off their mermaid silks,

a feast had been laid out, and two singing girls stood by, with their silver psalteries and balloon guitars, to play and sing for the company. Yüeh-niang proceeded to serve the wine and preside over the feast, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Ch'un-mei was ushered to the seat of honor but refused to occupy it by herself, insisting that Sister-in-law Wu share it with her. Yüeh-niang took her place as hostess and served the wine, as soup and rice, along with other delicacies, were laid before them, and Ch'un-mei directed her servant Chou Jen to reward the chef with three mace of silver. Words are inadequate to describe the scene:

Platters are piled with exotic viands,

And wine overflows with golden ripples.

Thereupon, what with:

The raising of glasses and passing of cups,

they continued drinking until the sun was about to set.

What should they see at this juncture but another servant from Chou Hsiu's household, who came with a lantern to escort Ch'un-mei on her way home. Yüeh-niang, however, would not let her go and ordered the two singing girls to kneel before her and play their instruments and sing, as a means of encouraging her to continue drinking.

"Select a good song," she told them, "with which to show your respect for Mistress Chou."

She also had Hsiao-yü pour out a large goblet of wine and place it before her.

Urging Ch'un-mei to drink, she said, "Sister, choose one of your favorite songs, and have the two of them perform it for you as you enjoy your wine."

"My Lady, responded Ch'un-mei, "I ought not to drink any more. I fear that my child is crying for me at home."

"Even if your little boy may be crying for you," said Yüeh-niang, "after all, his wet nurses are at hand to look after him. It's early enough yet, and I know you've got no mean capacity for drink."

Ch'un-mei then asked the two singing girls, "What are your names, and whose establishments are you from?"

The two of them knelt down before her and said, "One of us is the younger sister of Han Chin-ch'uan and is named Han Yü-ch'uan; while the other is the niece of Cheng Ai-hsiang and is named Cheng Chiao-erh."

"Can you sing any songs to the tune 'Reluctant to Paint Her Eyebrows?'" asked Ch'un-mei.

"If Mistress would like us to," responded Han Yü-ch'uan, "we can both do so."

"Since the two of you can sing what she has requested," said Yüeh-niang, "let us pour out some more wine for Mistress Chou to enjoy as the two of you sing for her."

Hsiao-yü, who was standing to one side, promptly poured out more wine, while the two singing girls, one of them

playing the psaltery, and the other the balloon guitar, proceeded to sing:

My lover, when can I ever cease
to care for you?
Having endured the spring, it has
now come to autumn.
Who is there who understands what
is in my heart?
Heaven!
You have caused me to become thin
and emaciated.
Upon hearing anything of you, my
two eyes shed tears.
Ever since the beginning, we have
shared our desires.
Who would have thought you could
heartlessly abandon me?

When Ch'un-mei had drunk her wine, Yüeh-niang told Cheng Chiao-erh to pour another cup for her, at which Ch'un-mei said, "Venerable Lady, you must keep me company with another cup for yourself."

Thereupon, both of their cups were filled to the brim, and the two singing girls then continued to sing:

My lover, all on your account I am
losing my allure.
Magpies are crying before the eaves,³
unwilling to stop.
There is no call for the deadly tone
of their lively cries.
Heaven!
Nevertheless, they serve to stir up
my dormant feelings;
Causing such desolation that my
two eyes shed tears.
Ever since he elected to go his way,⁴
I can't forget him.
Who would have thought you could betray
my love and abandon me?

"My Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "you should get your sister-in-law to drink a cup of wine."

"My sister-in-law is not much of a drinker," responded Yüeh-niang. "But I'll have her down a small cup to keep you company."

She then said to Hsiao-yü, "Pour out a small cup of wine for my sister-in-law."

The two singing girls then continued to sing:

My lover, on your account I am suffering from
a bout of depression.
I long for you as I sit, yearn for you as I walk,
and sorrow both day and night.
My fragrant flesh has become emaciated,⁵
and my geniality has declined.
Heaven!
I long to see you, but I am
unable to do so,
Which causes me such grief that my
two eyes shed tears.
Originally we were inseparably attached
to each other.
Who would have thought that this time
you could abandon me?

At this juncture, Ch'un-mei saw that Hsiao-yü was standing in front of her, and proceeded to pour out a large cup of wine for her to drink.

"Sister," remarked Yüeh-niang, "she can't handle it."

"My Lady," responded Ch'un-mei, "she can handle two or three cups. Have I not enjoyed drinking with her when I was a member of your household?"

Thereupon, having poured out the wine, she urged Hsiao-yü to drink it. The two singing girls then continued to sing:

My lover, on your account I am suffering
from idle grief.
As I lie on the pillow of my sickbed,
it never seems to end.
With a breastful of sorrow, I cannot help
puckering my eyebrows.
Heaven!
Though I try to forget, my memories
always return.
Upon the sides of my cheeks, my
two eyes shed tears.
Originally the two of us were
indivisibly united.
Who would have thought that for over a year
you would opt to abandon me?

Gentle reader, take note: At this juncture, why did Ch'un-mei choose to have the singing girls perform this particular set of songs? For some time she had been preoccupied by the thought of Ch'en Ching-chi, who was still at large, so that:

There was no way for them to get together.⁶
The seeds of passion and sprouts of ardor,
Inevitably have an effect on the feelings,
And are commonly given melodic expression.

She had also observed that the two singing girls performed sweetly and cleverly and was:

Delighted in her heart,

by the way they waited upon her assiduously, addressing her as "Mistress this," and "Mistress that."

She therefore summoned her servant Chou Jen and had him take out a pair of gift packets containing two mace of silver apiece and awarded one to each of them. The two singing girls responded by putting aside their musical instruments, and kowtowing to her:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
in order to express their gratitude for her largess.

In a little while, Ch'un-mei got up to leave, and Yüeh-niang was unable to persuade her to stay any longer. Accompanied by her attendants, bearing lanterns, she said good-bye, went out the gate, and got into her large sedan chair. The servants' wives who had come with her also got into their smaller sedan chairs, and they went their way, with four lanterns in front and behind them, and with soldiers shouting to clear the way. Truly:

When fortune comes, even the crudest iron
looks shiny;
When luck departs, even the brightest gold
lacks luster.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Daubing her lips with crimson rouge, she
flaunts her jadelike beauty;
Like the phoenix flying down in response
to the playing of the flute.
In front of the hall the speckled bamboo
blinds are rolled up high;
Revealing the swallows as they return to
reoccupy their former nests.

To resume our story, after coming home from her visit to Wu Yüeh-niang's residence, Ch'un-mei longed to see Ch'en Ching-chi but did not know where he had gone. All day long she took to her bed and was not in the best of moods.

Upon finding out what was bothering her, the commandant said, "I imagine you must be worrying that your cousin:

Has not been able to find a place for himself."⁷

He then called in Chang Sheng and Li An and admonished them, saying, "I entrusted you some time ago with the task of locating the whereabouts of your mistress's cousin. Why have you failed to exert yourselves in order to find him?"

"We went looking for him all over the place some time ago," the two of them responded, "but were unable to find him. We have already reported this to our mistress."

"I will set you a time limit of five days," the commandant said. "If you fail to locate him during that period, you will have to answer for it."

Chang Sheng and Li An, upon receiving this command, wore worried expressions as they proceeded conscientiously to:

Reconnoiter the streets and explore the alleys,⁸
looking everywhere for him. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.

To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi had been beaten and let go from the commandant's yamen, he intended to return to the Yen-kung Temple, but someone told him, "Your master Abbot Jen, upon hearing that you had been sleeping with a prostitute and had been beaten up and taken to the commandant's yamen, went to check the contents of his strongbox and found it to be empty, which gave him such a shock that, later that night, he passed away. If you have the nerve to venture into the temple, his disciples are likely to kill you."

Ch'en Ching-chi was frightened by this and did not dare to enter the temple. He also did not have the face to go once again to appeal to the elderly Layman of Apricot Village, Wang Hsüan. By day, he drifted about scrounging for whatever he could pick up, and at night, he sought refuge in a homeless shelter.

One day, it was one of those occasions when:

Something was destined to happen.

Ch'en Ching-chi was standing in the street when he caught sight of the Iron Fingernail, Yang the Elder. He was wearing a new silk cap on his head, a white satin jacket on his torso over an undergown of jet-black damask, aloeswood-colored stockings, and a pair of shiny white loafers, and was riding on a donkey with ornate silver trim on the saddle and bridle, as he came down the street, with a page boy in attendance.

Perceiving that it was Yang Kuang-yen, Ch'en Ching-chi stepped forward, took hold of the donkey's bit with his hand, and addressed him, saying, "Brother Yang the Elder, it is some time since we have seen each other. The two of us were friends and went down river together to purchase piece goods for our business. But, while our boat was docked at Ch'ing-chiang P'u, I made a side trip to Yen-chou prefecture to visit a relative and was entrapped and taken to court. But you did

not wait for me to return and absconded to who knows where with half a boatload of my goods. When I went to your house to ask after you, with the best of intentions, your younger brother Yang Erh-feng scratched open the skin on his head with a shard of tile and chased me all the way home, where he pounded on my gate. As a result, today, I have been reduced to the point of being:

As poor as though I have been utterly cleaned out,
while you are able to swagger about and show off your wealth."

When Yang the Elder saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had been reduced to beggary, he laughed disdainfully, saying, "It's just my luck on this occasion to venture outside only to encounter a pestilential ghost. You lousy death-defying starveling of a beggar! Where on earth would the likes of you get half a boatload of goods for me to abscond with? If you don't let go of the bit, I'll subject you to a good whipping with my riding crop."

"At present," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "I am impoverished, while you are loaded with silver. Give me something to sustain me or I will take you to court."

When Yang the Elder saw that he would not let go of the bit, he jumped off his donkey and gave him a few strokes with his whip, while shouting to his page boy, "Drag this death-defying beggar aside for me."

The page boy, exerting all his strength, managed to push Ch'en Ching-chi onto the ground, whereupon, Yang the Elder stepped up and gave him a number of kicks with his foot, until he started to howl outlandishly. In no time at all, they were surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. At this point, a man emerged from the sidelines, who wore a high hat on his head, held in place with a kerchief, and was carelessly draped in a purple jacket, over a white cotton tunic. His two bare feet were clad in rush sandals. He had sunken eyes, broomlike eyebrows, an oversized mouth, and a three-pointed beard. His countenance was adorned with:

Bulging lumps of purple flesh;
while his wrists were lined with:
Swollen rows of blood vessels;



Yang Kuang-yen Abuses Ch'en Ching-chi Brutishly

and he was stupefied with drink.

Raising his fists, he approached Yang the Elder and berated him, saying, "Brother, how can you be so unreasonable? He is only an impoverished youngster, so why are you bent on beating him this way? It has always been true that:

An angry fist does not strike a smiling face.

Moreover, he has done nothing to offend you. If you have the means to do so, give him something, out of consideration for your past relationship. If you lack the means, so be it. But there is no reason for you to continue beating him. It has always been true that:

When an injustice is witnessed on the road,
Someone will always try to shed light on it."

"You don't understand," responded Yang the Elder. "He falsely accuses me of absconding with half a boatload of his property. It is obvious that no one as impoverished as he is could have had half a boatload of property to begin with."

"I imagine," opined his interlocutor, "that he may originally have been the scion of a well-to-do family, who has since suffered the misfortune of becoming thus impoverished. Since you, Sir, are such a rich gentleman, I hope that you will comply with my request. If you have the means of doing so, give him something with which to support himself."

When Yang the Elder had heard him out, he actually unfastened the handkerchief in his sleeve, which contained an ingot worth four or five mace of silver, and handed it to Ch'en Ching-chi; after which he raised his hand in farewell to his

interlocutor, mounted his donkey, and went nonchalantly on his way.

When Ch'en Ching-chi scrambled to his feet and looked at the man in question, he saw that he was not a stranger, but was the beggar boss, known as the Flying Demon, Hou Lin, who was currently the foreman of a gang of construction workers, and with whom he had formerly shared a bed when he was living in the homeless shelter. At present, he was in charge of a gang of fifty workers, who were engaged in repair work on the sanctuary of the Buddhist monastery outside the south wall of the city known as the Shui-yüeh Ssu, or Water Moon Monastery, presided over by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh.

Taking Ch'en Ching-chi by the hand, Hou Lin addressed him, saying, "Brother, had it not been for the few words of protest I confronted him with, he would hardly have come up with those five mace of silver for you. Louse that he is, at least he knew when to concede. If he had refused to concede, for better or for worse, I would have given him a drubbing with my fists. Come along with me. Let's go to a wine shop and have a drink."

They then made their way to a small meat-eating wine shop, sat down at a table, and ordered the waiter to bring them four dishes to go with their drinks, and two large flagons of wine. Before long, after the waiter had wiped their table clean, he laid out a selection of appetizers on four platters and four saucers, and two large jugs of the olive wine that was in vogue at the time. They were not provided with small cups but with large porcelain goblets.

Hou Lin then turned to Ch'en Ching-chi and asked, "Brother, would you rather eat noodles or rice?"

"The noodles are boiled in hot water," explained the waiter, "and the rice is polished white rice."

"I'll take the noodles," said Ch'en Ching-chi.

Before long, enough boiled noodles to fill two or three bowls were placed on the table. Hou Lin ate only one bowl of them, and Ch'en Ching-chi ate the other two. Only after that did they begin to drink the wine.

"Brother," said Hou Lin to Ch'en Ching-chi, "today you can come with me and spend the night at the establishment where I am staying; and tomorrow I'll take you south of the city to the Water Moon Monastery, presided over by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh. Repairs are under way there to the sanctuary and the two corridors of residence halls, and I am in charge of the fifty workers employed on the project. If you come there, you will not be given any heavy work to do, but merely put to carrying a few baskets of soil. You will be counted as one of the workers and will earn four candareens of silver per day. I can rent space in a side building outside the monastery where the two of us can sleep at night and prepare food for ourselves. I will entrust the lock to you and put you in charge of the place. How would that be? It would surely be better than having to reside in the homeless shelter while ringing your bell and sounding your clapper in place of that beggar of a night watchman, and it would be more respectable to boot."

"If my brother is prepared to show such favor to me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I will be happy to accept. But I don't know how long this construction project is likely to last."

"It has only been going on for a month so far," responded Hou Lin, "and it may go on until the tenth month, or later, for all I know."

As the two of them talked together, what with:

First a cup for you,

Then a cup for me,

they managed to finish off the two large jugs of wine. The waiter calculated the bill to be one mace and three and a half candareens.

Ch'en Ching-chi offered to pay the tab and produced his ingot of silver to be weighed, but Hou Lin pushed it aside, saying, "You silly younger brother! Do you think I would let you pay for it? I've got the silver for it right here."

So saying, he pulled out his wallet and weighed out one mace and five candareens of silver for the manager, receiving one and a half candareens in change, which he tucked into his sleeve. He then leaned on Ch'en Ching-chi's shoulder as they made their way to the place where he was staying, and they spent the night together.

The two of them were both drunk, and during the night, Hou Lin enjoyed plucking the flower in Ch'en Ching-chi's rear courtyard all night long, exclaiming, "Dear brother! Dear daddy! Dear man! Dear father!" There were no endearments they did not lavish on each other.

Early the next morning, as he had promised, Hou Lin rented half of a side building outside the Water Moon Monastery south of the city, which was supplied with a heated k'ang and a wood-burning stove. He also bought all the cups, bowls, and other utensils that were needed. Later that morning, they reported for roll call at the construction site.

When the other workers saw that Ch'en Ching-chi was no more than twenty-three or twenty-four years old, and that he had a white face and was:

Bright-eyed and clean-cut,

they realized that he was a catamite of Hou Lin's and teased him outrageously.

One of them asked him, "Youngster, what is your name?"

Ch'en Ching-chi responded, "My name is Ch'en Ching-chi."

"If your name is Ch'en Ching-chi," the worker continued, "I guess you are accustomed to being squeezed into."⁹

Another worker remarked, "As young as you are, even if you go in for such things, it's a wonder you can accommodate a pole of that size."

Hou Lin responded to this by shouting at them to leave him alone, saying, "You crazy beggars, what are you teasing him for?"

He then proceeded to distribute spades and shovels, baskets and carrying poles, to the assembled workers, who went about their respective tasks; some of them carrying earth, some of them mixing mortar, and others working on the foundations.

It so happens that Abbot Hsiao-yüeh had appointed a Buddhist follower known as Yeh the Ascetic as the chef in

charge of cooking food for the workers on the construction project. This Yeh the Ascetic was about fifty years old and was blind in one eye. He was dressed in a long black gown, his feet were bare, and he wore a ragged woolen sash around his waist. He was incapable of reading the scriptures but was given to reciting the Buddha's name and was good at the physiognomic techniques of the Hemp-robed Master.¹⁰ People referred to him as Adept Yeh.

One day, after their morning work was finished, and the laborers had eaten their lunch, they were sitting, standing, or squatting about at their leisure, when they saw Ch'en Ching-chi come up and ask Yeh the Ascetic for some tea, to which he merely responded by looking him over from top to toe.

"Adept Yeh," one of the workers said to him, "this youngster is a newcomer. Why don't you physiognomize him?"

"Go ahead and physiognomize him," another said. "He looks like a catamite to me."

"I'd say he looks more like a hermaphrodite," said another.

Yeh the Ascetic asked him to step forward and looked him over for a while before saying:

"Your demeanor, I fear, is too tender,

as well as seductive;

Your seductive voice and tender nature

may prove your undoing.

If your demeanor is tender in old age

it invites trouble;

If your demeanor is tender when young

it will not endure.¹¹

You are bound to suffer because of the tenderness of your demeanor, though during your whole life it will prove attractive to women.

Throughout your eighth, eighteenth, and

twenty-eighth years,

It will show from the bridge of your nose

to the top of your hair.

Whether you make a living or not, you

will lose at both ends;

At thirty, you can't allow evil forces

to besiege your brow.¹²

Your glance may be captivating and your

brain be quick-witted;

You may attract people, though ignorant

of poetry and history.

Whatever you do, other people may find

you to be charming,

Since the falsehoods you manipulate are

made to seem true.¹³

Don't take offense at what I say, but during your entire life:

Your quick-wittedness and artfulness,

will induce women to help you succeed. How old are you this year?"

"I am twenty-three years old," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

"It is amazing that you survived the events of the year before last," said Adept Yeh. "The fact is that:

If the room between your eyebrows is too narrow,

Your progeny will perish and your wife will die;

If the facial area under your earlobes is murky,

Your kinfolk will die and your household perish.¹⁴

If your lips do not cover your teeth,¹⁵

You will always provoke altercations.

If your nose looks like a stove-door,

Your family wealth will be dispersed.¹⁶

During that year did you experience:

The verbal interchanges of a trial; and

The loss of your family and wealth?"

"I experienced all those things," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

"There is another thing," said Yeh the Ascetic. "The bridge of your nose ought not to be abbreviated. The Hemp-robed Master has two lines that state it very well:

If the bridge of your nose is abbreviated

you will soon be wiped out;

The wealth of your ancestors will be lost

and your family destroyed.¹⁷

During your early years, no matter how much wealth you inherited from your ancestors, once it came into your hands, you managed to squander it all.

If the upper segment of your face is short
and the lower segment long,¹⁸

it portends that you will have:

Many successes and many failures;¹⁹

and that you may spend all your money, and yet get it back.

But in the end:

Though you may manage to find a means
of supporting yourself;
It will end up like ice and frost when
exposed to the hot sun.²⁰

Be so good as to take a couple of steps for me to see.”

Ch'en Ching-chi took a couple of steps, as requested.

Yeh the Ascetic then went on to pronounce:

“If your head extends in front of your feet,
It portends that you may start out well
but end up impoverished.²¹

If your heels don't come down on the ground,
You may have to sell off your property

and move to another place,²²

since, during your lifetime, you have:

Failed to preserve your ancestral property.

In the future, you may be fated to have three wives. Have you already suffered the loss of a wife, or not?”

“I have already lost a wife,” responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

“You may still be fated to have three wives,” said Yeh the Ascetic. “After all:

Your face is as radiant as a peach blossom.

But you may have difficulty siring a son, since you are so:

Engrossed by the pleasures of wine and sex.²³

I fear, however, that there may be:

Misfortune lurking amidst your good fortune.

In their thirties, young men begin to lose their stamina and ought not to venture too often into the world of flowers and willows, but endeavor to moderate their desires.”

At this juncture, one of the workers interrupted him, saying, “Adept Yeh, you've got it all wrong. He is already playing the role of a wife to someone himself. What would he do with three wives?”

This had the effect of causing the rest of the company to fall all of a heap with laughter.

They then heard Abbot Hsiao-yüeh sounding his clapper, and the lot of them picked up their spades, shovels, baskets, and carrying poles and went back to work.

Under these conditions, Ch'en Ching-chi continued to work at the Water Moon Monastery for a month or so.

One day, during the middle decade of the third month, Ch'en Ching-chi, along with his fellow workers, had carried up a load of earth and was squatting at the foot of the wall by the door of the monastery, sunning himself, and picking the lice off his body, when he happened to see a man who was wearing a flat-topped cap, held in place with a hammered gold ring that floated at the back of his skull, who was dressed in a close-fitting black gown and a purple cummerbund over the belt around his waist, and whose feet were clad in long-legged boots. He rode astride a brown horse and carried a basket of fresh flowers in his hands.

Upon catching sight of Ch'en Ching-chi, he abruptly jumped off his horse, came forward, and made a deep obeisance, saying, “Uncle Ch'en, we have been searching everywhere for you without success, and it turns out that you are here.”

This gave Ch'en Ching-chi quite a start, and he promptly bowed in return, saying, “Brother, where have you come from?”

“I am Chang Sheng,” he responded, “a servant in the household of His Honor Chou Hsiu. Ever since he released you from the legal difficulties you were in and let you go, my mistress has not been feeling well, right up until the present time. His Honor sent me out to look everywhere for you, but I had no idea you were here. Had my mistress not sent me, this morning, to go to their country estate outside the city and bring her these herbaceous peonies, so that I had occasion to come by here, I would never have discovered your whereabouts. In the first place, this is an instance of your good fortune, venerable sir; and in the second place, it is lucky for me too. There is no reason for you to hesitate. Just get on my horse, and I will escort you to the commandant's residence.”

When the crowd of workers observed this, they could only:

Gaze at each other in astonishment,

not venturing to utter a word. Ch'en Ching-chi, thereupon, handed the key to the room they had been sharing to Hou Lin, mounted the horse, and set out for the commandant's residence, with Chang Sheng following closely behind him. Truly:

When one's lover achieves his desires while

in the prime of his youth;
There is no knowing where he will enjoy the
bright moon on this night.²⁴

There is a poem that testifies to this:

White jade is concealed within
coarse rock;
Yellow gold is buried beneath
filthy mud.
The day a prestigious person
picks one up;
Is like a ladder going to the
heavenly gates.²⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

CH'EN CHING-CHI PLAYS A ROLE IN THE COMMANDANT'S HOUSEHOLD; AUNTIE HSÜEH PEDDLES TRINKETS AND PROPOSES A MARRIAGE MATCH

In this world one has a role to play
for three score years and ten;
What need is there both day and night
to overtax one's spirits?
The affairs of this world in the end
all eventuate in nothing;
The fleeting luxury that beguiles the eye
is wont to prove unreal.
Poverty and want, wealth and distinction,
are allocated by Heaven;
Success and failure, flourishing and decay,
are but dust in a crack.
So why not let yourself go, enjoying
pleasures as they come;
Rather than waiting for the messenger
of death to seize you?¹

THE STORY GOES that when Ch'en Ching-chi arrived at Commandant Chou Hsiu's headquarters and dismounted, Chang Sheng preceded him inside to report his presence to Ch'un-mei. Ch'un-mei ordered that Ch'en Ching-chi should be taken to a duty room in the front of the compound and given a bath in a tub of fragrant water, so that his body would be washed clean. She also sent one of the wet nurses to take out a bundle of new clothes, a pair of boots, and a cap for him to change into. Chang Sheng took the tattered old garments that he had been wearing, tied them up into a bundle, and hung it up in the duty room, before reporting back to Ch'un-mei. At the time, the commandant had not yet retired from the courtroom.

Ch'un-mei then invited Ch'en Ching-chi into the reception hall at the rear of the compound, where she adorned herself elegantly before coming out to greet him.

Upon entering the door, Ch'en Ching-chi went up to Ch'un-mei and set out to perform:

Four brace makes eight kowtows,
saying, "Sister, pray accept my homage."

Ch'un-mei only allowed him to perform half an obeisance, after which, they sat down facing each other and proceeded to talk over the weather, and the events that had befallen them since they were separated, which led them both to:

Shed tears from their eyes.²

Ch'un-mei was concerned that the commandant might retire from the courtroom and come in upon them, so, seeing that there was nobody else about, she gave Ch'en Ching-chi a wink and whispered to him, saying, "In the future, if he should raise any questions about yourself, say that you are a younger cousin of mine. I am a year older than you at the age of twenty-five, and I was born at noon on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month."

"I understand," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.

Before long, a maidservant brought in a serving of tea, and the two of them drank it together.

Ch'un-mei then went on to ask, "Why did you ever give up lay life to become a Taoist monk? When you were allowed to go from the yamen here, the commandant did not know that you were related to me. He had you beaten in error and greatly regrets it. I would have detained you here at the time were it not that Sun Hsüeh-o, that worthless creature, was also working here, and it would not have been possible to accommodate you without her making trouble. That's why I let you go. Afterwards, I got rid of that worthless creature and sent Chang Sheng to look everywhere for you, but he couldn't find you. Who could have known that you were working as a laborer outside the city and had fallen into such miserable circumstances?"

"I will not deceive you, sister," said Ch'en Ching-chi:

"It's a long story.

After the two of us were separated, I planned to marry Sister Six, but my father died in the Eastern Capital, which delayed my return, so I was unable to marry her, and she was killed by Wu Sung. I heard that, out of the kindness of your heart, you had her buried on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity. I also visited her grave site and burned paper money there on her behalf. At home, my mother also passed away, and it was not long after I had taken care of her

funeral that someone made off with my capital. Upon my return home, my wife Hsi-men Ta-chieh also died, and that whore, my mother-in-law, not only took me to court over it but also reclaimed all of my wife's belongings. After the lawsuit against me, I had to sell my house and was left:

As poor as though I had been utterly cleaned out.

Fortunately, an old friend of my father's, named Wang Hsüan, and known as the Layman of Apricot Hermitage, came to my rescue and escorted me to the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing, where he arranged for me to become a Taoist acolyte. Unexpectedly, however, I was subsequently assaulted by a 'bare stick' and ended up being bound and transported to the commandant's yamen, where I was given ten strokes with the rod, and then released.

If I appeal to my relatives, they only ignore me;

If I appeal to my friends, they pay me no regard.

As a result, I ended up working as a day laborer at the Water Moon Monastery. I am profoundly indebted to my sister for caring enough to send your servant to look for me, with the result that I have been able to see you again.

Your kindness will be amply rewarded,

I will never dare to forget it."

As he related these pitiable events, the two of them both shed tears.

Whom should they see at this point but Commandant Chou Hsiu, who retired from the courtroom and came back to the rear compound. When his attendants lifted aside the portiere, and he entered the room, Ch'en Ching-chi came forward and knelt down before him.

This threw the commandant into such consternation that he promptly returned the salutation and said, "The other day, I did not know that you were a worthy young cousin of my wife, having been kept in the dark by my subordinates. I hope that you will forgive me for having treated you so offensively."

"Unworthy as I am," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "it is I who am at fault for having failed to keep in touch.

I can only hope that you will forgive me."³

So saying, he kowtowed once again.

The commandant helped him up with one hand and ushered him to the seat of honor. Ch'en Ching-chi, however, was sensitive enough to object to this and insisted on pulling the chair to one side before consenting to sit down on it. The commandant then assumed the role of host, and Ch'un-mei sat down facing their guest.

Before long, a new serving of tea was brought in, and when they had finished drinking it, Chou Hsiu asked, "Worthy cousin, how old are you? Why is it that I haven't met you before? And why did you leave lay life to become a Taoist acolyte?"

"I'm twenty-three," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "while my cousin is one year older than I am, and was born at noon on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month. A while ago, because both my father and mother passed away, my property became depleted, and my wife died, I left lay life to become a Taoist acolyte in the Yen-kung Temple. I did not know that my cousin had married into your household and have, consequently, been remiss in seeking her out."

"My worthy cousin," said the commandant, "ever since you were let go the other day, your cousin has worried about you, both by day and by night, and has been constantly upset, and given to:

Moaning and groaning,

about it, right up until the present time. I have been sending men out to look for you for some time, but without success. Who could have anticipated that today we would get together? It is truly a case of:

An affinity extending to three lives."⁴

He then ordered his attendants to set up a table and provide them with wine. In no time at all, they laid out an assortment of cups and platters, containing chicken, pig's trotters, goose, and duck, which had been stir-fried, roasted, steamed, and deep-fried, along with soup and rice and other dainties, that filled the entire surface of the table.

Within silver flagons and jade goblets,

The wine overflows with golden ripples.

The commandant joined in their conversation and kept them company, feasting until the lanterns and candles were lighted that evening before breaking up.

The commandant ordered his servant Chou Jen to sweep out the library on the west side of the front courtyard, which was already furnished with a bed and bed curtains. Ch'un-mei then brought out two sets of bedding, complete with quilts and pillows, so that Ch'en Ching-chi would have a place to sleep; and also arranged for a page boy named Hsi-erh to wait on him. In addition, she supplied him with two more outfits of silk clothing, so that he would have something to change into when needed. Ch'un-mei also invited him to come into the residential compound for his meals every day. Truly:

At the time one meets with good fortune,

It owes nothing at all to one's efforts."⁵

Light and darkness alternate swiftly;

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

Behold:

No sooner do the plum trees blossom

at winter's end,

Than one encounters New Year's day

in the first month.

Before one is aware of the apricots
filling the branches,
It is time for new lotus blossoms
to adhere to the water.⁶

When Ch'en ching-chi had resided in the commandant's household for more than a month, the time came for Ch'un-mei's birthday on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month. Wu Yüeh-niang prepared an assortment of gifts for her, consisting of a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, two boiled geese, four fresh chickens, two trays of candied fruits, and a jar of southern wine. Tai-an, clad in black livery, delivered them. Commandant Chou Hsiu was sitting in the reception hall when the gate keeper came in to announce his arrival, and the gifts were carried inside. Tai-an handed over the note that accompanied the gifts and then got down on the ground and kowtowed.

When the commandant had read the note with its list of gifts, he said, "I am much obliged to your mistress for taking the trouble to send these presents."

He then told a servant, "Take these gifts inside, and bring out a serving of tea for this gentleman."

He also handed the gift card to a page boy, saying, "Deliver this to your uncle, and have him seal up a handkerchief and three mace of silver for this gentleman, and a hundred candareens for the bearer. Have him write a thank-you note as well to express our appreciation."

When he had finished speaking, Commandant Chou Hsiu donned his formal clothes and went out to make New Year's calls. Meanwhile, Tai-an waited in front of the reception hall for the return card.

What should he see at this juncture but a young man who was wearing a "tile-ridge" hat, a black silk Taoist robe, and sandals with white socks and came out through the postern gate, carrying the return card and gratuities in his hand, and gave them to the page boy, after which, he went straight back inside.

Strange as it may seem,
he looked just like son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, and Tai-an thought to himself, "I wonder what he is doing here?"

The page boy then handed the handkerchief and the silver to Tai-an and saw him to the door.

When he got home and reported to Yüeh-niang, she saw that the return card read, "Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née P'ang, of the Chou family," and asked him, "Did you not see your sister Ch'un-mei?"

"I did not see my sister," replied Tai-an, "but I did see our son-in-law."

"You crazy jailbird!" laughed Yüeh-niang. "How could we have such an elderly son-in-law? The commandant is far too advanced in years for you to refer to him as our son-in-law."

"It was not the commandant I was referring to," responded Tai-an, "it was our son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi. When I first went in, His Honor Chou Hsiu was in the reception hall, and I handed him your card and kowtowed to him. He thanked me, saying, 'I have put your mistress to the trouble of sending these lavish gifts,' and then told a servant to bring me a serving of tea, and said to a page boy, 'Deliver this card to your uncle, and have him seal up a handkerchief and three mace of silver for this gentleman, and a hundred candareens for the bearer.' When he had finished speaking, His Honor Chou Hsiu put on his formal clothes and then set out on horseback to make New Year's calls. After I had waited for what seemed like half a day, the gentleman in question came out through the postern gate, handed the return card and gratuities to the page boy, and then went back inside, leaving me to take charge of the gift box and return home. If it wasn't him, who else could it have been?"

"You crazy little jailbird!" said Yüeh-niang. "Stop talking nonsense. Who knows where that stray lamb has ended up begging for his food? If he hasn't frozen to death, he has probably starved to death. Whatever would he be doing, for no good reason, in such a household? What would the commandant see in such a creature that would induce him to patronize him?"

"Mistress," said Tai-an, "would you like to make a bet with me about it? My identification of him is:

As certain as certain can be.

Even if he had been burned to ashes, I could identify his bones."

"How was he dressed?" asked Yüeh-niang.

Tai-an responded, "He wore a new 'tile-ridge' hat, held in place with a gold pin, a black silk Taoist robe, and sandals with white stockings; and he looked to be well-fed."

"I can't believe it," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "I simply can't believe it."

We will say no more at this juncture about their conversation.

To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi reentered the rear compound, Ch'un-mei was still in her room, putting on her makeup and painting her eyebrows in front of her mirror stand.

Ch'en Ching-chi showed her Yüeh-niang's card and asked, "Why should her household be sending gifts to you? What reason could there be for it?"

Ch'un-mei then told him all about how, some time ago, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, she had run into Yüeh-niang at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city; how, later on, P'ing-an had stolen the hair ornaments from the pawnshop; how the police chief Wu Tien-en had subjected him to a beating in the squeezers and induced him to testify that Yüeh-niang had been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an; and how Auntie Hsüeh had come and appealed to her to intervene in the case, with the result that the commandant had exonerated her.

"Her household purchased gifts for us as an expression of their gratitude," she went on to say, "and during the first month, I went to her home to celebrate Hsiao-ko's birthday. We have been keeping in touch with each other ever since, and she promised that on my birthday she would purchase gifts and come pay me a visit."

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he gave her a look and said, "Sister, how can you be so irresolute? Don't you remember how that lousy whore forced the two of us to separate and sent Sister Six to her death?"

For a thousand years or all eternity,
it would be better if you:

Had nothing to do with each other,
either indoors or out.

But instead you actually intervened on her behalf. Why should you have been afraid to let Wu Tien-en torture that page boy P'ing-an into testifying that she had been engaging in hanky-panky, rather than letting that whore be taken into custody with a length of rope and allowing her to suffer humiliation in the courtroom? What's it got to do with us anyway? Actually, if she hadn't been engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an, why should she have given her maidservant Hsiao-yü to him as a wife? If I had been here at the time, I never would have let you intervene on her behalf. She has been an enemy of ours, so why have you agreed to maintain relations with her?

The sixth month is the rainy season;
So one can hardly expect to have fair weather?"

This tirade had the effect of temporarily reducing Ch'un-mei to silence, but she then went on to say, "Why not let bygones be bygones? As far as I'm concerned:

Good minds are not obsessed with old enmities."⁷

"At the present time," responded Ch'en Ching-chi:

"Even the best intentions go quite unrequited."

"Since she has already sent these gifts to me," said Ch'un-mei, "I can hardly agree to accept them without doing anything in return. She is expecting me to send someone to invite her."

"From now on," opined Ch'en Ching-chi, "there is no need for us to pay any attention to that whore. What reason is there for issuing her an invitation?"

"Not to invite her would be a source of embarrassment," said Ch'un-mei. "I'll just send her a card, and leave it to her whether she chooses to come or not. If she does come, you should confine yourself to the library where you are staying, and not come out to meet her. In the future, I won't bother with her, and leave it at that."

Ch'en Ching-chi was annoyed by this but did not say a word and went to the front compound to compose an invitation, which Ch'un-mei entrusted to their servant Chou I to deliver to Wu Yüeh-niang. Yüeh-niang, after dressing herself appropriately, set out for the commandant's residence, along with the wet nurse Ju-i, who held Hsiao-ko in her arms and rode in a smaller sedan chair, followed by Tai-an. When she arrived there, Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang, appropriately dressed, came out to welcome her and ushered her back to the rear reception hall, where they sat down together after exchanging the customary amenities, and Ju-i, while holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, kowtowed to them. Ch'en Ching-chi concealed himself in the library and did not come out; allowing Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang to entertain their guest with tea, preside over the feast, and proffer her wine in the rear reception hall. They had engaged the two singing girls, Han Yü-ch'uan and Cheng Chiao-erh, to play their instruments and sing for their entertainment. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

Tai-an, who was being entertained in an anteroom in the front compound, happened to see a young page boy emerge from the rear compound, carrying a tray of soup and rice, and other viands, and head for the postern gate leading to the library on the western side of the courtyard.

"Who are those things intended for?" asked Tai-an; to which the page boy replied, "They are for my uncle to eat."

"What is your uncle's surname?" asked Tai-an.

"His surname is Ch'en," replied the page boy.

Tai-an surreptitiously followed him toward the library on the western side of the courtyard, and when the page boy lifted aside the portiere and went inside, he cautiously peeked through the gauze-covered window and saw that it was indeed their son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi who was sprawled out on the bed in the library, and who promptly got up, upon seeing that his meal was provided, set up a table for it, and proceeded to eat. Having observed this, Tai-an surreptitiously returned outside and sat down in the anteroom where he had been before.

That evening, when the lantern bearers from her household came to fetch Wu Yüeh-niang, she took her leave and went home, whereupon Tai-an told her in detail what he had seen, saying, "It is indeed the case that our son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi is residing there."

From the time it was discovered that Ch'en Ching-chi had been taken into Ch'un-mei's household, the two families ceased to have any relations with each other. Truly:

Who could have known that the young scamp
would face such adversities?
Even a single thought may turn out to be
the harbinger of resentment.⁸

Although Ch'en Ching-chi was now carrying on a clandestine affair with Ch'un-mei, no one else was aware of it. Whenever the commandant was not at home, Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi would eat together and drink together in her room. During their free time, while playing board games, or laughing and joking with each other:

There was no length to which they would not go.

When the commandant was at home, Ch'un-mei would send maidservants or page boys to take meals out to the library

for him to eat. Even in broad daylight, she would frequently go to the library herself and keep him company for half a day before returning to the rear compound. The warmth of their feelings for each other was such that there is no need to describe it in detail.

One day, the commandant led his men and horses out on a tour of inspection. It was the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month, and Ch'un-mei had arranged for a celebratory feast in the ornamental pavilion beside the library on the western side of the courtyard. Together with Sun Erh-niang and Ch'en Ching-chi, the three of them enjoyed drinking realgar-flavored wine and eating festival *tsung-tzu*,⁹ while waited upon by maids and attendants. On that auspicious day in the fifth month, what did the celebratory scene look like? Behold:

Urns are planted with green willows,
Vases are studded with red pomegranates.
Portieres of beaded crystal furl
their "shrimps' whiskers,"
Screens of inlaid mica display
their peacocks' tails.
The irises are like sliced jade;
Smiling beauties proffer goblets
of iridescent hue.
The *tsung-tzu* are like piled gold;
Waiting maids raise on high beakers
made of chrysoprase.
Dainties are prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits are provided just in season.
Efficacious charms and artemisia tigers
adorn their heads;
Variegated strands of yarn are fastened
around their arms.
Each household celebrates the Dragon
Boat Festival;
In every place people happily imbibe
fragrant wine.
Journeying beyond the corporeal realm
in the universe of the drunk;
Thus does one dissipate the idle days
within the Taoist's gourd.¹⁰

Truly, it is a case of:

Her ornate pendants tinkle, and her
golden lotuses are tiny;
As she gently handles her silken fan
with her slender fingers.

Ch'un-mei ordered the concubines Hai-t'ang and Yüeh-kuei to play their musical instruments and sing for their entertainment. That day, they continued feasting until:

The burning sun sank into the west, and
A gentle rain had a cooling effect.

Ch'un-mei kept raising a large gold goblet in the shape of a lotus blossom, and urging them to drink. After:

Several rounds of wine had been consumed,

Sun Erh-niang:

Could not handle the effects of the drink,

and got up to return to her room in the rear compound, leaving Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi to continue drinking together in the ornamental pavilion:

Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits;
First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me.

Before long, the maidservants brought out the gauze lanterns, and the wet nurses Chin-kuei and Yü-t'ang put the baby Chin-ko to bed. After losing a game, Ch'en Ching-chi went into the library, where he tried to avoid drinking any more by refusing to come out.

Ch'un-mei first sent Hai-t'ang to invite him back out, and when she learned that he refused to come, she then sent Yüeh-kuei after him, saying, "You must drag him back out, no matter what. If you fail to do so, when you return I'll give you ten slaps on the face, menial creature that you are."

Yüeh-kuei went to the library and pushed open the door, where she found that Ch'en Ching-chi was lying sprawled out on the bed, where he pretended to be snoring and could not be moved.

"The mistress has sent me to invite you back," she said. "If I fail to do so, she has threatened to beat me."

"If she beats you it is none of my business," Ch'en Ching-chi muttered in response. "I'm drunk and can't drink any more."

Yüeh-kuei dragged him up with her hand and gave him a push, saying, "I'm going to drag you there no matter what. If you won't let me do so:

You hardly count as a stout fellow."¹¹

She then pushed and pulled Ch'en Ching-chi until he became so excited that, in the dark shadows, he pretended to be drunk and:

Half facetiously but in earnest,
embraced Yüeh-kuei with his arms and gave her a kiss.

This only had the effect of encouraging Yüeh-kuei to:

Assume privileges above her station,
saying, "I came to fetch you with the best of intentions, and you assume the right to treat me so disrespectfully. How can you do such a thing?"

"My child," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "who is it now that is putting on airs with the best of intentions?"

So saying, he gave her another kiss, and it was only after this that they arrived back in the ornamental pavilion.

"Mistress," said Yüeh-kuei, "you may have threatened to beat me, but I have succeeded in dragging uncle back here."

Ch'un-mei then had Hai-t'ang pour out another large beaker of wine, and the two of them continued to enjoy themselves playing board games together, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit. Thereupon, what with:

First a game for you,

Then a game for me,

they continued playing until the maidservants fell asleep from exhaustion. Ch'un-mei then sent Yüeh-kuei and Hai-t'ang back to the rear compound to fetch them some tea. Once the two of them were alone in the ornamental pavilion:

Untying her girdle pendant, she discloses the jade
of the Nymph of the Hsiang River;

Distending her ruby lips, she displays the cloves
of the Han dynasty Secretariat.¹²

Truly, it is a case of:

Amid the flower shadows by the curved balustrade
the lamplight shines aslant;

Beside it there is a fallen hairpin along with a
pair of phoenix-feather shoes.¹³

There is a poem that testifies to this:



The Spurious Cousins Resume Their Clandestine Affair

As they embrace inside the ornamental pavilion
her cloudy locks are disheveled;
Her powdered sweat becomes congealed fragrance
that permeates the crimson gauze.

In the secluded courtyards the days are long¹⁴
and nobody comes to disturb you;
One can simply look on as the yellow orioles
peck away at the famous flowers.

At the time, just as the two of them were in the thick of things, the concubine Hai-t'ang came back with the tea and said, "Mistress, you had better return to the rear compound. Your son Chin-ko has just waked up and is crying for you."

Ch'un-mei kept Ch'en Ching-chi company in drinking another two goblets of wine, after which, she rinsed out her mouth with tea, took her leave, and returned to the rear compound. The serving maids were left to clear away the utensils, and the male servant Hsi-erh supported Ch'en Ching-chi on his way back to the library, where he went to bed. But no more of this.

One day, an imperial edict came down ordering Commandant Chou Hsiu to lead the infantry and cavalry under his command to join Chang Shu-yeh, the prefect of Chi-chou, in a campaign against the outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh led by the bandit chieftain Sung Chiang, and to set out as soon as possible.

The commandant said to Ch'un-mei, "You must stay at home and look after our son Chin-ko. You should also engage the services of a go-between to arrange a marriage for your cousin. I will put his name on my roster; and if we are fortunate enough to be successful in our campaign, the magnanimity of the Emperor may result in his being given:

An official post or even half of one,
which will also serve to enhance your reputation."

Ch'un-mei assented to this suggestion; and two or three days later, the commandant packed his gear, mustered his infantry and cavalry, and left Chang Sheng and Li An behind to look after the household, while taking only his servant Chou Jen to accompany him. But no more of this.

One day, Ch'un-mei summoned Auntie Hsüeh and said to her, thus and so, "My husband, on the eve of his departure, suggested that I engage the services of a go-between to find a wife for my cousin. See if you can locate a decent woman of:

Appropriate social and economic standing,
for me. It doesn't matter if she is only fifteen or sixteen years old, so long as she is attractive, has dainty hands and feet, and is clever and adept, since he has a somewhat finicky disposition."

"Do you think I don't know that?" said Auntie Hsüeh. "There is no need for you to tell me about it. I recall that he was not even satisfied by the likes of Hsi-men Ta-chieh."

"If you come up with one who isn't up to snuff," said Ch'un-mei, "just see if I don't box your ears for it. After all, I'll have to address her as my young sister-in-law. It's not a matter to be treated lightly."

When they had finished speaking, Ch'un-mei had a maidservant bring in a serving of tea for her. Who should appear at this point but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to have something to eat.

Auntie Hsüeh stepped up and bowed to him, saying, "Brother-in-law, I haven't set eyes on you for a long time. Where have you been keeping yourself? You are to be congratulated. Just now, the mistress has directed me to find a nice wife for you. How will you repay me for doing so?"

Ch'en Ching-chi only frowned at this, without saying anything.

"You old beggar," said Auntie Hsüeh, "why do you have nothing to say?"

"Don't call him brother-in-law," said Ch'un-mei. "That's over and done with. Just address him as Uncle Ch'en, that's all."

"My worthless mouth deserves to be slapped," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "It is prone to make such mistakes. In the future, I will simply address you as Uncle."

On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi couldn't help breaking into a laugh, saying, "That really touches my heart."

Auntie Hsüeh, affecting a bout of silliness, ran up to him and gave him a blow, saying, "Just look at the fine way this old beggar talks. I'm not the one you're after. So how could I ever hope to touch your heart?"

Even Ch'un-mei broke out laughing at this.

Before long, Yüeh-kuei brought in a serving of tea and snacks for Auntie Hsüeh, after consuming which, she picked up her box of trinkets and prepared to go, saying, "I will do my best to locate an appropriate young woman for you, and if I do so, will come to let you know."

"We will not skimp," stated Ch'un-mei, "on the bride price, preserved fruit, festive red silk, gifts of wine, head ornaments, and clothing for her trousseau, as long as she is an attractive girl from a good family, who might appropriately become a member of our household."

"I understand," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I guarantee that she will live up to your expectations."

After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi finished his meal and went back to the front compound.

Auntie Hsüeh, who was still sitting there, asked Ch'un-mei, "When did that gentleman come here?"

Ch'un-mei then proceeded to tell her the story of how he had become a Taoist acolyte and went on to say, "It was I who located him, and have passed him off as a relative of mine."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Auntie Hsüeh. "You really have an eye for the future."

She then went on to say, "I have heard that on your birthday, a while ago, the lady from his former household came to visit you."

"She took the initiative by sending gifts to me," said Ch'un-mei. "It was only then that I sent a card inviting her to come for a visit, and she sat around for the better part of the day before going home."

"I was busy on that occasion," said Auntie Hsüeh, "preparing the bridal chamber for one of my customers, which took me all day. I had wanted to come see you but was under such pressure I was not able to do so."

She then went on to ask, "Did Uncle Ch'en see the lady from his former household?"

"He would hardly have agreed to see her," said Ch'un-mei. "He got into quite a quarrel with me over the fact that I even invited her. I said that I had merely done a favor for her household, but he accused me of lacking resolution. He said, 'There is no reason to doubt that it would have been preferable if Wu Tien-en had been allowed to beat the page boy P'ing-an into implicating the First Lady in a scandal, so that she would have been dragged into court. What did it have to do with you, that you should choose to do her a favor, in spite of the fine way she treated us in the past?'"

"What you said makes sense," opined Auntie Hsüeh. "When you get right down to it, people:

Should not be preoccupied with old enmities."

"Since I had received gifts from her," said Ch'un-mei, "not to have invited her for a visit would have been unacceptable.

It is better to overlook another's unkindness,
Than it is to commit unrighteous acts oneself."

"It is no wonder," opined Auntie Hsüeh, "that you are blessed with such good fortune, when you possess such a good heart."

Thereupon, having chatted for what seemed like half a day, Auntie Hsüeh picked up her box of trinkets, took her leave, and departed.

Two days later, she came back and reported that Battalion Commander Chu, who resided inside the city, had a fourteen-year-old daughter, Miss Chu, whom he was prepared to marry off because her mother was dead. Ch'un-mei, however, felt her to be too young and was not interested. Auntie Hsüeh then suggested Ying Po-chüeh's second daughter as a possibility, and reported that she was twenty-one years old. Ch'un-mei rejected this suggestion as well, on the grounds that since Ying Po-chüeh was now dead, she would be in the hands of his elder brother, who would not provide her with anything much in the way of a dowry. She therefore told Auntie Hsüeh to return the cards with the horoscopes of these two candidates.

Several days later, Auntie Hsüeh returned with some artificial flowers in hand and pulled a card with the horoscope of another prospect out of her sleeve. The inscription on the crimson satin surface of the card read: "The eldest daughter of the prosperous dry goods merchant, surnamed Ko, who is nineteen years old, was born in the year of the cock, at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month, and her personal name is Ts'ui-p'ing."

Auntie Hsüeh then described her, saying, "She is as pretty as a picture, is petite in stature, has a face shaped like a melon seed, possesses a congenial and elegant disposition,¹⁵ is as clever as can be, and her mastery of needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments goes without saying. Her parents are both alive, and her father has the equivalent of ten thousand strings of cash in capital, operates a dry goods store on Main Street, and does business in Su-chou, Hang-chou, and Nanking. It is an incomparably fine family, and the beds and curtains, and the trunks containing her trousseau, are all manufactured in Nanking."

When Ch'un-mei heard this, she said, "If it's as good a match as all that, we might as well agree to it."

She then told Auntie Hsüeh to go ahead and transmit the needed documents, and she promptly set out to do so. Truly:

If you want to seek an alluring beauty

from a brocaded boudoir,

You must rely entirely upon a red leaf

to be a good go-between.¹⁶

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The Weaving Maid, positioned at her loom,
attaches the fragrant silk;
An affinity between widely divided people
suffices to connect them.
In Heaven above, the Herd Boy is matched
with the Weaving Maid;
In the human realm, the man of talent
weds an alluring damsel.

When Auntie Hsüeh delivered the nuptial documents, and the family of Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's father, the prosperous dry goods merchant, saw that they came from the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, they were happy to accept the proposal and engaged another go-between named Auntie Chang to go with Auntie Hsüeh in order to arrange the match. Ch'un-mei, for her part, made up two parcels of tea leaves, dumplings, and candied fruit and sent off Sun Erh-ning in a sedan chair to deliver these betrothal gifts to the Ko family home and conclude the match by presenting Ko Ts'ui-p'ing with an engagement ring.

Upon her return, she said to Ch'un-mei, "She really appears to be a worthwhile young woman. She has an attractive demeanor, is as lovely as a flower, and her family is of an appropriate status."

Ch'un-mei thereupon selected an auspicious day for the formal betrothal ceremony, and prepared gifts including sixteen platters of preserved fruit, tea, and pastries; two platters of noodles to celebrate the putting up of her hair; two platters of pearls and trinkets; four jugs of wine; two sheep; a fret for her coiffure; a lavish set of gold and silver hair ornaments, pins, and bracelets; two velvet gowns; and clothing for the four seasons; in addition to bolts of cotton fabric; and a betrothal present of twenty taels of silver. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

The yin-yang master selected the eighth day of the sixth month for the wedding ceremony, when the bride would be brought over the threshold.

Before that date, Ch'un-mei asked Auntie Hsüeh, "Is her family going to supply any maidservants as part of her dowry?"

"They will supply beds and curtains as part of her trousseau," said Auntie Hsüeh, "along with gilt lacquer cabinets and so forth, but there will be no maidservants included in the dowry."

"It would be more convenient in that case," said Ch'un-mei, "if we were to purchase a twelve- or thirteen-year-old maidservant to serve in her room, empty the commode, pour bathwater, and so forth."

"I know of two families," said Auntie Hsüeh, "who are offering to sell their girls as maidservants. I'll bring one back with me tomorrow."

The next day, sure enough, she brought a young girl back with her and explained, "She has been working as a maidservant in the household of the merchant Huang the Fourth's son, and this year she is just twelve years old. Huang the Fourth and Li the Third, along with Lai-pao, who was formerly employed in your household, have all been imprisoned for misappropriation of official funds, until such time as they can make reparation. It is now more than a year since they were incarcerated, and they have been forced to dispose of their possessions, and sell off their houses. Li the

Third has passed away, and his son, Li Huo, has been incarcerated in his stead. Lai-Pao's son, Seng-pao, has run away and is said to be serving someone as a groom."

"Are you referring to the servant we knew as Lai-pao?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"He is no longer known as Lai-pao," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but has changed his name to T'ang Pao."

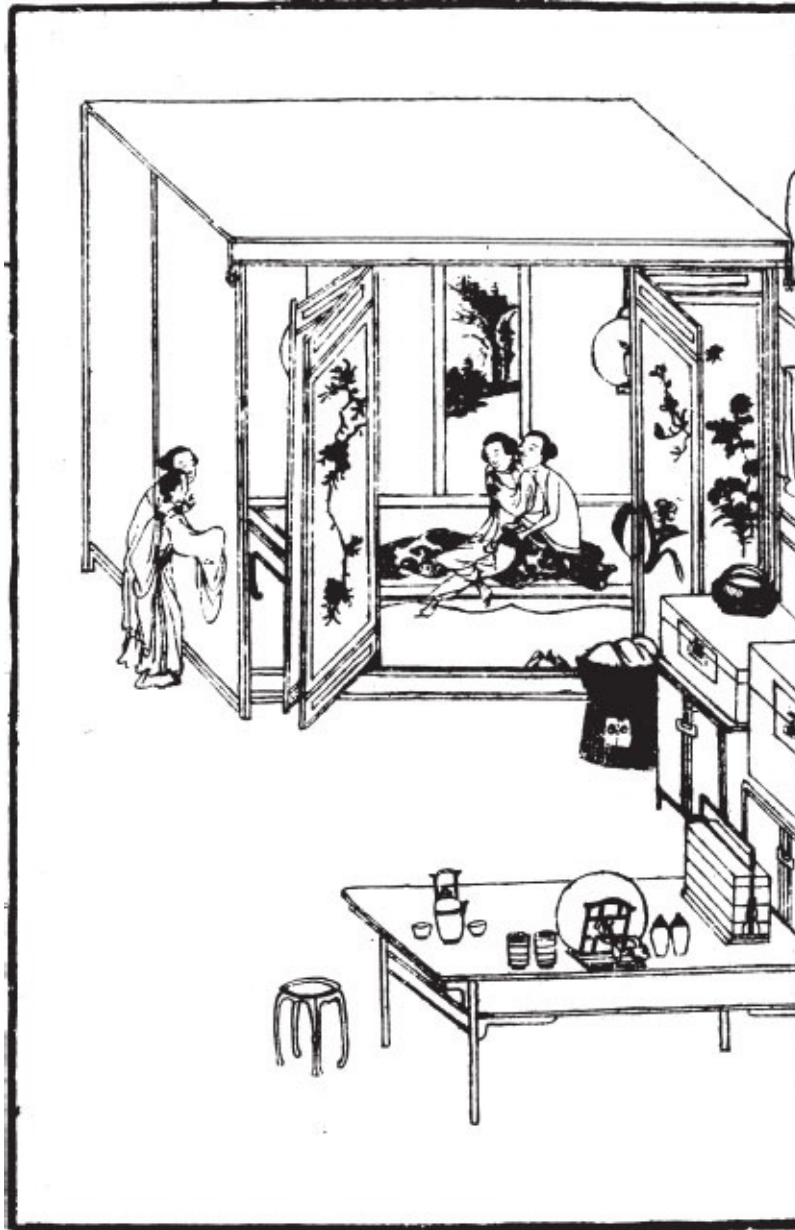
"If this girl has been employed as a maidservant in Huang the Fourth's family," said Ch'un-mei, "how much do they want for her?"

"All they are asking for is four and a half taels of silver," said Auntie Hsüeh. "They are anxiously awaiting it in order to help them repay the misappropriated funds."

"Four and a half taels is too much," said Ch'un-mei, "but I am willing to pay three taels and five mace of silver for her."

She then paid over the sum of three taels and five mace worth of "snowflake" government silver, wrote out a contract for her, and changed her name to Chin Ch'ien-erh.

To make a long story short, on the eighth day of the sixth month, Ch'un-mei dressed herself up with a phoenix cap adorned with pearls and trinkets on her head, and a full-sleeved scarlet robe, encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold. Riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, and accompanied by drums and lanterns, she set out to fetch the daughter of the Ko family, preside over the bridegroom's ritual presentation of a goose to the bride's family, and bring her over the threshold in marriage. Ch'en Ching-chi rode on a large white horse with ornate silver trim on the saddle and bridle and was accompanied by soldiers who shouted to clear the way. He wore a scholar's cap on his head, a round-collared robe of black velvet, with a pair of white-soled black boots on his feet, and his head was adorned with two floral ornaments of gold. Truly, it was a case of:



The Legal Couple Openly Come Together by Candlelight

Encountering sweet rain after a prolonged draught;
 Meeting an old acquaintance when traveling abroad;
 Enjoying the candlelit night in a nuptial chamber;
 Finding oneself on a list of successful graduates.¹⁷

Each time such things are refurbished
 they will be as good as new.

When the wedding procession arrived back at the commandant's residence, and the bride descended from her sedan chair, she wore a scarlet gold-flaked bridal veil. Dressed in her wedding finery she accepted a ritual mouthful of rice, before entering the main gate, holding a "precious vase" in her arms. The yin-yang master then conducted her into a decorated hall where she proceeded to pay her respects before the family shrine, after which, she was taken to the nuptial chamber. Ch'un-mei saw to it that the two of them sat down together within the bed curtains, and then she came out again. After the yin-yang master had performed the ceremony of scattering auspicious symbols of fertility upon the nuptial bed, he left upon receiving his gratuity, and the drummers that had been hired for the occasion also went their ways.

After Ch'en Ching-chi had sat within the bed curtains with Ko Ts'ui-p'ing for a while, he mounted a horse and went to his father-in-law's home to thank him for the gift of his daughter. Upon his return he was quite drunk. That evening,

being:

A woman of beauty and a man of talent;
They indulged their newlywed passions,
Enjoying the clouds and rain together.

Truly, it is a case of:

When spring touches the apricot and peach trees,
their new buds burst into red flower;
When the breeze plays among the willow fronds,
they are made to bend their green waists.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

To encounter close up such a paragon
of feeling and romance;
Is a consummation that: "Without good fortune
one cannot enjoy."
Wherever has Lieh-tzu allowed the wind
to carry him;
When night after night the beauty of the moon
shines in the willow branches.¹⁸

That night, Ch'en Ching-chi and the young lady Ko Ts'ui-p'ing found themselves to be highly compatible. The pair of them were like:

Mandarin ducks beneath the quilt;
Phoenix mates within the curtains.
Like fish sporting in the water,
They enjoyed sharing loving cups.

On the third day after the wedding, in the rear hall of the commandant's headquarters, Ch'un-mei prepared a feast, hung up decorative bunting, hired musicians to provide:

Drum music, pipes, and song,

and invited friends and relatives to attend a wedding reception. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

Every day, Ch'un-mei invited the two of them to her quarters so they could share their meals, and they addressed each other as cousins, constantly:

Getting up and sitting down together.

Not a single one of the maidservants, wet nurses, or servants' wives chose to object to this. It so happens that Ch'un-mei had fixed up a suite of three rooms on the western side of the front courtyard to serve as his quarters. Inside, she had provided a curtained bedstead, replastered the walls so that the rooms were as spotless as snow grottoes, and suspended blinds. The library on the outside served as his study and was also furnished with a bed and a couch, tables and mats, and a collection of old books. The letters and calling cards sent and received by the commandant, as well as the documents presented by other bureaucratic offices, all passed through his hands and were either listed in registers, or stamped by him with official seals. The brushes, inkstones, and other appurtenances needed by a writer were all available to him, and the shelves were loaded with books. Ch'un-mei would come out to the library from time to time in order to sit down and talk with him, and they ended up engaging in intercourse with each other on more than one occasion. Truly:

In the morning he attends feasts in Golden Valley,
In the evening he favors beauties in ornate houses.
But do not consider these to be occasions for joy,
Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.¹⁹

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

CH'EN CHING-CHI OPENS A TAVERN IN LIN-CH'ING; HAN AI-CHIEH ENCOUNTERS A LOVER IN A BORDELLO

If the heart is content even a thatched cottage seems ample;
If one's feelings are calm even vegetable roots smell sweet.
The fewer worldly desires one has the more beneficial it is;

When human relations are tepid they are more likely to last.¹
If one depends on others in order to attain one's ambitions;

In trying to avoid trouble one will deal with local tyrants.²
One may achieve an exalted level of distinction for the day;
But it will end with inevitable extinction in years to come.

THE STORY GOES that, one day, Commandant Chou Hsiu, and the prefect of Chi-nan prefecture Chang Shu-yeh, in command of their infantry and cavalry, completed a successful campaign against the outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh; and the thirty-six leaders of the band, under the command of their chieftain Sung Chiang, along with their more than ten thousand followers, agreed to accept the offer of an imperial amnesty, so that peace was restored in the affected territory. When this was reported to the throne, the Emperor was greatly pleased and promoted Chang Shu-yeh to the positions of censor-in-chief and pacification commissioner of Shantung, and Commandant Chou Hsiu to the post of commander-general of Chi-nan, with the responsibility for patrolling the waterways and hunting down the bandits in his jurisdiction. The Emperor also decreed that the meritorious officers who had participated in the campaign should all be promoted one grade. Since Ch'en Ching-chi's name had been listed in the roster, he was raised to the rank of counselor, with a salary of two piculs of rice per month, and the right to distinguish himself by wearing an official cap and girdle.³

During the middle decade of the tenth month, Commandant Chou Hsiu, with his imperial commission in hand, led the infantry and cavalry under his command on their way home and sent a messenger ahead to report the situation to Ch'un-mei and let the household know about it. Ch'un-mei was as pleased as could be and sent Ch'en Ching-chi, along with Chang Sheng and Li An, to go outside the city to welcome him. A feast was prepared in the reception hall of their residence, to celebrate his official promotion, and the number of his fellow officials and others who came to offer congratulations and proffer gifts was so great they could hardly be counted. When the commandant alighted from his horse and came back to the rear hall, Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang were there to receive him and pay their respects. Ch'en Ching-chi divested himself of his commoner's costume, put on a scarlet round-collared gown, an official cap, black boots, and a girdle with a rhinoceros horn plaque, and came out with his new wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing. When the two of them had paid their respects to him, and the commandant saw that she was a good-looking girl, he rewarded her with a set of clothing and ten taels of silver, which she could use to make head ornaments for herself. But no more of this.

That evening, as Ch'un-mei and the commandant enjoyed drinking wine together in their room, they could not avoid bringing up some mundane household matters, and Ch'un-mei said, "The arrangements for my cousin's marriage cost a good deal."

"Ai-ya," responded the commandant. "Your only relative is this cousin, who has sought refuge with you. If he were to be without a wife, it would not bode well for his future prospects. Even though it has cost us a few taels of silver, it has not been spent on some unrelated person."

"And now you have secured this prospect of advancement for him," remarked Ch'un-mei. "It is more than enough to distinguish him."

"The Emperor's edict has already come down," the commandant went on to say, "so that, any day now, I will have to go to Chi-nan prefecture to assume my office. I will leave you behind to look after the household, and you should provide your cousin with some capital so he can hire a manager, and open a business of some kind. Every third or fifth day, he can go to inspect the books, and he ought to be able to make enough in the way of profit this way to support himself."

"What you propose makes sense," responded Ch'un-mei.

That evening, the two of them enjoyed each other as husband and wife, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

The commandant remained at home for another ten days or so, but during the first decade of the eleventh month, he proceeded to get his baggage together and set out to assume his office in Chi-nan prefecture; taking Chang Sheng and Li An with him, and leaving his servants Chou Jen and Chou I to look after the household. He was seen off by Ch'en Ching-chi, who accompanied him as far as the Temple of Eternal Felicity south of the city before returning home.

One day, Ch'un-mei consulted with Ch'en Ching-chi and said, "The commandant suggested, thus and so, that you

should open a business of some kind in the canal port of Lin-ch'ing, and hire a manager to run it for you, in the hope of making enough profit to help support the household."

On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi was as pleased as could be. One day, while he was walking along the street in the process of looking for a manager, it was one of those occasions when:

Something was destined to happen.

Unexpectedly, he ran into his old friend Lu the Second, or Lu Ping-i, who bowed to him and said, "Brother, why is it that I haven't seen you for such a long time?"

Ch'en Ching-chi responded by telling him about the death of his wife and continued, "That rascal Yang Kuang-yen made off with half a boatload of my goods, leaving me:

As poor as though I had been utterly cleaned out;

but I am all right again now. Luckily, my female cousin married into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and they arranged another marriage for me. I have subsequently been raised to the rank of counselor and granted the right to distinguish myself by wearing an official cap and girdle. Right now, I am engaged in looking for a manager to run a business for me. But I haven't been able to find one anywhere."

"That rascal Yang Kuang-yen," said Lu Ping-i, "after stealing your merchandise, hired a manager surnamed Hsieh and opened a large tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, known as the Hsieh Family Tavern. With the profits he makes he acts as a money-lender, making loans to the unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls who gather there from the four quarters in the effort to make a living, and collects substantial sums in the way of interest from them. Every day, he wears fine clothing, eats good meat, and rides around on a donkey. Every three or five days, he goes down to the dock to look over the accounts and collect his profits, while utterly ignoring his former friends. His younger brother, Yang Erh-feng, operates a gambling den in his home and engages in cock-fighting and the raising of dogs. Nobody dares to cross him."

"I ran into him last year," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and he not only turned against me without any feeling but started to give me a beating, from which I was lucky enough to be rescued by a friend. My hatred for him has infused the marrow of my bones."

He then pulled Lu the Second into a tavern by the side of the road, where they went upstairs to have a drink together.

During their discussion, he asked, "How am I to deal with him in order to vent this anger of mine?"

Lu Ping-i responded with the words, "As the saying goes:

He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;

He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.

If we were to attempt to reason with him, since he is the sort of person who:

Before seeing his own coffin will not

shed tears of repentance,

he is certain not to concede anything. But I have an alternative plan to propose. Brother, there is no need for you to engage in any other business activity. Simply write out a legal accusation against him and submit it to your commandant's yamen. If you are able to recover your stolen goods and silver, you should be able to take over this tavern of his, invest some additional capital in it, and form a partnership with the manager Hsieh the Third. I could then cooperate with Hsieh the Third in operating the business on the dock, and all you would have to do is visit the premises every three or five days to inspect the accounts. I am absolutely sure that in a single month you should be able to realize a profit of more than a hundred taels of silver. That would be preferable to trying to start any other kind of business."

Gentle reader take note: This suggestion that Lu Ping-i made at the time would have the result of causing several people to:

Die an untimely death.⁴

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:

The manner of his death would be

altogether too tragic;

The manner of his demise would be

entirely too grievous.⁵

The nature of his death was as terrible as that of Li Ts'un-hsiao of the Five Dynasties, and that of P'eng Yüeh of the Han Dynasty.⁶ Truly:

Though it may not be determined by fate;

It owes nothing at all to one's efforts.

When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this proposal, he promptly bowed to Lu Ping-i and said, "Worthy Brother, what you say makes sense. As soon as I get home, I'll take it up with my cousin and her husband. If this undertaking is successful, I'll put you and Hsieh the Third in charge of the enterprise."

Thereupon, when the two of them had finished their wine and gone downstairs to pay the bill, Ch'en Ching-chi said to Lu the Second, "Brother, be sure to keep this to yourself. If it should work out, I'll come to thank you for it."

"I understand," responded Lu the Second, and the two of them then went their separate ways.

When Ch'en Ching-chi had explained the proposal in detail to Ch'un-mei, he went on to say, "But His Honor is not here right now, so what are we to do?"

The senior servant Chou Chung happened to be standing by their side and said, "That's no problem. If Uncle will write out an accusation, indicating how much money and merchandise he lost, and include one of His Honor's calling cards with it, I will deliver it to the two officials at the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. When this Yang

Kuang-yen is brought before the bench and subjected to a beating in the squeezers, there is no reason to fear that the rascal will not cough up the money.”

Ch'en Ching-chi was delighted by this proposal and proceeded at once to write out an accusation, seal it up in an envelope with one of the commandant's calling cards, and send the senior servant Chou Chung to take it to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.

The two officials were sitting on the bench at the time, in the process of conducting a hearing, when the gatekeeper came in and reported, “His Honor Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command, has sent someone to deliver a document to you.”

The officials Ho Yung-shou and Chang Mao-te called for Chou Chung to come before them and inquired about His Honor Chou Hsiu's assumption of the office to which he had recently been promoted. After listening to his explanation, upon opening the envelope and examining the accusation and the calling card, they felt inclined to do Chou Hsiu a favor.

Agreeing forthwith to accept the case, they sent detectives and constables to the port of Lin-ch'ing to arrest Yang Kuang-yen and gave return cards to Chou Chung, saying, “When you get home, convey our regards to His Honor and his wife, and tell them that when we succeed in recovering the missing money, they can send someone here to collect it.”

Chou Chung took the return cards back to the commandant's yamen and told Ch'un-mei, “They agreed forthwith to send people to arrest him and said that as soon as they succeed in recovering the money, you can send someone to collect it.”

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the two accordion-bound cards read, “Respectfully presented by your pupils Ho Yung-shou and Chang Mao-te,” he was utterly delighted.

In less than two days time, the detectives, inspectors, and constables from the Provincial Surveillance Commission who had been dispatched to the port of Lin-ch'ing succeeded in arresting Yang Kuang-yen and his younger brother Yang Erh-feng and bringing them back to the yamen. The two officials there interrogated them on the basis of Ch'en Ching-chi's accusation and, upon subjecting them to a beating in the squeezers and several days of incarceration, succeeded in recovering the sum of 350 taels of silver, and a hundred bolts of porous ramie fabric. In addition, the tableware from the tavern was estimated to be worth 50 taels of silver. In Ch'en Ching-chi's accusation he claimed to be due a reparation of 900 taels of silver, so they were still short 350 taels. They sold their home for 50 taels of silver, but their property was then completely exhausted. Ch'en Ching-chi was thus allowed the right to take over his stake in the Hsieh Family Tavern, and he entered into a partnership with the owner Fatty Hsieh, or Hsieh the Third. Ch'un-mei also provided the sum of 500 taels of silver, so that he had a capital of a thousand taels of silver, and he appointed Lu Ping-i to be his manager. He also had the tavern entirely redecorated, repainting and varnishing it, and decorating it with pictures, so that:

The balustrades were sparkling,
The rafters appeared brand new,
The tables looked shiny bright,
The wine and food well ordered.

On the day that it reopened:

Drums and music resounded to the heavens,
Pipes and flutes were blown harmoniously;

attracting the patronage of itinerant merchants and singing girls from the four quarters. Ch'en Ching-chi celebrated the occasion by sacrificing a pig and burning paper money. As the sayings go:

If you unplug the jug, it will make
three people drunk;
If you uncork the flagon, the aroma
will spread far off.⁷
Spirits and immortals have deposited
their jade girdles;
Ministers and councilors have pawned
their golden sables.⁸

When Ch'en Ching-chi climbed to the top of the large tavern, he found himself surrounded by translucent latticed windows that could be pushed open, and balustrades embellished with green varnish.

In all four directions, clouded peaks
rise in piles;⁹
Above and below, the sky and the water
appear to meet.¹⁰
To the east, dimly appear the spiraling blue
peaks of Mount T'ai;
To the west, impenetrable dark mists shroud
the imperial capital;
To the north, the red structures of wealthy
homes rise in layers;
To the south, the Huai River's vast extent
is like a strip of silk.

Above and below, the tavern had more than a hundred compartments.

Room after room houses the dancing
skirts of singing girls;
Floor after floor reverberates with
lively pipes and strings.¹¹

Words are inadequate to describe the scene:

The viands are piled as high as hills;
The wine flows as copiously as waves.

Truly, it is a case of:

The dancing continued till the moon in the pavilion
amid the willows hung low;
The singing went on until the breeze underneath the
peach-blossom fans expired.¹²

It was the middle of the first month when Ch'en Ching-chi reopened the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock in Lin-ch'ing, and he cleared as much as thirty-five taels of silver per day. It was managed jointly by Fatty Hsieh and Lu Ping-i, who served together behind the counter. Every three or five days, Ch'en Ching-chi would ride a horse, accompanied by his servant Little Chiang, and go to the port of Lin-ch'ing to look over the accounts. Whenever he came, the two managers Lu Ping-i and Fatty Hsieh would prepare a clean room on an upper story of the building that was provided with a curtained bedstead, furnished with tables and chairs, and replastered so that it was as spotless as a snow grotto. They would prepare a feast for him there, and assign four good-looking powdered faces to keep him company. The "cribber" Ch'en the Third would look after seeing that he was supplied with wine.

One day, on the third day of the third month, when spring was at its most beautiful, and the landscape was suffused with floral fragrance:

With their green hues, the locusts and
willows populate the banks;
With their rich reds, the apricots and
peaches shine like brocade.

Ch'en Ching-chi, on an upper floor of the tavern, leaned over the green balustrade and contemplated the scene below, which was alive with activity. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Tossed by the wind, enshrouded in mist,
the brocade banner flutters;
During this era of great peace the days
are beginning to grow longer.
Wine is capable of enhancing the courage
of even a stouthearted hero;
And is equally effective at alleviating
the depression of a beauty.
Deep within the three-foot long branches
on the willow-lined bank;
The tavern's signpost rises at an angle
beside the apricot trees.
The stalwart who has yet to accomplish
his lifelong ambition;
Is prone to sing haughtily as he enters
the Land of Drunkenness.¹³

One day,¹⁴ Ch'en Ching-chi happened to look out the rear window of his chamber on an upper floor of the tavern that overlooked the canal and noticed that there were two barges moored there, loaded with trunks, tables, benches, and other household effects, which four or five workers were moving into an empty suite on the ground floor. There were also two women on the barges, one of whom was middle-aged and tall of stature, with a rosewood complexion; while the other was a young woman, given to:

Putting on rouge and applying powder,
who had an attractive pale complexion and was about twenty years old. The two of them also proceeded to go into the empty suite below.

Ch'en Ching-chi approached Manager Hsieh and demanded to know, "Who are those people who, without asking our permission, are taking it upon themselves to move into our building?"



Ch'en Ching-chi Meets an Old Acquaintance in Lin-ch'ing

"They are two women who have come from the Eastern Capital," explained Manager Hsieh. "Having failed to locate their relatives, and being unable to locate a dwelling on such short notice, they asked our neighbor Old Man Fan if they could stay here for two or three days before moving on. I was planning to report this to you sir, but you have asked me about it before I was able to do so."

Ch'en Ching-chi was about to give vent to his anger when he saw the young woman approach him respectfully with straightened skirts and bow deeply, saying, "Pray abate your wrath, sir. Your manager is not at fault. It was we who took the liberty:

For lack of an alternative,¹⁵
of moving in before coming to ask your permission.

I can only hope that you will forgive us.
If you will permit us to remain here for three to five days, we will respectfully reimburse you upon moving out."

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the young woman had a way with words, he proceeded to look her over from top to toe, while the woman glanced back at him with her pair of starry eyes.

Their mutual feelings were visible in their four eyes;

They found they were unable to control their emotions.

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but

In his heart he thought to himself,
“I must have met her somewhere before, she looks so familiar.”
The middle-aged woman who was tall of stature looked hard at Ch'en Ching-chi and said, “Sir, are you not Son-in-law Ch'en from the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing?”

Ch'en Ching-chi was startled by this and said, “How were you able to recognize me?”
“I will not deceive you,” the woman replied. “I am the wife of his former manager Han Tao-kuo, and this girl is my daughter Ai-chieh.”

“The two of you were residing in the Eastern Capital,” said Ch'en Ching-chi, “so how have you happened to turn up here? And where is your husband?”

“He is on one of the barges, looking after our belongings,” the woman replied.

Ch'en Ching-chi immediately responded by ordering a waiter to go invite him into his presence. Before long, Han Tao-kuo came in and greeted him with a bow. His hair and whiskers had already begun to turn gray.

He then went on to explain the recent events in the capital, saying, “At court, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, Defender-in-chief T'ung Kuan, Minister of the Right Li Pang-yen, Defender-in-chief Chu Mien, Defender-in-chief Kao Ch'iu, and Eunuch Director Li Yen, all six of them, have been impeached in a memorial to the throne by the national university student Ch'en Tung.¹⁶ His allegations have subsequently been supported by numerous other memorials from the supervising secretaries and censors. As a result, an imperial edict has come down, ordering them to be remanded to the Three Judicial Offices for interrogation, and they have been sentenced to perpetual military servitude in areas suffering from poisonous miasmas.¹⁷ The grand preceptor's son, Minister of Rites Ts'ai Yu, has been executed, and his property has been confiscated by the state. The three of us were forced to flee for our lives and made our way to my younger brother Han the Second's place in Ch'ing-ho district, only to find that his house has been sold, and that he has fled to who knows where. The three of us, consequently, hired barges and traveled here on the canal, but we scarcely anticipated that we would run into you here.

Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.”

He then went on to ask, “Son-in-law, are you still a member of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing's household?”

Ch'en Ching-chi explained the preceding events, saying, “I am no longer a member of his household but am serving as a counselor in the household of my cousin's husband Commandant Chou Hsiu and have been granted the right to distinguish myself by wearing an official cap and girdle. At present, I am supporting myself by operating this tavern on the dock with the help of two managers. Since you have run into me, there is no reason for you to move out. It will not be a problem if you choose to reside here for a while. Please feel free to do as you like.”

The woman and Han Tao-kuo both kowtowed to him in gratitude and, after finishing their conversation, went back to moving their belongings off the barges.

As he looked on, Ch'en Ching-chi was moved to tell his servant Little Chiang and the “cribber” Ch'en the Third to help them move some of their things, at which Wang Liu-erh said, “There is no need, Son-in-law, for you to go to such trouble on our behalf.”

They were both pleased at this exchange, and Ch'en Ching-chi went on to say, “After all, you and I were originally members of the same household. What need is there to quibble about it?”

When Ch'en Ching-chi noticed that:

The light was beginning to wane,
and that it was about four o'clock in the afternoon, he decided to go home and told his managers to take care of supplying their new tenants with boxes of tea and goodies in the morning. He then mounted his horse and set out for home, accompanied by his servant. All night long:

His every thought and every consideration,¹⁸
was concentrated on Han Ai-chieh, whom he could not put out of his mind.

After spending a day at home, on the following day, he got up early, dressed himself appropriately, and returned to the tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing, accompanied by his servant Little Chiang, where he proceeded to look on for a while as his managers conducted their business.

Han Tao-kuo happened to send a servant over to invite him to come to their quarters for a serving of tea. Ch'en Ching-chi had been hoping for a chance to see Han Ai-chieh again, so when the servant arrived with his invitation, he promptly got up and went inside.

Lo and behold, Han Ai-chieh came out to meet him and greeted him with:

Such a smile you could have plucked it off her face;
bowing to him, and saying, “Sir, please come in and take a seat.”

Ch'en Ching-chi went into the chamber and sat down, while Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh came out to keep him company. It did not take them long to finish a serving of tea, as they chatted back and forth about their memories of the past. While this was going on, Ch'en Ching-chi gazed continually at Han Ai-chieh, while Ai-chieh's pair of eyes, like autumn ripples, were fixed infatuatedly on Ch'en Ching-chi. It was clear that they both had the same idea in mind. There is a poem that testifies to this:

Her narrow and upturned shoe-tips are
formed of florid silk;
Her fragrant flesh and creamy breasts
resemble sculpted jade.
Her lovely person is hardly sustained
by her lissome waist;

After a little while, Han Tao-kuo went outside, and Han Ai-chieh turned to Ch'en Ching-chi and asked, "Sir, how old are you?"

"I'm twenty-five," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "May I make bold to ask, sister, how old are you?"

Han Ai-chieh smiled at this, and said, "Sir:

We must have been fated to meet.²⁰

I, too, am twenty-five years old. We met each other as members of His Honor's household in the past, and now we have been fortunate enough to meet again. Truly:

Those with affinities will meet though
separated by a thousand li."

When Wang Liu-erh observed that the conversation between them had started to warm up, she sensed what was going on and made an excuse to go out herself, leaving the two of them sitting together face to face. Han Ai-chieh then resorted to the use of suggestive language in the endeavor to entice Ch'en Ching-chi. Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been familiar with such matters since his youth, could not fail to understand her intentions and started to get up and leave.

This Han Ai-chieh had colluded with her mother in plying this trade during their journey from the Eastern Capital; and while she had resided in the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, she had served as majordomo Chai Ch'ien's concubine. When it came to poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies, as well as the works of the hundred schools, she was acquainted with them all, and there was little she was not familiar with.

Upon seeing Ch'en Ching-chi get up and prepare to go out, and observing that they were alone, she went up close to him and sat down, affecting the:

Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,
as she said, "Sir, let me take a look at that gold pin in your hair."

Ch'en Ching-chi was about to pull it out for her, when Han Ai-chieh grasped the knot of hair on top of his head with her hand and pulled out the pin, whereupon she stood up and said, "Why don't the two of us go upstairs and have a word together?"

As she spoke, on the one hand, and walked out, on the other, Ch'en Ching-chi felt compelled to follow her up the stairs. Truly:

Though you may be as devious as any demon,
You'll drink the water she's washed her feet in.

Ch'en Ching-chi followed her upstairs and then said, "Sister, what is it you want to say?"

Han Ai-chieh responded by saying, "You and I have:

A predestined affinity for each other.²¹

There is no need for you to pretend otherwise.

Let us share our fervor on pillow and mat,²²
Enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss."

"I fear we may be discovered by the people here," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "That would never do."

Han Ai-chieh, displaying a variety of voluptuous airs, hugged Ch'en Ching-chi around the waist and proceeded to pull down his trousers with her dainty jade-white hands. Both of them felt that:

Their lascivious excitement burned like fire,
And it proved utterly impossible to suppress.²³

Han Ai-chieh felt driven to take off her clothes and recline face-up on the bed, where they proceeded to engage in intercourse with each other. Truly:

With lustful daring as big as the sky,
what is there to fear?
Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:
a lifetime of passion.

In the course of their engagement, Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "What number are you known by?"

"I was born on the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month," responded Han Ai-chieh, "so I am known as Han the Fifth, but my personal name is Ai-chieh."

In no time at all, after:

The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,
they sat down next to each other, and Han Ai-chieh proceeded to say to Ch'en Ching-chi, "Ever since the time that the three of us fled from the Eastern Capital but were unable to locate our relatives, we have been short of living expenses. If you have the silver on hand, I beg you to lend five taels to my father. I will take the responsibility to repay you with interest. Pray don't refuse this request."



Han Ai-chieh Entertains Her Lover in an Ornate Bordello

Ch'en Ching-chi agreed to her request, saying, "That's no problem. You have but to open your mouth, and I will weigh out five taels of silver for you."

When Han Ai-chieh saw that he had agreed, she returned his gold pin to him, and the two of them then went on to sit together for what seemed like half a day.

Fearing that they might be subject to gossip, they drank a serving of tea, and Han Ai-chieh invited him to have lunch with her, but Ch'en Ching-chi said, "I've got something to do elsewhere, so I won't eat anything, but I'll send you the money you asked for in a little while."

Han Ai-chieh went on to say, "This afternoon, I will prepare a meager cup of watery wine to share with you. Pray don't refuse my invitation, sir, but come back to see me, no matter what."

When Ch'en Ching-chi had eaten lunch in the tavern's office, he took a casual stroll in the street and happened to run into his former fellow disciple from the Yen-kung Temple, Chin Tsung-ming, whom he greeted with a bow and regaled with the story of his subsequent adventures.

"Worthy brother," responded Chin Tsung-ming, "I did not know that you had been acknowledged as a relative by the household of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu, or that you had opened a thriving business in that tavern.

I have been remiss in not coming to pay my respects.²⁴

Tomorrow, I will send a junior disciple to deliver a gift of tea to you. Please come to the temple for a visit when you have the time to do so."

Upon finishing their conversation, Chin Tsung-ming went back to the temple.

When Ch'en Ching-chi returned to the tavern, Manager Lu Ping-i reported to him, "That fellow named Han who is residing here has invited you for a drink, but I didn't know where to find you."

By a lucky coincidence, Han Tao-kuo's servant happened to come back at this point and said, "You are invited, sir, and your two managers are invited as well to keep you company. There are no other guests."

Ch'en Ching-chi, along with his two managers, then proceeded to go into their room, where a repast had already been neatly laid out, consisting of fish, pork, vegetables, fruits, and the like. Ch'en Ching-chi sat down in the place of honor, while Han Tao-kuo assumed the position of host, and Lu Ping-i and Fatty Hsieh were seated to either side. Wang Liu-erh and Han Ai-chieh sat down respectfully on the sidelines, while their servant came back and forth to serve the wine and refreshments.

After drinking a few cups of wine, the two managers, sensing what was afoot, said, "Sir, pray continue to drink at your leisure. The two of us will go back and man the counter."

So saying, they got up and left.

Ch'en Ching-chi was not accustomed to drinking heavily, but when he saw that the managers had left, he relaxed and downed another few cups of wine with the three members of the Han family, until he began to feel somewhat intoxicated.

Han Ai-chieh then ventured to say to him, "Sir, today there is no need for you to go home."

"It is already too late for me to return home by now," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I might as well go home tomorrow."

When Wang Liu-erh and Han Tao-kuo had drunk with them for a while, they went downstairs, and Ch'en Ching-chi then pulled five taels of silver out of his sleeve and presented it to Han Ai-chieh, who went down and turned it over to Wang Liu-erh, before coming back upstairs. What with:

The sharing of glasses and passing of cups,

Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,

they then continued drinking together until the evening fell, at which point Han Ai-chieh:

Divested herself of her fancy attire,²⁵

and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to spend the night with her in her upstairs room. On this occasion, what with:

Oaths by the pillowside to be faithful as the hills,

Promises under the quilts to be as true as the seas;

Giving forth oriole's notes and swallow's cries,

They enjoyed to the full their mutual affection;²⁶

But it is impossible to evoke all that they did.²⁷

When Han Ai-chieh had gone to the Eastern Capital, where she resided in the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching and waited upon his elderly wife, she had learned to play musical instruments and sing, and also acquired the ability to read and write. Upon hearing about this, Ch'en Ching-chi:

Felt unable to constrain his pleasure,²⁸

and found himself as attracted to her, as he had been to P'an Chin-lien. Consequently, the two of them proceeded to:

Frolic together the whole evening,²⁹

And sleep together all night long.

As a result, they could not avoid sleeping until late the next day and did not get up until lunchtime, when Wang Liu-erh made a pick-me-up for them, containing eggs and pork meatballs, which the two of them consumed, along with several cups of warmed wine.

In a little while, one of his managers came in and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to join them for lunch, whereupon he put on his hairnet, performed his ablutions, got dressed, and went out to eat with them. When he had finished his meal, he came back to take leave of Han Ai-chieh before heading back home, but she did not want to let him go and made a show of shedding tears.

Ch'en Ching-chi responded by saying, "After I get home, I'll come to see you every three or five days. There's no reason for you to get upset."

When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and headed back to the city of Ch'ing-ho, accompanied by his servant.

Along the way, he said to Little Chiang, "When we get home you must not say anything about the Han family."

"I understand," responded Little Chiang. "There is no need for you to admonish me."

Upon arriving back at the commandant's residence, Ch'en Ching-chi claimed that business was so brisk at the tavern that by the time he had finished reckoning up the accounts it was too late to come home, so he had stayed overnight. He then handed over to Ch'un-mei the thirty-some taels of silver in the form of profits that had been realized since his last trip before going back to his own quarters.

When he arrived there, he was taken to task by Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who said, "What reason did you have for staying away overnight, unless you were out exploring:

The willow paths and flower lanes,³⁰

of the licensed quarter? You left me at home, all by myself in an empty room, without a thought for returning home."

Thereafter, she insisted on keeping Ch'en Ching-chi at home for seven or eight days in a row, without letting him return to the dock at Lin-ch'ing. For her part, Han Ai-chieh noticed that he did not return for some time but merely sent Little Chiang to collect the profits from the managers, who wrapped up the silver for him to take home.

As a consequence, Han Tao-kuo felt obliged to have his wife, Wang Liu-erh, entice familiar customers or traveling merchants into their quarters to drink tea or wine. For some time, Han Tao-kuo had enjoyed the convenience of being dependent upon his wife for his livelihood. Moreover, though Wang Liu-erh was forty-five or forty-six years old, and could be said to be middle-aged, she still retained her charm. And now they were lucky enough to have this daughter, who was prepared to take her place, so that the business that was the source of their livelihood would not be interrupted, and they could continue to practice it in the open.

It so happens that when people without any official position, or other source of livelihood, depended on their wives for their support, the latter were known as clandestine harlots, or what are now known as unlicensed prostitutes.

At this time, when Ch'en Ching-chi failed to show up, the wine steward Ch'en the Third arranged for the silk merchant Magnate Ho to patronize Han Ai-chieh. This Magnate Ho, who was about fifty years old and had a thousand taels worth of silk and other piece goods at his disposal, was quite willing to patronize her, but Han Ai-chieh, who was still infatuated with Ch'en Ching-chi, claimed that she was feeling out of sorts and refused:

On three times and five occasions,³¹
to come downstairs, which Han Tao-kuo found extremely annoying. But when Magnate Ho observed that Wang Liu-erh was tall of stature, with a rosewood complexion; had a face shaped like a melon seed:

Painted her eyebrows and dressed her hair,³²
so that she displayed long spit curls; possessed a seductive pair of starry eyes:

The glint in which suggested intoxication;
and that her lips were daubed bright red, he surmised that she must be a past master at amorous liaisons; offered a tael of silver for the privilege of sharing a drink in her quarters; and ended up spending the night with her. Han Tao-kuo kept out of the way by sleeping in an outer chamber, while his daughter, Han Ai-chieh, on seeing that her mother was entertaining a customer, remained on the upper floor, without coming down.

From this time on, Magnate Ho was rendered so happy by Wang Liu-erh that the two of them were:

As hot for each other as burning charcoal;
and he did not let more than two or three days go by without coming to spend the night with her. Han Tao-kuo, for his part, was thus able to pocket no small amount of his money.

When Han Ai-chieh saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had not come back to see her for more than ten days, she longed for him so that:

Each day was like three months of autumn;
Each night seemed like half a summer.
She couldn't help feeling affected by:
The eye alongside the wood, and
The heart beneath the field.³³

She therefore sent their servant to the commandant's residence in the city to find out what was going on.

Upon encountering Ch'en Ching-chi's servant Little Chiang, he confidentially inquired, "Why has your master not gone to see her?"

"For the last few days," responded Little Chiang, "he has been feeling out of sorts and has not ventured outside."

When the servant returned and told Han Ai-chieh what he had heard, she consulted with Wang Liu-erh about it and then purchased a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two fresh fish, and a box of cookies; after which, in her upstairs room, she:

Ground her ink and picked up her brush,
Spreading out some flowered stationery,³⁴
and wrote out a note, which she entrusted to the servant to deliver to Ch'en Ching-chi.

She then placed the presents in boxes, turned them over to the servant to carry, and enjoined him, saying, "When you enter the city and see Master Ch'en, you must hand these things over to him personally, and ask him for an answering note."

The servant proceeded to tuck the note into his sleeve and take charge of the gifts, but of the events of his trip there is nothing to tell. Upon entering the city, he went up to the front of the commandant's yamen and sat down on the stone stylobate.

Who should appear at this juncture but the servant Little Chiang, who happened to come outside, and on seeing him asked, "What have you come again for?"

The Han family servant greeted him with a bow and then pulled him to an out-of-the-way spot, saying, "I've come to deliver some gifts to your master and have something to say to him. I'll wait for him here, if you will be good enough to let him know that I'm here."

Little Chiang promptly turned around and went inside, and it was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi swaggered into sight. It was the fifth month at the time, and the weather was swelteringly hot. Ch'en Ching-chi was dressed in an outfit of thin silk, wore a tile-ridged hat, held in place with a gold pin, on his head, while his feet were clad in sandals and white socks.

The Han family servant hastily bowed to him, saying, "Master, are you feeling somewhat better? Han Ai-chieh has commissioned me to deliver a note and some presents to you."

Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the note and said, "Is Han Ai-chieh well?"

"On observing that you have not visited her for so long," he replied, "she is suffering from heartache. She wishes to

send you her regards and would like to know when you might come to see her again.”
Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to open up the note and saw that it read as follows:

RESPECTFULLY INDITED WITH STRAIGHTENED SKIRTS TO HER LOVER MASTER CH'EN BY HIS HUMBLE CONCUBINE HAN AI-CHIEH.

Ever since parting from your distinguished countenance,³⁵ my heartfelt admiration for you³⁶ has not abated even slightly,³⁷ but has remained suspended and unforgotten in my heart. Since you promised to return, I have been leaning on the door gazing fixedly into the distance³⁸ but have failed to see you deigning to visit my humble abode. The other day, I sent a servant to ask after you, but he returned without having seen you,³⁹ although he heard that you were suffering from some ailment. This has filled my breast with such regret that I remain depressed whether sitting or lying down. Alas, I am not able to sprout a pair of wings so that I might fly to your side. Since you possess a captivating wife to love you at home, you cannot be expected to think of me but have spit me out like the seed of a fruit. I am sending you some boxes of savory foods as a meager expression of my sincere concern for you, and I hope that you will accept them with a smile.⁴⁰ I trust my sentiments will be apparent as I am unable to express myself more fully.⁴¹

In addition I am providing a brocade perfume sachet embroidered with mandarin ducks, and containing a lock of my black hair,⁴² as a paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings.

The twentieth day of the middle month of summer.

Your humble concubine Han Ai-chieh salutes you.

When Ch'en Ching-chi had read the note, he looked over the perfume sachet and found that it contained a lock of black hair and was embroidered with the motif of two mandarin ducks, and eight characters that read:

Admiringly tendered to my lover,

I'll follow you wherever you go.

He then folded it up as before and concealed it in his sleeve.

There was a wine shop next door to the commandant's yamen, and Ch'en Ching-chi told Little Chiang, "Take the Han family servant into the wine shop to have a drink of wine while he waits for me to write an answering note."

He then went on to tell Little Chiang, "Take these presents into my room, and if the mistress asks anything about them, just say that they were sent to me by Manager Hsieh from our tavern in Lin-ch'ing."

Little Chiang did not dare to be remiss and proceeded to take the four boxes of gifts inside. Ch'en Ching-chi then went into the library and secretly composed an answering note; after which, he wrapped up five taels of silver and, going out to the wine shop, asked the Han family servant if he had enjoyed a drink or not.

"Thank you for the fine wine, sir," the servant responded. "I can't drink any more and am ready to be on my way."

Ch'en Ching-chi gave the silver and the answering note to the servant and said, "When you get home, convey my respects to Han Ai-chieh. These five taels of silver are meant as a contribution toward her living expenses. I will come to see her in the next two or three days."

The Han family servant then went downstairs, and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted him out the door of the wine shop and saw him off.

When Ch'en Ching-chi went into his living quarters, Ko Ts'ui-p'ing asked him, "Who was it who sent these gifts?"

"It was Fatty Hsieh, the manager of the tavern," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "He had heard that I was not feeling well and sent these gifts as an expression of his concern."

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing believed his explanation. The two of them then, after consulting with each other, sent the maidservant Chin Ch'ien-erh to take a platter with one of the roast ducks, one of the fresh fish, and half a set of the pig's trotters back to the rear compound for Ch'un-mei to eat. She told her that they had been sent by one of the managers of the tavern, and she did not raise any questions about it. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, when the Han family servant reached the dock at Lin-ch'ing it was already late in the day, and on entering the door, he handed the silver and the answering note to Han Ai-chieh. On opening the note and perusing it by lamplight, she saw that it read as follows:

RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED IN REPLY TO THE DRESSING TABLE OF HIS INAMORATA HAN AI-CHIEH.

I am much obliged to you for the generosity you displayed toward me at our previous meeting. The sentiments inspired by our love making, and the affection you displayed on pillow and mat, have not been forgotten. I have been intending to hasten to our expected reunion, but a temporary indisposition has forced me to disappoint your expectations. You have also sent someone to ask after me, and present me with these mouth-watering delicacies, for which my gratitude is impossible to contain. In the next two or three days I should be able to thank you in person. I am also sending you five taels of silver, and a silk handkerchief, as a meager expression of my regard, which I sincerely hope you will accept, and deign to appreciate.

Signed: Respectfully presented by Ch'en Ching-chi

When Han Ai-chieh had read the note, she saw that a poetic quatrain had been inscribed on the handkerchief, that read as follows:

The handkerchief of Wu silk is inscribed
with a palindrome;
From a flourish of my writing brush the
ink is still fresh.
I have dedicated it to my affectionate
love Han Ai-chieh;
That we may enjoy the century-long love
of mating phoenixes.⁴³

When she had finished reading it, Han Ai-chieh handed over the silver to Wang Liu-erh, and mother and daughter gave vent to:

A thousand or ten thousand signs of joy,
in anticipation of Ch'en Ching-chi's return. But no more of this.

Truly:

When a favored friend arrives, one's feelings
can never be satiated;
When a real confidant shows up, conversation
is mutually agreeable.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Beneath the green gauze window ⁴⁴ I opened
the seal of your letter;
The paper, with its cloud-soaring geese,
is redolent with perfume.
I know the flourishes of your brush are
done with your jade hand;
But your loving thoughts are seen only
in what is left unsaid. ⁴⁵

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

LIU THE SECOND DRUNKENLY CURSES WANG LIU-ERH; CHANG SHENG WRATHFULLY KILLS CH'EN CHING-CHI

Some words of admonition:

All of the forms of discontent,
Arise from lack of forbearance.
If you show patience to events,
Your perception will be bright.
Buddha's words reject argument,
Confucian texts abhor conflict.
This avenue leads to happiness,
But not many persons pursue it.¹

THE STORY GOES that Ch'en Ching-chi allowed two days to pass, since the third day, the twenty-fifth of the fifth month, was his birthday. On that occasion, Ch'un-mei prepared a feast in the rear reception hall to celebrate his birthday, and the entire household joined in the festivities.

Early the next morning, Ch'en Ching-chi said to Ch'un-mei, "It is some time since I have been to the dock in Lin-ch'ing. Since I am not busy today, I plan to go there. In the first place, I will be able to go over the accounts with the managers of the tavern; and in the second place, I can avoid the stifling summer heat, and come back after my excursion."

Ch'un-mei said in response, "You should go in a sedan chair, and avoid any overexertion."

He then set out in a sedan chair, borne by two soldiers, and accompanied by Little Chiang, and headed straight for the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock in Lin-ch'ing, but of the events of his trip there is nothing to tell.

That afternoon, when he arrived in front of the tavern, got out of his sedan chair, and went inside, his two managers came out to welcome him, saying, "Sir, are you feeling somewhat better?"

Ch'en Ching-chi, whose mind was preoccupied with Han Ai-chieh, merely responded, "I fear I have put the two of you to the trouble of worrying about me."

After sitting with them for a while, he got up; told them, "Write out a copy of the accounts so I can look them over"; and then headed for the interior. The Han family servant came out to meet him and announced his arrival to Wang Liu-erh and her mate. Han Ai-chieh was in her upstairs room:

Leaning on the balustrade and gazing abroad,

Flourishing her brush and expending her ink,

as she composed a set of poems;

In order to dispel her lingering depression.²

When it was suddenly reported that Ch'en Ching-chi had arrived, she:

Lightly moved her lotus feet

Gently lifted her beige skirt,

and made her way downstairs, where mother and daughter greeted him with their faces wreathed in smiles, saying:

"The more eminent you are, the harder you are to see."³

What wind has blown you here today?"

Ch'en Ching-chi bowed in response to mother and daughter and then went into their room and sat down.

In a little while, Wang Liu-erh prepared a serving of tea for them, and when they had finished drinking it, Han Ai-chieh said, "Sir, please come upstairs and have a seat in my room."

Ch'en Ching-chi went upstairs as requested, and the two of them:

Just like fish in the water,⁴

Resembling lacquer and glue,⁵

did not fail to exchange words expressing:

Deep-felt love and intimate feelings.⁶

A sheet of flowery stationery was sticking out from under Han Ai-chieh's inkstone, and Ch'en Ching-chi picked it up to look at.

Han Ai-chieh explained, “Those are several poems that I wrote in my room up here while longing for you during my leisured hours, in order to:

While away my lingering depression.⁷

But I fear they may be unworthy of your distinguished eyes.”

Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to peruse them, and they read as follows:

Spring

Leaning languidly against the embroidered bed,

I'm too depressed to move;⁸

Languorously unfastening my embroidered sash,

I let my hair tumble down.

Ever since my jadelike lover has departed

I have had no news of him;

Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day

I can only yearn for him.⁹

Summer

From a high vantage point on the lofty tower

I gaze into the clear radiance;

The rose blossoms covering the entire arbor

are clothed in rare fragrance.

I have spent idle hours leaning over every

one of the twelve balustrades;¹⁰

As the perfumed breeze from the south has

begun to penetrate my garments.

Autumn

Within the cold hibiscus-blossom curtains

I am unable even to dream;

Since my understanding lover has left me

I can only grieve for him.

The tears I shed upon my pillow are like

the raindrops on the steps;

Outside the window they drip unceasingly

right up till the day dawns.¹¹

Winter

Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror,

I retouch my unblemished makeup;

I have withered away on my loved one's account,

losing the freshness of my complexion.

Closing the door, I am no longer concerned

with the idle breeze and moonlight;

And will henceforth instruct the plum blossoms

to do whatever they please.¹²

When Ch'en Ching-chi had finished perusing the poems:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,

He praised them endlessly to the skies.

Before long, Wang Liu-erh prepared wine and delicacies and brought them upstairs, where she moved the mirror stand out of the way and laid them out on Han Ai-chieh's dressing table.

The two of them sat down next to each other, and Han Ai-chieh proceeded to pour out a cup of wine and proffer it to Ch'en Ching-chi with both hands, bowing deeply to him, and saying, “Sir, during the whole time that you failed to visit me, I could not get you out of my mind for even a moment. But when our servant returned with your contribution toward our living expenses, our whole family:

Felt they could not thank you enough.”¹³

Ch'en Ching-chi took the proffered wine in his hand and bowed in return, saying, “It was my trivial indisposition that prevented me from keeping our engagement. Please do not hold it against me.”

After downing his wine, he poured another cup and proffered it respectfully to Han Ai-chieh. When she had drunk it, they sat down together and prepared to enjoy some more. Wang Liu-erh and Han Tao-kuo also came upstairs to share a few cups with them but found excuses to go downstairs again in a little while, leaving the two of them to drink together, and share their experiences during the time they had been separated.

After some time, as they drank until they began to feel the effects of the wine:

Their lascivious excitement burned like fire,

and they could not help recapitulating their former passion for each other.

As they engaged in intercourse,

Their affection knew no bounds.¹⁴

Getting up and putting on their clothes, they washed their hands and resumed drinking. After downing several more cups:

As their drunken eyes grew bleary,

Their residual lust had not faded.¹⁵

Ever since the last time they had met, the young man had been unhappy at home, and his mind had been so preoccupied with Han Ai-chieh that he had not engaged in intercourse with his wife. On this occasion, when reunited with his inamorata:

He was reluctant to call a halt,
after only one engagement. Truly, like:

Alive or dead predestined lovers,¹⁶

For the foregoing five centuries,
they had finally been thrown together, and Ch'en Ching-chi's psyche was led completely astray by her. In a little while:

His lustful feelings rose again,
and they engaged in intercourse a second time; after which, he felt that:

His body was so utterly fatigued,¹⁷

That he could carry on no longer.¹⁸

He had not eaten anything for lunch and simply collapsed onto the bed and went to sleep.¹⁹

It turned out to be one of those occasions when:

A disaster was destined to occur.

Unexpectedly, the silk merchant Magnate Ho showed up down below, and Wang Liu-erh entertained him with wine on the ground floor, while Han Tao-kuo went out onto the street to purchase vegetables, delicacies, and fruits to go with the wine. During his absence, the two of them engaged in intercourse, after which, Han Tao-kuo returned with the foodstuffs he had purchased, and the three of them drank several more cups of wine together.

About the time that the sun began to sink in the west, who should appear but the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, the proprietor of My Own Tavern, who was stinking drunk, and whose shirt was hanging open to reveal a torso of purple flesh.

With his fists raised on high, he strode into the ground floor of the tavern and shouted loudly, "Drag out the southerner Magnate Ho so I can beat him up."

This startled the two managers, who were afraid that Ch'en Ching-chi, who was asleep on the second floor, would hear him; so they hastily emerged from behind the counter, came forward, and bowed to him, saying, "Brother Liu the Second, Magnate Ho has not been here."

Liu the Second was not persuaded by this and strode into the interior in large strides, where he tore aside the portiere leading into Han Tao-kuo's quarters with one hand and found that Magnate Ho was inside, sitting shoulder to shoulder with Wang Liu-erh, and drinking wine.

Enraged by this, he cursed at Magnate Ho, saying, "You lousy servile dog! I'll fuck your mother! I've looked everywhere for you, but now I've found you. You've been maintaining two powdered faces in my tavern but have failed to pay them for their services on more than one occasion. In addition to which, you have not paid your rent for the last two months but have been coming over here to make out with another woman."

Magnate Ho hastily came outside and said, "Liu the Second, please go home. I'll come after you."

"You'll come after me, will you, you dog-fucked creature!" Liu the Second cursed at him.

Without any warning, he sent a clenched fist whistling his way that flew right into Magnate Ho's face, creating instantaneously a swollen purple bruise. When Magnate Ho got to his feet he managed to escape out the open door.

Liu the Second then knocked over Wang Liu-erh's table with a single kick of his foot, smashing all the utensils on it; at which Wang Liu-erh cursed at him, saying, "Who do you think you are, you death-defying, lousy, gallows bird, to break into my room for no good reason, only to let off your farts? I'm not the sort of woman who feels:

Inured to such alarms."

Liu the Second responded by stepping forward and giving her a single kick that knocked her flat on her back, and cursed at her, saying, "You whore, I'll fuck your mother! What are you but a nameless unlicensed prostitute, who did not come register yourself with me; as though I would let you get away with plying your trade in this tavern. You had better move out at once. If you delay, I'll subject you to a real beating with my fists."

"What sort of a 'bare stick' or 'knockabout' do you think you are?" retorted Wang Liu-erh. "Do you suppose I have no relatives of my own, so that you can get away with taking advantage of me? What do I want with this life of mine anyway?"

So saying, she plopped down on the ground and began to cry.



Liu the Second Drunkenly Beats Wang Liu-erh

"You whore!" Liu the Second cursed at her, "I'll kick you in the entrails until they break. You still don't seem to understand who I am."

The uproar they created was such that, in no time at all, the neighbors to either side, as well as the pedestrians in the street, gathered around them in considerable numbers.

One of the bystanders, who did not comprehend the situation, said to her, "Wang Liu-erh, you are a newcomer and do not know that he is the renowned Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, who is the brother-in-law of Inspector Chang Sheng on the staff of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu. He is the proprietor of My Own Tavern and is:

A foreman among the beaters of trollops;

A leader among the abusers of drunkards.

You would do well to cut him some slack, rather than acting as though you:

Don't know what is in your own interest.²⁰

No one around here dares to cross him."

"There are people even more powerful than he is," responded Wang Liu-erh. "What reason is there to worry about that gallows bird?"

When Lu Ping-i saw how rough Liu the Second was getting, he and Fatty Hsieh:

Resorting to both appeals and threats,
succeeded in persuading him to leave.

Ch'en Ching-chi was still lying in bed at the time, and when he heard the disturbance on the floor below and got up to see what was going on, the sun was already setting in the west.

When he asked what was going on, Han Tao-kuo was nowhere to be seen, but he ran into Wang Liu-erh, who was coming up the stairs:

With disheveled hair and a soiled face,²¹
and said to him, thus and so, "Some gallows bird of a 'knockabout,' who is known as the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, who is the proprietor of My Own Tavern, and who claims to be the brother-in-law of Inspector Chang Sheng from the commandant's household, came looking for one of his customers, kicked and beat me for no good reason, and cursed me out before finally leaving. He also smashed our crockery and wine vessels to smithereens."

So saying, she started to weep out loud. Ch'en Ching-chi then called up the two managers to ask them what had happened, but the two of them could only:

Gaze at each other in astonishment,
without daring to utter a word.

Finally, Manager Lu Ping-i, who had a glib tongue, explained, "It was the brother-in-law of the head servant Chang Sheng from the commandant's household, who came here looking for Magnate Ho. He claimed that he owed him two month's rent, and that he had also come to collect the unpaid fees for the services of the prostitutes he had been patronizing at his place. When he saw that he was in Wang Liu-erh's quarters drinking wine:

Without permitting any further explanation,
he tore the portiere aside and struck Magnate Ho a blow with his fist, which frightened Magnate Ho so much that he fled the scene. He then went on to quarrel with Han Tao-kuo's wife, kicking her over with his foot; and the rumpus thus created attracted the attention of all the pedestrians in the street, who crowded in to see what was going on."

Ch'en Ching-chi was worried about creating an incident this late in the day and ordered them to disperse the crowd. He then asked what had become of that rascal Liu the Second, and the two managers told him that they had persuaded him to leave.

On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi:

Made a point of remembering it;
and then did his best to placate Wang Liu-erh and her daughter, saying, "Leave it to me. There is nothing to worry about. The two of you, mother and daughter, can continue to live here. When I get home, I'll take care of it."

When the managers had calculated the interest earned since his last visit and turned the silver over to him, Ch'en Ching-chi got up to go, mounted his steed, and, followed by his servant, whipped up his horse and departed. By the time he made it inside the city wall, the sky was already dark, and he was not in a good mood. On arriving home, he went to see Ch'un-mei, turned the interest money over to her, and then returned to his own quarters. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day:

His every thought and every consideration,
told him that he should tell Ch'un-mei what had happened, but as he contemplated it, he said to himself, "I'd better hold off on it, and wait until I can find some serious faults with Chang Sheng, and get my cousin to persuade His Honor to put an end to him. I cannot tolerate the fact that he has shown more than once that he is not to be trusted. He dares to point out that it was he who located me and knows the truth about my origins, so he figures that I am at his mercy." Truly:

Getting revenge on one's enemies is often
accomplished this way;
When the opportunity arises, one does not
need to seek far for it.
Though you wear out shoes of iron without
finding what you seek;
In the end you may find it without making
any effort whatsoever.²²

One day, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to the tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock and met with Han Ai-chieh and her mother to discuss the fright they had been exposed to on the previous occasion.

He also asked his Manager Lu Ping-i, "Has that rascal Liu the Second come back to bother you again?"

"Since he left the other day," responded Manager Lu, "he has not returned."

He also asked Han Ai-chieh whether or not Magnate Ho had come back for another visit.

After having something to eat, and checking over the accounts, Ch'en Ching-chi felt obliged to go back to Han Ai-chieh's room on the second floor, where the two of them spent some time engaged in heartfelt conversation and also indulged in a bout of intercourse.

Upon coming out, he took advantage of his free time to call the wine steward Ch'en the Third into his presence and interrogate him, thus and so, as to whether Chang Sheng or Liu the Second were guilty of any serious misdemeanors that he knew of. This Ch'en the Third:

Though he never, ever, should have done it,
told him how Chang Sheng was keeping Sun Hsüeh-o, who had formerly been in his master's household, as his mistress in My Own Tavern. He also told him how Liu the Second lent money to the singing girls in the brothels at 30 percent interest and took advantage of His Honor the commandant's name to conduct his illicit business. Ch'en Ching-chi made a

mental note of everything he had said.

After this, he gave two or three taels of silver to Han Ai-chieh for her living expenses, finished checking the accounts with his managers, wrapped up the money that had been earned as interest since his last visit, said farewell, mounted his horse, and set off for home. But enough of this idle chatter.²³ He had harbored the thought of revenge in his heart for some time. In the first place, it was a case of:

Two enemies confronting each other;
and in the second place, it was only to be expected that it might give rise to a catastrophe.

Unexpectedly, just at this time, in the Court in the Eastern Capital, Emperor Hui-tsung was confronted with the fact that the army of the Great Chin regime had crossed the borders of the realm and had penetrated far into the interior. The situation was urgent and the Son of Heaven was thrown into a panic. After consulting with his chief ministers, he dispatched an envoy to travel to the northern kingdom and sue for peace; expressing his willingness to pay an annual ransom of several million taels worth of gold and silver, and colored silk, in return for a settlement. He also abdicated his throne in favor of the crown prince, who changed the reign title from the seventh year of the Hsüan-ho reign period to the first year of the Ching-k'ang reign period and assumed the title of Emperor Ch'in-tsung. When his son had taken his place on the throne, the former Emperor Hui-tsung assumed the title Supreme Taoist Emperor Emeritus and retired to the Lung-te Kung, or Dragon Virtue Palace. The court then appointed Li Kang²⁴ to the post of minister of war, in charge of the armies of the various circuits; and Ch'ung Shih-tao²⁵ to the post of general-in-chief, responsible for military affairs both inside and outside the capital.

One day, an imperial edict came down, addressed to Chou Hsiu, the commandant of Chi-nan prefecture, promoting him to the post of commander-general of the Shantung region, in command of an army of ten thousand men, both infantry and cavalry, and ordering him to station his forces in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, where he should join forces with the grand coordinator and censor-in-chief Chang Shu-yeh in defending the territory and resisting the Chin armies.

Commandant Chou Hsiu was presiding in his yamen at the time, when his attendants came in and reported that an imperial edict had come down and invited him to formally receive it. Commandant Chou Hsiu did not dare to be remiss and knelt down before an incense stand in order to listen to the reading of the edict. The imperial messenger then proceeded to declaim it out loud, and the text read as follows:

The edict from the Emperor, whose sovereignty is ordained by Heaven, states:²⁶

We have heard that the civil arts establish peace in the country,²⁷ while military prowess serves to stabilize the realm. The Three August Ones relied on rites and music to establish their kingdoms; the Five Emperors²⁸ used military campaigns to secure their empires. Undertakings may go smoothly or with difficulty; men may be sagely or foolish.²⁹ We have inherited the unshakable foundation bequeathed by Our ancestors;³⁰ and the weighty position passed on to Us by Our predecessor. In performing Our myriad tasks We tremble with anxiety. In olden times, Shun subdued the four malefactors, and T'ang³¹ drove out the Miao barbarians. Had they not deployed their armies, they could not have been victorious; had they not employed military might, they could not have established peace. Armies are the teeth and claws of the nation; military power determines the security of the realm. At the present time, the central plain is in danger of collapse, and the barbarians are in revolt. The Liao bandits have encroached upon Our borders from the west; and the Chin rebels have launched a southern invasion with their cavalry. The common people have been greatly afflicted;³² and We are much concerned about their plight.³³ The military commissioner-in-chief of Shantung, Chou Hsiu, is a man of seasoned talent, and a commander capable of defending cities; who has repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary merit, and whose fidelity and courage are well-known. He deploys his troops strategically and knows how to lead them into battle. We hereby promote him to the posts of commander-general of the Shantung region, and defense commissioner of the four circuits. In concert with the grand coordinator and censor-in-chief of Shantung, Chang Shu-yeh, he is ordered to lead his infantry and cavalry to defend Kao-yang Pass; and to place the disposition of his forces and their battle orders under the jurisdiction of General-in-chief Ch'ung Shih-tao; in the hope of restoring peace to Our endangered society, and expelling the rebellious barbarians. Alas! The appointment of worthy men to office in order to set the country straight; and the willingness to put oneself in danger in order to protect the throne; are indications of the loyalty and sincerity of ministers and sons. Just as the recognition of the good and the rewarding of the worthy, in order to stimulate resistance toward the enemy, are among the important functions of the court.³⁴ Each of you should exert your loyalty to the utmost, in order to accomplish Our goals. This Imperial command must be obeyed.

Ordered on the stated day of the ninth month of the first year of the Ching-k'ang reign period.

When Commandant Chou Hsiu had listened to the reading of the edict, he sent the imperial messenger on his way. He then called in his two inspectors, Chang Sheng and Li An, and directed them to load up two carts with his trunks of luggage, valuables, and other belongings, and escort them back home.

It so happens that during the year he had served in office at Chi-nan he had amassed enormous sums of gold and silver, which he now stowed in his trunks of luggage and turned over to his two trusted servants, saying, "When you arrive home and have stored this material safely away, be sure to keep watch over the premises by day and by night. Some day soon, in conjunction with the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh, I will take charge of the infantry and cavalry from the four circuits and set out for the front from Ch'ing-ho district."

That very day, Chang Sheng and Li An took care of loading the carts as they had been ordered to do and set out ahead of their master, but of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell. When they arrived home some days later and had stored the material safely away, the two of them proceeded to patrol the premises, by day and by night, both inside and out. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi saw that Chang Sheng had escorted the carts and come home, and learned that Commandant Chou Hsiu had been promoted to the office of commander-general of the Shantung region and would arrive back before long himself, he decided to reveal what was on his mind to Ch'un-mei, so that when the commandant returned they would jointly be able to disclose the incriminating evidence he had discovered about Chang Sheng.

Unexpectedly, one day, when his wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing was away from home visiting her mother, he was sleeping all by himself in the library on the west side of the courtyard when Ch'un-mei came in to see him early in the morning. Upon observing that there were no maidservants about, the two of them took off their clothes and proceeded to engage in the game of clouds and rain with each other.

What they did not anticipate was that Chang Sheng, ringing his bell as he patrolled the premises, should pass by the

postern gate, and overhear what sounded like female laughter coming from inside the library. He immediately silenced his bell and crept slowly up to the window in order to eavesdrop on what was going on.

He found out that Ch'un-mei was inside, engaged in intercourse with Ch'en Ching-chi, and overheard him saying to her, "I can't put up any longer with that rascal Chang Sheng, who is trying to keep me under his thumb by reminding me that it was thanks to him that I was located, and rescued from the plight I was in. He has run me down in front of the other servants more than once. Recently, when he learned that I had opened a tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, he encouraged his brother-in-law, the Turf-protecting Tiger, Liu the Second, to take advantage of your husband's prestige in order to get away with operating a brothel for unlicensed prostitutes, and exploiting them as a loan shark. He is also maintaining Sun Hsüeh-o as his kept mistress in a separate location, and keeping you in the dark about all these things. The other day, his brother-in-law Liu the Second actually forced his way into my tavern and drove the customers away. I have been keeping quiet about these things, not venturing to tell you about them, but now that your husband is on his way home, if we don't let him know about all this, I will not dare to continue doing business on the dock at Lin-ch'ing."

When Ch'un-mei heard this, she responded, "How can that rascal act so improperly? I sold that menial creature Sun Hsüeh-o into prostitution. How can he presume to maintain her in a separate location as his kept mistress?"

"He is not only taking advantage of me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but is taking advantage of you as well."

"When His Honor arrives home," pronounced Ch'un-mei, "I'll see that he gets rid of that rascal for good."

As the saying goes:

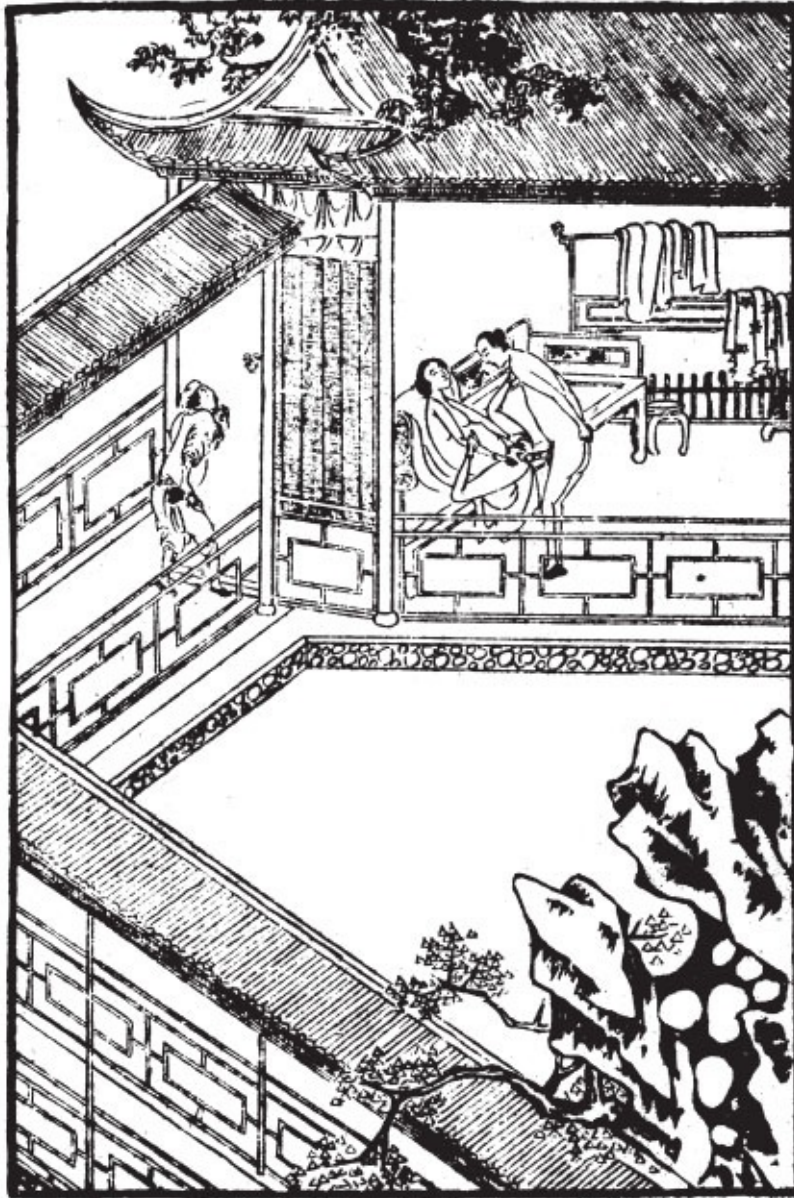
There are sure to be ears on the other
side of the wall;
How could there not be someone hidden
beyond the window?³⁵

The two of them were preoccupied with what they were saying to each other inside the room and were quite unaware that Chang Sheng, who was lurking outside the window, overheard what they said so clearly that he might well have ejaculated:

"Is it not delightful?"
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,

"Right now, they may be hatching a plot against my brother-in-law and myself, but I will act first by hatching a plot against them."

So saying, he discarded his bell, went out to the duty room in the front compound, where he picked up a steel-bladed dagger, and then:



Chang Sheng Eavesdrops on Ch'en Ching-chi

The telling is slow, but
 What happened was quick;
 he sharpened the blade on a whetstone and strode into the library.
 Who could have known that:

As providence would have it,
 Ch'un-mei was not fated to die at his hands.

Lan-hua, her junior maidservant, had suddenly come out in a state of consternation and interrupted them, saying to Ch'un-mei, "Your son, the young squire Chin-ko, has come down with a fit of convulsions, and you had better go back to see how he is."

This alarmed Ch'un-mei so much that:

Covering two steps with every one,
 she had rushed back to the rear compound to look after her child.

No sooner had she left than Chang Sheng burst into the library with dagger in hand, where he failed to see Ch'un-mei but found Ch'en Ching-chi lying under the bedcovers.

Upon seeing him come in, Ch'en Ching-chi cried out, "Ai-ya! What are you coming in here for?"

"I've come to kill you," Chang Sheng announced angrily. "How could you bring yourself to tell that whore that you intended to do me in? Was it not I who was responsible for rescuing you from your earlier predicament? And now you

are:

Requiting kindness with enmity.

As the saying goes:

A black-headed beetle is not safe to rescue;³⁶

If rescued it will end up eating your flesh.

Don't try to escape, but have a taste of my dagger.

This day a year from now will mark the

anniversary of your death."³⁷

Ch'en Ching-chi, whose body was stark naked, had no place to hide, and tried to wrap himself in the quilt; but Chang Sheng tore it aside and jabbed him with the dagger, which penetrated between his ribs, causing his fresh blood to spurt out. When Chang Sheng saw that he was still struggling, he jabbed him in the chest once again, which left him:

No longer able to make a move;³⁸

at which point, he grabbed him by the hair and cut off his head. Truly:

So long as one has three inches of breath,

one uses it a thousand ways;

But when the messenger of death shows up,

everything comes to an end.

It is pitiable, but Ch'en Ching-chi was no more than twenty-seven years old when he was made to:

Die an untimely death.

Chang Sheng, with his dagger in hand, proceeded to circle the room and look behind the bed for Ch'un-mei but could not find her, whereupon, he headed out toward the rear reception hall in large strides. When he reached the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds, he ran into Li An, who was carrying his watchman's bell and patrolling the premises.

No sooner did Li An see Chang Sheng come charging in like an avenging spirit, with dagger in hand, than he asked him, "Where are you headed?"

When Chang Sheng refused to respond and continued to charge ahead, Li An blocked his way, and Chang Sheng attempted to stab at him with his dagger.

Li An laughed sardonically at this and said, "My uncle is the famous military instructor known as the Shantung Yaksha Li Kuei, but there is no need for me to avail myself of the skills I have acquired from him."

As he spoke, his right foot shot up and kicked the dagger in his antagonist's hand to one side with a clattering sound. Chang Sheng was thrown into a panic by this, and the two of them fell to grappling with each other. But Li An tripped him up with his foot, so that he fell facedown to the ground, and then took off the belt around his waist and tied him up with it in no time at all.

The noise created by their struggle was overheard by Ch'un-mei in the rear compound, and Li An explained it to her, saying, "Chang Sheng came inside with a dagger in hand, but I have succeeded in subduing him."

Ch'un-mei had only just succeeded in coaxing Chin-ko back to consciousness, and when she heard these words she:

Turned pale with consternation,

and rushed out to the library, only to find the dead body of Ch'en Ching-chi lying there, with his:

Fresh blood flowing everywhere,³⁹

at which she couldn't help starting to weep out loud.

She then sent someone to report the situation to his wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who hurried home as quickly as possible. When she saw the slain corpse of Ch'en Ching-chi, she:

Fell to the floor in tears,

Oblivious to human affairs.

Ch'un-mei helped her up until she regained consciousness; after which, she had the corpse removed, purchased a coffin in which it could be prepared for burial, and had Chang Sheng incarcerated in the lockup, while she waited for the commander-general to come home and deal with the affair.

In no more than a few days, since the military situation was urgent, and he had received orders to make haste, Commander-general Chou Hsiu managed to finish rounding up the infantry and cavalry from the various circuits and heard that the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh had already arrived in Tung-ch'ang prefecture and was waiting for him to join him there.

When he arrived home, Ch'un-mei told him how Ch'en Ching-chi had been killed by Chang Sheng, and Li An laid the murder weapon before him and knelt down to tell him what had happened. The commander-general was enraged by this and, taking his seat on the bench, had Chang Sheng brought before him, and:

Without discussing the pros and cons of the matter,

ordered his soldiers to give him a hundred strokes with the bamboo, taking turns as they beat him five strokes at a time. In no time at all he was beaten to death. He then lost no time in dispatching flag-bearing couriers to proceed to the Lin-ch'ing dock, take the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second into custody, and bring him back in fetters.

Sun Hsüeh-o, on seeing that Liu the Second had been arrested, feared that she might be taken also, and going into her room:

Hanged herself until dead.

When the flag-bearing couriers brought Liu the Second back to the yamen, Commander-general Chou Hsiu ordered that he also should be given a hundred strokes with the bamboo, and he was beaten to death that very day. As a result:

The district of Ch'ing-ho
was dumbfounded;
The prefecture of Lin-ch'ing
was much disturbed.

Truly:

One who spends his life doing evil
and defying Heaven;
Will, one day, suffer retribution
from Heaven itself.⁴⁰

There is a poem that testifies to this:

In being a person one should never
engage in deceit;⁴¹
Hovering three feet over one's head
there are the gods.⁴²
If the doing of evil deeds received
no retribution;
The cruel people of this world would
devour each other.⁴³

At the time, the commander-general, by ordering these two men to be beaten to death, succeeded in ridding the neighborhood of their harmful influence. He then ordered Li An to take care of returning the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing to its original owner, and recovering the capital that had been invested in it. He also instructed Ch'un-mei to hold funeral services for Ch'en Ching-chi on the seven weekly commemorations of his death, and then to select an auspicious day on which to bury him on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city. He decided to leave Li An and Chou I to look after the household during his absence, and to take Chou Chung and Chou Jen to serve him at his military headquarters.

That evening, Ch'un-mei, along with Sun Erh-niang, hosted a farewell feast to see him off, at which, before she knew it, all of a sudden, she began to:

Shed two streams of tears,
and said, "Once you have set out, sir, there is no knowing when you will return. You must be careful when going into battle.

The barbarian troops are ruthless, and
They cannot be lightly confronted."⁴⁴

"The two of you," responded the commander-general, "while you remain at home, must:

Cleanse your hearts and reduce your desires,⁴⁵
while devoting yourselves to caring for my son. There is no need for you to worry about me. Since I have been the recipient of the Emperor's rank and emolument, I must:

Expend my loyalty to requite my country."⁴⁶

As for:

Fortune or mischance, survival or death,
I can only leave them to Heaven."

When he had finished admonishing them, he went to bed for the night.

The next day, the infantry and cavalry under his command were all assembled outside the city wall waiting for him; and when the commander-general set out at their head, the men and horses were all in excellent order. Behold:

Signal flags flutter amid embroidered banners;
Painted drums resound along with bronze gongs.
Three-pronged pitchforks,
And five-pronged pitchforks,
Glitter like autumn frosts.
Spears as sharp as reeds,
And spears of tempered steel,
Proliferate like snowflakes.⁴⁷
Buckler-bearing troops lead the way;
Strong bows and sturdy crossbows⁴⁸ come next.
Cannons are drawn behind their carts;
Battle-axes and lances follow in their wake.
The generals in their saddles,
Like the fierce tigers of the Southern Hills,⁴⁹
Are ready for battle and given to combat.⁵⁰

The horses they sit astride,
Like the coiled dragons of the Northern Seas,
Are adept at struggle and prone to fight.⁵¹
Truly, their blades and spears are as turbulent
as tumbling waters;
In fact, the men and horses sweep forward like
tempestuous winds.⁵²

Of the events of their journey there is nothing to tell.

One day, they were met by a mounted scout who told them not to proceed any further and then led them up to the outskirts of Tung-ch'ang prefecture, at which point the commander-general dispatched a courier, bearing his blue commander's standard, to report their arrival and stationed his infantry and cavalry outside the city wall. When Grand Coordinator Chang Shu-yeh learned that Commander-general Chou Hsiu, and the infantry and cavalry under his command, had arrived, he went out to meet him, together with the prefect of Tung-ch'ang, Ta T'ien-tao. Upon arriving back in the courtroom of the prefectural yamen, and exchanging the conventional greetings, they sat down together to discuss the military situation, and the relative urgency of the information available to them.

After bivouacking overnight, the infantry and cavalry set out early the next morning in order to assume their duties in defending the front against the enemy. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Han Ai-chieh and her mother, in the Hsieh Family Tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, learned of Ch'en Ching-chi's death, Han Ai-chieh gave herself over to weeping, by day and by night, and refused to consume either tea or food. She indicated that if she could only go to the commandant's yamen inside the city and be able to see Ch'en Ching-chi's corpse:

She'd be prepared to die if she must.

Her father and mother, along with others, did everything they could to talk her out of it, but she refused to be dissuaded. Han Tao-kuo, finding himself:

At a loss for what to do next,

sent their servant to the commandant's yamen, where he learned that Ch'en Ching-chi's corpse had already been encoffined and buried on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city.

When the servant returned and reported this news, Han Ai-chieh expressed the desire to go burn paper money at his tomb, and weep over his grave, as an expression of her grief over the demise of their relationship. Her parents felt compelled to go along with this and proceeded to hire a sedan chair for her, and pay a visit to the Temple of Eternal Felicity. When they asked Abbot Tao-chien where the tomb was located, he ordered a novice to take them behind the temple and point out the location of the tomb.

Han Ai-chieh got out of the sedan chair, went in front of the tomb, lit the paper money, and bowed before it, calling out as she did so, "My darling brother:

I really looked forward to living in harmony
with you until our old age.

How could I have anticipated that this day you would be dead?"

So saying, she commenced to weep out loud and then fell down in a faint, knocking her head on the ground so hard that she lost consciousness. This threw Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh into a panic, and they rushed over to help her up, calling out to her as they did so, but she did not respond, which panicked them even further.

Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi's wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who arrived in two sedan chairs to conduct the ceremony of revisiting the grave on the third day after the burial, accompanied by their attendants, carrying the three sacrificial animals and other ritual offerings, in order to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. On their arrival, they saw a young woman, wearing plain white mourning garments and a mourning cap on her head, who had:

Fallen to the floor in tears,

while a man and a middle-aged woman were attempting to help her up, though she fell down again:

Oblivious to human affairs.

They were startled by this and asked where the man was from.

Han Tao-kuo and his wife came forward to greet them with a bow and told them what had happened up until that point, saying, "This is our daughter Han Ai-chieh."

When Ch'un-mei heard the name Han Ai-chieh she remembered that she had met her in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in the past and also recognized Wang Liu-erh. Han Tao-kuo then went on to tell her all about how they had been forced to leave Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital.

He then went on to explain, "Our daughter was acquainted with Master Ch'en Ching-chi but did not realize that he had died, and on finding out, wanted to come see his grave and burn paper money on his behalf. We did not anticipate that on arriving here she should collapse in tears this way."

The two of them then continued trying to resuscitate Han Ai-chieh for what seemed like half a day before she finally spit up a mouthful of sticky sputum and regained consciousness. She choked inarticulately for a while, before giving way to a fit of weeping.

She then got up and proceeded to kowtow to Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing four times:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;

while saying, "Although he and I were guilty of:
Cohabitation amid the dewdrops,
the two of us:

Swore to be as faithful as the hills,
And vowed to be as loyal as the seas.⁵³
We looked forward to living in harmony
together until our old age.

Who could have known that:

Heaven should fail to comply with our wishes,⁵⁴
and he should predecease me one day, leaving me:

On the ground on all fours?

While he was still alive, he gave me a handkerchief of Wu silk with a love poem in the form of a quatrain inscribed on it. I knew that he had a wife at home, but I was willing to subordinate myself to you as his concubine. In case you don't believe me, I'll show it to you."

So saying, she pulled the handkerchief of Wu silk with the quatrain inscribed on it out of her sleeve so Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing could read it. The poem read as follows:

The handkerchief of Wu silk is inscribed
with a palindrome;
From a flourish of my writing brush the
ink is still fresh.
I have dedicated it to my affectionate
love Han Ai-chieh;
That we may enjoy the century-long love
of mating phoenixes.

Han Ai-chieh went on to say, "I also gave him a little perfume sachet embroidered with two mandarin ducks, for him to suspend from his belt. It had double-headed lotus blossoms depicted on either side, on each petal of which I had stitched a character, so that they read:

Admiringly tendered to my lover,
I'll follow you wherever you go."

Ch'un-mei then asked Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, "Why did we not find this perfume sachet?"

"It was suspended inside his tunic," responded Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, "and I put it inside the casket when he was encoffined."

When they had finished offering their sacrifices before Ch'en Ching-chi's tomb, Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing invited the mother and daughter into the temple where a repast was prepared for them to eat. When Han Ai-chieh's parents saw that:

The light was beginning to wane,
they urged her to get ready to go, but she did not want to leave.

Kneeling down in front of Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, she wept, saying, "I do not want to return with my mother and father. I would rather join you in wearing mourning and living as a widow, in order to honor our relationship, and show that:

While living I served as his concubine;
When dead I remain close to his spirit."

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing did not choose to say anything in response to this, but Ch'un-mei said, "My sister, I fear that someone still in the springtime of her youth as you are will find it difficult to remain chaste. The best years of your life will be wasted."

"Mistress," responded Han Ai-chieh, "how can you say such a thing? Having committed myself to him, even if:

My eyes were gouged out or my nose broken,
I would feel obliged to maintain my fidelity and swear never to marry anyone else."

She then turned to her parents and enjoined them, saying, "The two of you elders should return by yourselves. I wish to join my mistress and my sister as residents of their household."

Wang Liu-erh:

Shed tears from her eyes,
and wept, saying, "We had hoped that you would support the two of us in our old age. We have only just rescued you from:

A tiger's lair and a dragon's pond,⁵⁵
and today you propose to abandon us."

All Han Ai-chieh said in response was, "I will not go back with you. Even if you managed to take me with you, I would only commit suicide."

When Han Tao-kuo saw that his daughter was adamant about not returning with them, he and Wang Liu-erh cried together over her decision and shed tears as they set out for the tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing; while Han Ai-chieh joined Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing as they rode back to the commandant's yamen in their sedan chairs. On the way back, Wang Liu-erh could not bear the thought of relinquishing her daughter and wept over it again and again:

In sorrow and distress.

Han Tao-kuo, for his part, feared that it was getting late and hired two horses to speed them on their way. Truly:

When the horse is slow and the mind beset⁵⁶
the road ahead is endless;

One's person resembles floating duckweed⁵⁷
or tosses like tumbleweed.

There is only the moon as it hovers over
the gates of the capital;

That shines indifferently on the grief of
those going west and east.⁵⁸

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

HAN AI-CHIEH SEEKS HER FATHER AND MOTHER IN HU-CHOU; CH'AN MASTER P'U-CHING RESCUES SOULS FROM PERDITION

Some words of admonition

In this human life people should not
rely upon heroism;
Their degrees of skill at their jobs
are sure to differ.
Even fierce tigers are bound to meet
more ferocious beasts;
The most poisonous serpents are also
fearful of centipedes.
His seven captures of Meng Huo made
Chu-ko Liang famous;¹
For prevailing over Kuan Yü twice
Lü Meng was admired.²
The judiciousness of Li An marked
him as a prudent man;
And enabled him to fly high and
evade his predicament.³

THE STORY GOES that when Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh returned to the Hsieh Family Tavern without their daughter, they were faced with the prospect of:

Sitting at home as their resources ran out.⁴

They therefore sent Ch'en the Third to invite Magnate Ho to visit them as before. When Magnate Ho found out that Liu the Second had been killed by the local authorities, so that the threat that he posed was eliminated, he came back and resumed his affair with Wang Liu-erh.

In the course of a conversation with Han Tao-kuo, he said, "Since your daughter, Han Ai-chieh, is preserving her chastity as a member of the commandant's household, and refuses to come back, I propose that once I have sold off my shipment of merchandise, and collected what I am owed, the two of you can come with me on my return to my home in Hu-chou. That would surely be preferable to carrying on this business of yours here."

"If you deign to be so considerate of us, sir," responded Han Tao-kuo, "that would be wonderful."

One day, after Magnate Ho had sold off his merchandise, and collected what was owed him, he hired a boat and set out for Hu-chou, taking Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh with him.

To resume our story, when Han Ai-chieh had settled into Chou Hsiu's household, she and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing both remained chaste out of respect for Ch'en Ching-chi, addressed each other as sisters, and got along very well, spending their days keeping company with Ch'un-mei. At the time, Chou Chin-ko was already five years old, Sun Erh-niang's daughter Chou Yü-chieh was nine, and the women had nothing to do but look after the children.

Who would have thought that after the death of Ch'en Ching-chi, and Chou Hsiu's departure on his military campaign, despite the fact that every day Ch'un-mei enjoyed:

Delicacies of every variety, and
Clothes of satin and brocade;

while on her head:

What glitters is gold,
What is white is silver,
What are round are pearls,
What sparkle are jewels; and
She lacked for nothing;⁵

she found the nights difficult to endure:

Sleeping in solitude on her lonely pillow,⁶
While flames of desire consumed her heart.

She noticed that Li An was a handsome fellow and was impressed by the way in which, after the death of Chang Sheng, he had continued conscientiously to patrol the premises, both early and late.

One day, during the winter, he was on the night shift in the duty room when he heard someone knocking on the rear gate and promptly asked who it was; to which the only response was, "Just open the door."

Li An hastily unfastened the door only to see someone force their way inside and hide out of the lamplight. When Li An took a look at the person, he saw that it was the wet nurse Chin-kuei.

"Nurse," said Li An, "what are you doing here at such an hour?"

"I have not come on my own initiative," said Chin-kuei. "It is my mistress in the rear compound who sent me here."

"What did the mistress send you here for?" asked Li An.

Chin-kuei laughed, saying, "You wouldn't understand it. She wanted me to see if you had gone to sleep or not, and entrusted me with something to give to you."

So saying, she pulled a bag of clothing off her shoulder and said, "These are for you, and this bag also contains some women's clothing for your mother. The mistress feels much indebted to you for escorting His Honor's cartloads of luggage on the way home, and for saving her life. If it had not been for you, she also would have been slain by that rascal Chang Sheng."

When she had finished speaking, she left the clothes behind and went out the door.

After going only two steps, she turned around and said, "There is another item of importance."

So saying, she pulled out a large ingot of silver weighing fifty taels and tossed it to Li An, after which she continued on her way. The rest of the night passed without incident.

Early the next morning, Li An got up and went straight to his home, taking the clothes with him to give to his mother.

"Where did these things come from?" his mother asked.

Li An told her what had happened the night before; but when she had heard him out, his mother became upset and said, "At the outset, Chang Sheng committed a crime, for which she had him beaten to death with a hundred strokes of the bamboo. What could there be behind her giving you these things today? I am already more than sixty years old at present, and since the death of your father, you are the only person I have left to look to. If you do something that gets you into trouble, who would there be for me to depend on? You had better not go back there tomorrow morning."

"If I don't return," said Li An, "and she should send someone to fetch me, what will you have to say?"

"I will just tell them that you have come down with a severe cold," his mother said.

"If I should end up not returning," said Li An, "wouldn't that serve to make His Honor annoyed with me?"

"You might as well go visit your uncle the Shantung Yaksha Li Kuei," said his mother. "After staying there for a few months, you can come back to check out the situation."

Li An, who was both a filial and obedient son, opted to take his mother's suggestion and proceeded to pack up his luggage and set out for Ch'ing-chou prefecture in order to seek refuge with his uncle Li Kuei.

When Ch'un-mei saw that Li An had not returned, she sent a junior servant to summon him on three or five occasions. At first, his mother said that he was at home recuperating from an illness, but when she saw that people came back to check on the situation, she explained that he had returned to his native place to try to make a living. Ch'un-mei suffered heartfelt frustration at this news. But no more of this.

Time flies by swiftly;⁷

The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.⁸

The twelfth month ended and spring began,

During the primal decade of the first month.

Commander-general Chou Hsiu, at the head of his twelve thousand troops, had been encamped at Tung-ch'ang prefecture for some time, when he sent his servant Chou Chung to deliver a letter to his family, directing them to send Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang to join him there, along with his children Chin-ko and Yü-chieh. When his dependents were ready to get into their carts and set out, they left only Chou Chung behind, having instructed him to go and invite Chou Hsiu's cousin Chou Hsüan to leave his country estate and come to look after the household during their absence.

It so happens that Commander-general Chou Hsiu had a cousin named Chou Hsüan who lived on his country estate, and who agreed to join Chou Chung in looking after the household along with Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh, while Chou Jen and a contingent of military guards escorted the vehicles of the other family members on their way to Tung-ch'ang prefecture. With regard to this trip, truly:

It was not to save their lives or reputations

that they left their home;

But how could they have known how few persons

survive such expeditions?

There is a set of verses that describes the heroic leadership of Commander-general Chou Hsiu. At this time, when the Central Plain was in a state of turmoil, it was his ambition to overcome the barbarians. Behold:

In all four quarters bandits arise
like swarming bees;
The flames of beacon fires flare up
turning the sky red.
A display of the general's wrath may
pacify the realm;
Sweeping away the barbarians, and
making them submit.

He has long chosen to prefer public
over private interests;
And pledged his life to his country
as if it were not his.
His dagger-axe can shroud the sun
to aid him in battle;
He is able to win the first place
in the Hall of Fame.

Beyond the Yen-men Pass the autumn
wind is tempestuous;
Clad in metal armor he must sleep
under the cold moon.
He has forced his steed to sweat
for twenty years;
Only to achieve streaks of snowy
white in his hair.

The Son of Heaven sees his worth
from miles away;
And has rewarded his efforts with
praise repeatedly.
A golden seal hangs at his elbow,
as big as a dipper;
As surely befits a hero of such
imposing stature.⁹

One day, under the supervision of Chou Jen, the vehicles that were carrying Chou Hsiu's dependents arrived in Tung-ch'ang. When the commander-general saw that Ch'un-mei, Sun Erh-niang, Chin-ko, and Yü-chieh, along with their attendants, had arrived, and that:

 Their journey had been a safe one,¹⁰

he was utterly delighted and arranged for them to be housed in the rear compound of his headquarters.

Chou Jen told him, "I invited your cousin Chou Hsian from your country estate to come and look after your household, along with my father Chou Chung."

Commander-general Chou Hsiu also asked, "Why is Li An nowhere to be seen?"

"Why bring up the subject of Li An?" Ch'un-mei expostulated. "Because I was feeling grateful to that rascal for apprehending Chang Sheng, I gave him two sets of clothes for his mother to wear. But that evening, while patrolling the premises, he went into the rear compound and made off with a package of fifty taels worth of rental income from your country estate that was lying on a table in the parlor. I sent servants to his mother's place to summon him a number of times, but he claimed to be sick and failed to return. And the last time I sent someone after him, he was told that he had absconded to his native place in Ch'ing-chou."

"That rascal," responded Chou Hsiu. "I had always treated him favorably, and he has turned out to be as ungrateful as that. When I have the time, I will send people there to arrest him."

Ch'un-mei chose not to mention anything about the affair of Han Ai-chieh. After some time had passed, Ch'un-mei observed that Chou Hsiu was preoccupied every day with military affairs and was utterly devoted to serving the national interest on the Emperor's behalf:

 Straining his heart and taxing his mind,¹¹

while not even taking the time to eat during the day. As for the gratification of sexual desires within the bed curtains, it was a long time since he had indulged in them. She observed that Chou I, the second son of the old family servant Chou Chung, was eighteen years old, possessed:

 Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes;

and was willing to:

 Exchange looks with eyes and eyebrows.

Consequently, the two of them began a clandestine affair and became attached to each other.

 Morning after morning and evening after evening,

the two of them played board games and drank wine together in her room, while the only person who remained unaware of what was going on was the commander-general.

Who could have anticipated that, one day, Emperor T'ai-tsung of the northern state, the Great Chin, having overcome the state of Liao, and observed that in the Eastern Capital of the Sung dynasty Emperor Ch'in-tsung had ascended the throne, assembled a powerful contingent of barbarian troops and launched a two-pronged invasion of the Central Plain. The grand marshal Nien-mo-ho led a force of one hundred thousand infantry and cavalry through the Ching-ching Pass in T'ai-yüan prefecture in an attempt to invade the Eastern Capital; while the secondary marshal Wo-li-pu led his forces from T'an-chou in an attempt to seize Kao-yang Pass. The Sung armies defending the frontier:

 Proved unable to resist them.¹²

This information threw the minister of war Li Kang and the general-in-chief Ch'ung Shih-tao into a panic, and that very night they issued urgent military dispatches ordering the commander-generals of Shantung, Shansi, Honan, Hopei, Kuantung, and Shensi to muster the infantry and cavalry in their six jurisdictions, and occupy the strongholds therein, in order to defend their territories, and fend off the enemy. Consequently, Liu Yen-ch'ing, the commander-general of the Shensi region, led the forces of Yen-sui; Wang Ping, the commander-general of the Kuantung region, led the forces of Fenchiang; Wang Huan, the commander-general of the Hopei region, led the forces of Wei-po; Hsin Hsing-tsung, the

commander general of the Honan region, led the forces of Chang-te; Yang Wei-chung, the commander-general of the Shansi region, led the forces of Tse-lu; and Chou Hsiu, the commander-general of the Shantung region, led the forces of Ch'ing-yen against the Chin invaders.

To resume our story, when Commander-general Chou Hsiu learned that a powerful contingent of barbarian troops had come to attack the frontier, and received the urgent military dispatch from the Ministry of War, he mustered his infantry and cavalry:

Donned his complete suit of armor,¹³

And marched away at double stages.

By the time his mounted scouts reached the Kao-yang Pass the Chin marshal Wo-li-pu's infantry and cavalry had already penetrated the pass and slain an enormous number of men and horses.

This happened during the first decade of the fifth month.

The armies endeavored to arrest each other; but

Yellow sand flew up in all four directions, and

The tempestuous winds blinded their vision.

Chou Hsiu led his troops into battle, but the Chin commander Wo-li-pu, while urging his cavalry forward in a counterattack, launched an arrow that buried its shaft in his neck, penetrating his throat and causing him to fall off his horse and die. The enemy officers tried to secure his corpse with hooks and cords, but his own men dashed forward, seized his body, and carried it away on horseback. The soldiers wounded in this engagement were without number. Alas, on the day that Commander-general Chou Hsiu died in battle, he was only forty-six years old. Truly:

Loyal generals exert themselves to serve

their home and country;¹⁴

But the blood of both the worthy and the

stupid stains the sand.¹⁵

A man of yore whose thoughts on this subject were inexhaustible has left us a quatrain to express his feelings, which reads:

Victory and defeat are outcomes that military

men cannot anticipate;¹⁶

Security and danger in the final analysis are

things decided by fate.

Advancing to battle without obtaining victory

he dies before his time;¹⁷

The sun sets and the rivers flow in spite of

one's insuperable grief.¹⁸

There is also a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that reads:

A handsome hero whose aim it was to stabilize

the state and pacify the land;¹⁹

His heart was motivated by correct principles²⁰

and the will to rout the enemy.

He was as given to planning national affairs

as dealing with family matters;

And was practiced at carrying secret tallies

and wearing tiger-head tallies.²¹

The barbarian cavalry was invincible,

While the prowess of his men was lax.

His troops were unwilling to risk their lives

and his officers were inept.

It was a pity that he suffered such a death

upon the sandy battlefield;

And that for untold years his heroic spirit

could not find expression.

When the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh saw that Commander-general Chou Hsiu had perished on the battlefield, he immediately:

Sounded the gong for his troops to retire,²²

took stock of his losses, withdrew to defend Tung-ch'ang, and submitted an urgent memorial to the throne. But no more of this.

When the retreating troops carried Chou Hsiu's corpse back to Tung-ch'ang, Ch'un-mei and her entire household, both high and low, were so upset that:

Their cries shook the heavens,

as they proceeded to encoffin the body and turn over his military credentials and official seals to the authorities. One day some time later, Ch'un-mei, along with her servant Chou Jen, took charge of the coffin and returned with it to Ch'ing-ho district. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.

To resume our story, ever since Ch'un-mei departed, Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh had stayed at home, where they:

Chose to consume only plain tea and simple fare,²³

Remaining chaste and preserving their widowhood,

as the days and months passed by. One day, as spring expired and the summer began, when the scenery was bright and fresh, and the days grew longer, they became weary of their needlework, and the two of them strolled out to the ornamental pavilion outside the library on the west side of the courtyard, where they saw that:

The many flowers were in full bloom,²⁴
Orioles sang and swallows chattered,²⁵

and they were:

Touched with heartache by the scene.²⁶

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's heart remained relatively unperturbed, but Han Ai-chieh could not get the thought of her lover Ch'en Ching-chi out of her mind. With regard to all things, she was:

Bereft of thought or feeling, and
Saddened by whatever she saw.²⁷
The mouth divulges the sprouts of the mind,²⁸
And gives shape to them in poetic language.

They took turns composing some quatrains that testify to this.

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:

As flowers bloom in the quiet courtyard
the sun begins to shine;
Outside the tightly locked double doors
the white day brightens.
Collapsed against the silver screen I
wake from my spring sleep;
Upon the branch of a green locust tree
I hear an oriole's cry.

Han Ai-chieh's read:

The spring season is coming to an end²⁹
as the summer begins;
Meandering in my upturned shoe-tips I
venture out the door.
As evening comes I lean in depression
on my dressing table;
If I were to neatly paint my eyebrows³⁰
for whom would it be?³¹

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:

Wiping the mirror with a red cloth by
light from the window;
I paint my mothlike eyebrows so they
slope to either side.
When my lotus feet are lightly animated³²
where is there to go?
Smiling beside the stairs I pluck the
pomegranate blossoms.³³

Han Ai-chieh's read:

My countenance looks like snow and my
spirit resembles jade;
I am not yet ready to banish romance
for fear of defilement.
As I gaze at my visage I pity myself
and also feel regret;
Who is left to savor the beauty of my
newly applied makeup?³⁴

Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:

Sedge grass spreads over the ground
as thick as a rug;
Elm pods are strewn everywhere like
scattered coins.
Who could have foreseen that rascal
to be so fickle?
Drunken the whole day long he sleeps
under the flowers.

Han Ai-chieh's read:

Besetting sorrow continues to cause
my brows to peak;
Why has my face looked so distressed
for the last year?
Ever since we parted all day long my
soul is disturbed;

There is no road to Heaven that might
allow us to meet.

When the two sisters had finished reciting their quatrains, without their knowing it:

Tears trickled down their cheeks.³⁵

Chou Hsüan came upon them at this point and admonished them, saying, "You two sisters ought not to disturb yourselves so. You would do better to stifle your sighs and examine your own conduct. I have had a number of dreams in the last few days that appear to be inauspicious. I dreamed of a bow hanging from a flagstaff, and the flagstaff appeared to be broken. But I don't know whether this should be interpreted as inauspicious or auspicious."

On hearing this, Han Ai-chieh remarked, "I fear it may portend that His Honor has suffered some mishap on the frontier."

As they were wondering about this, all of a sudden they saw their servant Chou Jen, dressed in mourning garments, and in a state of obvious agitation, who came in and reported, "A calamity has occurred. His Honor, thus and so, on the seventh day of the fifth month, was killed in battle at the frontier pass. The First Lady and the Second Lady, along with their dependents, have brought the cart with his bier home with them and have just arrived."

This threw Chou Hsüan into a state of consternation, and he promptly ordered that the front reception hall should be swept out and straightened up so that Chou Hsiu's coffin could lie in state there, and the sacrificial offerings could be formally presented. The entire household, both high and low, then proceeded to give voice to grievous lamentations, and Chou Hsüan made arrangements for funeral services to be held on the seven weekly commemorations of Chou Hsiu's death, and for Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to hold scripture readings on his behalf. His children, Chou Chin-ko and Chou Yü-chieh:

Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel;

while visitors came and went to offer their condolences. A day was chosen for the funeral procession, and he was duly buried in his family's ancestral graveyard. But there is no need to describe this in detail.

To resume our story, on behalf of his nephew the five-year-old Chou Chin-ko, Chou Hsüan submitted a memorial to the throne asking that an officially ordained sacrifice be offered at the site of Chou Hsiu's burial, and that his son should be allowed to succeed to his father's official position. An imperial decree was duly issued to the Ministry of War that read as follows:

The deceased Commander-general Chou Hsiu has devoted his life to repaying his country, and died in the course of serving the ruler. His loyalty and courage are worthy of commendation. Officers should be deputed to conduct a sacrificial ceremony at his grave site, and a tablet should be erected at the head of his tomb engraved with his posthumous title as commander-in-chief. His son should be properly nurtured until he reaches the age at which he can succeed to his father's hereditary position.

As for Ch'un-mei, when she was not caring for her son, her lascivious desires were stronger than ever, and she often kept Chou I in her perfumed boudoir for days at a time. As the mornings and evenings succeeded one another:

She indulged her lust without restraint,

until one day she came down with a hectic fever and other symptoms of consumption. Although she took medication for this every day, her appetite for food and drink diminished, her temperament became depressed, and:

Her body became as thin as a stick of kindling,³⁶

but her lascivious desires did not abate.

One day, sometime after the celebration of her birthday, and during the hottest period of the summer in the sixth month, she was sleeping late when, unexpectedly, as she and Chou I embraced each other on her bed, and he had just ejaculated, a burst of cold air emerged from her nostrils, her vaginal secretions formed a pool on the bedding, and:

Alas and alack,

she expired on top of Chou I's body. At the time of her death she was only twenty-eight years old.

When Chou I realized that she was no longer breathing, he was reduced to a state of panic, stole some gold and silver and other valuables from her trunk, secreted them in his clothing, and fled from the premises. The maidservants and wet nurses:

Did not dare to conceal these events,³⁷

and reported them to Chou Hsüan, who proceeded to put the family's senior servant Chou Chung in manacles and force him to help them track down Chou I.

Strange as it may seem,

he had gone to his aunt's home outside the city to seek refuge and was apprehended there, tied up with a length of rope, and brought back to face the music. Chou Hsüan understood what had happened but was afraid that if the scandal leaked out it might prevent Chou Chin-ko from succeeding to his father's hereditary position. He therefore had Chou I taken to the front reception hall where:

Without permitting any further explanation,

he had him beaten forty strokes with the heavy bamboo, which caused him to die on the spot.

Chou Hsüan then entrusted Chou Chin-ko to the care of Sun Erh-niang and undertook to make the funeral arrangements for Ch'un-mei, having her coffin taken to her husband's ancestral graveyard and buried in the same tomb with the commander-general. He also dismissed the two wet nurses, along with the two concubines Hai-t'ang and Yüeh-kuei, so they could seek employment elsewhere and find husbands for themselves. This left only Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh, who refused to leave, though he urged them to do so.

One day, unexpectedly, the infantry and cavalry forces of the Great Chin regime succeeded in capturing the Eastern

Capital of Pien-liang and took the retired Emperor Hui-tsung and his son Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity in the northern regions. As a result:

The Central Plain lacked a ruler,³⁸
The four quarters were disrupted,
Military weapons were everywhere,
The masses felt driven to flight.³⁹
The common people faced the calamity
of disruption;⁴⁰
The populace was forced to suffer in
dire straits.⁴¹

A large force of barbarian troops had already slaughtered its way across the borders of Shantung province with the result that among the people:

Husbands fled and wives scattered,
Specters cried and spirits howled.⁴²

Even fathers and sons were no longer able to care for each other. Ko Ts'ui-p'ing was taken back by her mother's family, while:

Everyone else fled for their lives.⁴³
Only Han Ai-chieh was left:
Without a place to seek protection.

She had no alternative but to pack her luggage, dress herself in plain traveling clothes, leave Ch'ing-ho district, and set out for Lin-ch'ing in order to find her parents. But when she arrived in Lin-ch'ing, she found that the Hsieh Family Tavern had been closed and its owner had fled.

Unexpectedly, she ran into Ch'en the Third, who said to her, "Last year, your parents went to Chiang-nan with Magnate Ho to live with him at his home in Hu-chou."

Han Ai-chieh, consequently, set out to seek her parents there, supporting herself along the way by singing songs and accompanying herself on the moon guitar.

When hungry she ate, when thirsty she drank;
Stopping by night and traveling by day;
As flustered as a dog who has
lost his way home;
As flurried as a fish who has
escaped the net.

Her bound feet with their upturned toes were small, and she was beset by:

A myriad pains and a thousand hardships.⁴⁴

After traveling for a few days, she reached the area around Hsü-chou. It was getting late, and she was passing through a solitary village when she came upon an old lady in her seventies.

Her hairdo resembled two strips of snow,
Her chignon was tied into a bag of silk,
and she was busy at the stove, pounding rice and preparing a meal.

Han Ai-chieh went up and bowed to her, saying, "I am a native of Ch'ing-ho district. On account of the current disruption, I am heading to Chiang-nan to seek my parents. I did not realize that it was this late and wonder if you might let me stay overnight at your place. I will leave first thing in the morning and will be sure to pay you for it."

The old lady contemplated the young woman and thought to herself, "She does not look like the maidservant of an impoverished household.

Her movements are cultivated;
Her demeanor is not ordinary."⁴⁵

Behold:

Her raven locks have not been dressed;⁴⁶
She is thinking only of how well-off
she used to be.
Her brows are knit like distant peaks;
She recalls the wealth and distinction
of former years.
During the autumn night the moon is
hidden by misty clouds;
The peony blossoms have been buried
beneath layers of dirt.⁴⁷

"If you are seeking a place to spend the night," the old lady said, "please have a seat on the k'ang while I finish cooking this meal. There is a crew of men engaged in dredging the riverbed who are coming to eat it."

The old lady was tending a stove on top of the k'ang, and in no time at all she produced a large kettle's worth of dried

rice mixed with beans and other grains. She also chopped up two large platters of fresh vegetables and flavored them with a pinch of salt. What should appear at this point but a crew of men whose hair was disheveled, whose legs were bare, who wore breechcloths around their waists, and whose feet were caked with mud.

Putting down their spades and shovels, they asked, "Old lady, is our food ready or not?"

"Help yourselves, and eat your fill," the old lady responded.

Thereupon, they proceeded to help themselves to the food and then went their separate ways to consume it.

As they were eating, one of them, who looked thirty-three or thirty-four years old and had a dark complexion and graying hair, asked the old lady, "Who is that person sitting on the k'ang?"

"This woman," the old lady said, "is a native of Ch'ing-ho district who is on her way to Chiang-nan to look for her parents. Since it is already late in the day, she has asked to spend the night here."

The man in question then asked her, "Lady, what is your name?"

"My surname is Han," Ai-chieh replied, "and my father is named Han Tao-kuo."

The man then came forward and took her by the hand, saying, "Sister, are you not my niece, Han Ai-chieh?"

"You look rather like my uncle, Han the Second," exclaimed Han Ai-chieh.

The two of them then:

Embraced each other by the neck and wept.

He then went on to ask, "Where are your father and mother? I thought you were all in the Eastern Capital. How do you happen to be here?"

Han Ai-chieh then proceeded from the beginning to tell him in detail what had happened and concluded by saying, "Because I had married into Commandant Chou Hsiu's household, after the death of my husband I have maintained my chaste widowhood up until now. On learning that my parents accompanied Magnate Ho to his home in Hu-chou, I determined to go in search of them. Because of the current disruption, there was no one available to go with me, and I have chosen to set out alone, supporting myself on the way by singing songs. I could hardly have anticipated that I would encounter my uncle here."

"Ever since your parents moved to the Eastern Capital," said Han the Second, "I have lacked any reliable means of livelihood. Being forced to sell my house, I have ended up working as a common laborer here, engaged in dredging the riverbed in order to earn a bowl of rice for myself. Under the circumstances, I might as well join you in going to Hu-chou in search of your parents."

"Should my uncle decide to go with me," said Han Ai-chieh, "that would certainly be wonderful."

He then filled a bowl with rice and gave it to Han Ai-chieh to eat. Han Ai-chieh sampled a mouthful but found it so coarse that she could hardly swallow it and gave up after consuming only half a bowl. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

At dawn the next day, the crew of workers departed to continue their job, but Han the Second, after paying the rent he owed to the old lady, took Han Ai-chieh with him and went out the door, as they set out on their journey together.

Han Ai-chieh was delicate by nature, and her bound feet with their upturned toes were small. She had an assortment of valuables such as hairpins and combs with her, which she sold off piecemeal in order to support them along the way. On reaching Huai-an, they boarded a boat and continued to wend their way toward Hu-chou in Chiang-nan. After some days, they found their way to Magnate Ho's home in Hu-chou and were reunited with Han Ai-chieh's parents.



Han Ai-chieh Encounters Han the Second on the Road

Who could have anticipated that Magnate Ho had already died. He had no wives or concubines in his home other than Wang Liu-erh and left behind merely a daughter who was five years old, and an estate consisting of several acres of paddy fields. In less than a year, Han Tao-kuo also died, and since Wang Liu-erh had already had an affair with Han the Second, she took her brother-in-law as her mate, and they supported themselves by farming on Magnate Ho's property.

There were numerous affluent young men in Hu-chou who noticed how clever and good-looking Han Ai-chieh appeared to be and sought to marry her. Han the Second also urged her repeatedly to take a husband, but Han Ai-chieh deliberately cut off her hair, defaced her appearance, and became a Buddhist nun, swearing never to marry anyone again. Two years later, at the age of thirty-one, she came down with an illness and died. Truly:

Before her chaste bones have been buried
under three feet of soil;
Her resentful soul first finds its way to
the nine-layered heavens.

Thus it was that Han the Second and Wang Liu-erh ended up as man and wife and inherited Magnate Ho's estate and landed property. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when the invading infantry and cavalry of the Great Chin regime succeeded in seizing Tung-ch'ang prefecture and threatened to make their way to Ch'ing-ho district, behold:

The officials endeavor to flee;

The city gates are shut by day.⁴⁸
The masses are moved to flight;
Fathers and sons are separated.

Behold:

Smoke arises in all four quarters;
The sun is hidden by yellow sand.
Rapacious boars and long serpents,⁴⁹
Attempt to swallow each other up.⁵⁰
Dragons contend and tigers battle,⁵¹
Each contending for its dominance.
Black standards and crimson flags,
Overspread the suburban landscape.
Men shriek aloud and women weep,⁵²
A myriad homes are terror-struck.
Foreign troops and alien generals,
Are like gathering ants or swarming bees;⁵³
Their short swords and long spears,⁵⁴
Resemble thick forests and dense bamboos.⁵⁵
In place after place, dead bodies and human bones
lie scattered higgledy-piggledy;
In pile after pile, split blades and broken swords
are discarded in jumbled heaps.⁵⁶
Every parent holds a son or embraces a daughter;
Every home closes its gates and locks its doors.⁵⁷
Nine out of ten houses have been vacated,⁵⁸
No longer resembling rural or urban communities.
The deer flee and the squirrels scatter;
Leaving no trace of ritual, music, or formality.

Truly, it is a case of:

The palace ladies weep into their red sleeves;
The royal sons flee in their civilian disguise.⁵⁹

At this juncture, when Wu Yüeh-niang in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that the barbarian troops were approaching and saw that family after family had locked the gates to their houses and fled in disorder, she felt compelled to do likewise and got together some gold, pearls, and other valuables to take with her. At that time, her elder brother Wu K'ai had already died, so she set out accompanied only by Wu the Second, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and her ten-year-old son Hsiao-ko.⁶⁰ After seeing that both the front and rear doors to the residence were securely locked, they headed for Chi-nan prefecture to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou. By so doing, she hoped, on the one hand, to escape the invading army, and, on the other hand, to formalize Hsiao-ko's betrothal to Yün Li-shou's daughter.

Along the way:

Every individual they met was feeling panicked;
Each and every one of them in a state of shock.

The unfortunate Wu Yüeh-niang, dressed in her traveling clothes, along with Wu the Second and the other males and females, five of them in all, fell in with the crowds of other fleeing refugees, managed to squeeze their way through the city gate, and made their way into the suburbs. As they proceeded on their way, they arrived at a crossroads in the open countryside where they encountered a Buddhist priest whose body was clad in a purplish-brown cassock, who held a metal staff with nine rings attached to it in his hand, who wore straw sandals on his feet, and over whose shoulder he carried a calico bag containing his sacred texts.

Stepping forward in large strides, he proceeded to press his palms together in front of his chest and bow to her in the Buddhist fashion, saying in a loud voice as he did so, "Lady Wu, where are you going? Pray hand my disciple over to me."

This startled Yüeh-niang so that she:

Turned pale with consternation,

and addressed him saying, "Master, what disciple is it that you are asking for?"

"Lady," the monk replied, "you had better not pretend to be:

Still asleep in dreamland.

You must remember how, ten years ago, on the eastern spur of Mount T'ai, you were being pursued by Yin T'ien-hsi and sought refuge for the night in my mountain cave. I am that same Ch'an Master Snow Cave, whose religious name is P'u-ching. You promised then to let me have your son as a disciple, so why have you not turned him over to me?"

"Master," interjected Wu the Second, "you are a Buddhist monk. How can you be so:

Unamenable to reason?⁶¹

In this year of political upheaval we are fleeing for our lives. It is her hope that in the future this only child of hers will be able to carry on the ancestral sacrifices. How could she bear to relinquish him to you so he could abandon lay life and become a monk?"

"Are you really refusing to turn him over to me?" the monk asked.

"Master," said Wu the Second, "don't talk such nonsense, or hinder us from making our escape. I fear that the barbarian army may show up at any moment.

Who knows in the morning what evening may bring."⁶²

"Since you refuse to turn my disciple over to me," said the monk, "it is already late in the day, and you cannot proceed any further. The barbarians have not yet come this far. You might as well come with me to stay overnight at this temple, before leaving first thing in the morning."

"Master," inquired Wu Yüeh-niang, "what temple is that?"

The monk merely pointed with his finger and said, "the one up there by the side of the road."

As the monk led the way forward, they found themselves at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, which Wu Yüeh-niang recognized as the one that she had visited once before in the past. By the time they arrived there, the abbot and more than half of the resident monks had already fled, leaving behind only a handful of Ch'an monks who were sitting in the lotus position in the meditation hall in the rear, where a large glazed censer was burning incense before an effigy of the Buddha. At the time, the sun was already sinking behind the hills. Behold:

The teeming crossroads are all ablaze with
the light of burning lanterns;
The Temple of the Nine Stars is enhanced by
fragrant mist and tolling bells.
The wheel of the bright moon is suspended
underneath the blue heavens;
A handful of scattered stars serves to
light up the azure firmament.
Within the camps of the Six Imperial Armies,
The wailing of painted bugles frequently resounds;
On the upper floors of the five drum towers,
Water drips in the bronze tanks of the clepsydras.
On all four sides the evening fog,
Densely encompasses the dancing pavilions
and singing platforms;
In the three markets a cloak of mist,
Faintly enshrouds the green gauze windows
and vermilion gates.
Pair by pair, the strolling beauties
return to their boudoirs;
One by one, the young scholars close
the blinds in their studies.⁶³

That evening, Wu Yüeh-niang, along with Wu the Second, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and Hsiao-ko, five males and females in all, spent the night in the abbot's quarters at the temple. Some of the junior monks recognized her and provided Yüeh-niang and the others with something to eat. Meanwhile, Ch'an Master P'u-ching assumed the lotus position on a platform in the meditation hall, where he kept time by beating on a wooden fish as he recited the sutras. Yüeh-niang, along with Hsiao-ko and Hsiao-yü, slept on the bed, while Wu the Second and Tai-an slept together on the floor. As people who had been suffering from alarm and fatigue, they fell fast asleep.

The only one among them who failed to sleep soundly was Hsiao-yü, who got up in the abbot's quarters and watched through a crack in the door as P'u-ching recited the sutras.

As the third watch of the night gradually approached, behold:

The metallic autumn wind grew desolate;
The slanting moon appeared more somber.
The bustle of human activity subsided;⁶⁴
The myriad pipes of Heaven were silent.

On looking at the large incense-burning censer in front of the effigy of Buddha, she saw that it was:
Half alight but not extinguished.

When Ch'an Master P'u-ching realized that:

The empire was in a state of disorder,
The population was suffering distress,

and that:

The corpses of those killed in battle,
Appeared to be incalculable in number;

He exerted his compassionate feelings,
To dispense his boundless benevolence.
Addressing himself reverently to the Buddha, he recited a spell for dispelling enmity, intended to:
Rescue the incarcerated souls,⁶⁵
Free them from old resentments,
Clear impediments in their way,
So they could be reincarnated,
Without any remaining residues.

Thereupon, he recited the spell for dispelling enmity more than a hundred times.

Shortly thereafter:

A cold breeze blew forlornly,
A chilly wind began to sough,⁶⁶
and several tens of ghosts appeared, some of them:
With scorched heads and singed scalps,
Disheveled hair and mud-stained faces.

Others:

With ruptured fingers and broken arms,
Gutted stomachs and gouged out hearts.

And still others:

Without heads and with crippled limbs;

Or with:

Locked cangues hanging on their necks.

They had come to be enlightened by the Ch'an Master's recitation of the spell and:

Lined up neatly to either side of him.⁶⁷

The Ch'an Master then addressed them, saying:

"You group of living individuals,
Seek to repay enmity with enmity,⁶⁸
Unwilling to seek reconciliation.
Whenever can this come to an end?

You must listen carefully to what I say, if you wish to pursue your separate paths to reincarnation. There is a gatha that says:

I urge you not to harbor enmity;
Acute enmity is hard to resolve.
Enmity can arise in one any day,
But cannot be resolved for ages.
If one repays enmity with grace,
It is to pour hot water on snow.
If you requite hatred with hate,
It is a wolf meeting a scorpion.
I sense those who harbor enmity,
Permit enmity to devastate them.⁶⁹
Those who sense this and repent,
Are able to grasp their natures,
Understand their original minds,⁷⁰
And rid themselves of animosity.
The potency of this sacred text,
Redeems one from his evil karma.
Each of you may be reincarnated,
If you harbor no further enmity.
The head is altered and the face replaced, as
the wheel of transmigration turns;
It is useless to try to grasp what awaits you
in the predestined life to come."⁷¹

At this juncture, the crowd of ghosts thanked him and then disappeared. Hsiao-yü had been surreptitiously scrutinizing them but did not recognize anyone.

In a little while, another man appeared, who was more than six feet in stature.

His appearance was stately,⁷²

He was fully clad in armor,

and his breast had been pierced by an arrow.

"I am Commander-general Chou Hsiu," he said. "In the course of contending with an enemy general, I died on the field of battle. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the second son of Shen Ching, with the name Shen Shou-shan."

Before he had even finished speaking, another person appeared, dressed in impressively immaculate clothing, who said, "I am the wealthy gentleman from Ch'ing-ho district, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who died after suffering a leakage of blood in my urine. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the second son of the

wealthy gentleman Shen T'ung, with the name Shen Yüeh."

Hsiao-Yü recognized him to be her former master and was too scared to utter a word.

After this, another person appeared, carrying his head in his hands, while his whole body was covered with blood, and said, "I am Ch'en Ching-chi, who was murdered by Chang Sheng. Thanks to the Master's deliverance and the power of the scriptures, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a son of the Wang family."

After this, a woman appeared who was also carrying her head in her hands, while her chest was covered with blood, and said, "I am the wife of Wu Chih, and concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, P'an Chin-lien, who had the bad luck to be slain by my enemy Wu Sung. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn in the Eastern Capital as a daughter of the Li family."

After this, another man appeared who was dwarflike in stature and whose countenance was purplish and said, "I am Wu Chih who died as a result of Dame Wang's persuading P'an Chin-lien to poison me. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in Hsü-chou as a son of the peasant family named Fan."

After this, another woman appeared whose face was thin and sallow, while her body was dripping blood, and said, "I am Li P'ing-erh, the wife of Hua Tzu-hsü and concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who died from a case of acute metrorrhagia. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the daughter of Commander Yüan."

After this, another man appeared, who said, "I am Hua Tzu-hsü, who suffered the misfortune of being exasperated to death by my wife. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a son in Battalion Commander Cheng's family."

After this, another woman appeared with her footbindings wrapped around her neck, who said, "I am the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing's servant Lai-wang, Sung Hui-lien, who:

Hanged herself until dead.

Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a daughter in the Chu family."

After this, another woman appeared, who had:

A sallow face and emaciated flesh,⁷³

and said, "I am the wife of Commander-general Chou Hsiu, P'ang Ch'un-mei, who perished from sexual exhaustion. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a daughter in the K'ung family."

After this, another man appeared:

Who was stark naked with disheveled hair,⁷⁴

Whose entire body was covered with weals,

and identified himself, saying, "I am Chang Sheng, who was beaten to death. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn as a son in the impoverished Kao family attached to the Ta-hsing guard in the Eastern Capital."

After this, another woman appeared, with a rope around her neck, and said, "I am Sun Hsüeh-o, the former concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who unhappily:

Hanged myself until dead.

Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated as a daughter in the family of the impoverished Yao family outside the Eastern Capital."

After this, another young woman appeared with her footbindings wrapped around her neck, and said, "I am Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter and Ch'en Ching-chi's wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who also unhappily:

Hanged myself until dead.

Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated as a daughter of Chung Kuei, a policeman who resides outside the wall of the Eastern Capital."

After this, another young man appeared and identified himself with the words, "I am Chou I, who was also beaten to death. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn as a son in the Kao family that resides outside the wall of the Eastern Capital and am named Kao Liu-chu."

When they had done speaking, they all suddenly disappeared.

Hsiao-yü was so astonished by this that she shivered in awe and thought to herself, "So this monk is capable of communicating with the ghosts of the departed."

She wanted to go back to bed and tell Yüeh-niang about it, but who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang was fast asleep, and her numinous soul's true being dreamt that, together with Wu the Second and the others, she was still on her way to Chi-nan prefecture, with the string of a hundred imported pearls, and a gem-studded chatelaine in hand, in order to seek refuge from the invading army with Yün Li-shou, and finalize the betrothal of Hsiao-ko to his daughter.

Eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty;⁷⁵

Stopping by night and traveling by day;

they arrived in Chi-nan prefecture, where she asked an elderly man where Assistant Regional Commander Yün Li-shou was stationed.

The elderly man pointed the way out to them, saying, "He is stationed at a place, some two li from here, called the Ling-pi Stockade, which faces the river on one side and the mountains on the other. This Ling-pi Stockade is located on top of the city wall, and there are a thousand troops and horses stationed there. Assistant Regional Commander Yün Li-shou is the stockade commander there."

When Wu Yüeh-niang and her companions, five persons in all, arrived at the gate of the stockade, and Yün Li-shou learned that she had come to consummate the betrothal of their children:

He greeted her like an old acquaintance,⁷⁶

as they exchanged the customary amenities. It so happened that his wife had recently died, so he asked a neighbor called Old Mrs. Wang to keep Yüeh-niang company, provided her with a lavish feast of wine and food in the rear hall of the stockade, and saw that Wu the Second and Tai-an were entertained in another place.

In the course of their conversation, Yüeh-niang mentioned her need to flee from the invading army, and her desire to consummate the betrothal of their children. She also brought out the string of a hundred imported pearls and the gem-studded chatelaine and presented them to him as a provisional betrothal gift. Yün Li-shou accepted them but did not have anything further to say about the betrothal.

That evening, he also arranged for Old Mrs. Wang to spend the night with Yüeh-niang, and to feel her out in order to ascertain her sentiments toward himself.

In the course of doing so, she said to Yüeh-niang, "Although Yün Li-shou is a military official, he is:

A book-reading gentleman;⁷⁷

and ever since you and his wife betrothed your children to each other by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of your blouses, you have been on his mind. Unexpectedly, his wife died, and he has been living as a widower ever since. At present, he is serving as the commander of this mountainous stockade. Although his position is not high:

When mounted he commands the troops;

When dismounted he rules the people;⁷⁸

and their life and death are in his hands. If you see fit not to reject him, he would like to:

Unite with you in connubial bliss,⁷⁹

That you may share your mutual joy.⁸⁰

Your son would also benefit from such a marriage alliance. Once peace has been restored, it would not be too late to return home together."

When Yüeh-niang heard this proposition, she:

Turned pale with consternation,

and was speechless for some time.

Old Mrs. Wang reported what she had said to Yün Li-shou, and the next evening he prepared wine in the rear hall and invited Yüeh-niang to have a drink with him there. Yüeh-niang thought that it was only to formalize Hsiao-ko's betrothal to his daughter and lost no time in joining him there, where they sat down together.

Yün Li-shou then said to her, "Sister-in-law, you may not be aware of it, but although I am only in charge of this mountainous stockade here, I command a considerable body of both infantry and cavalry and possess quantities of money and silk, fancy clothing, gold and silver, and other valuables. The only thing I lack is a wife to take charge of my household. For some time I have thought of you:

Like a thirsty person longing for drink;

Like a parched person longing for coolness.

I could hardly have anticipated that you would show up here today in order to formalize the betrothal of your son to my daughter.

Heaven has granted this affinity,

That we may share our mutual joy.

If we end up here as man and wife:

We can enjoy a lifetime of bliss.⁸¹

There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."

When Yüeh-niang heard this proposal she was enraged and cursed at Yün Li-shou, saying, "Who could have known that you are nothing but:

The skeleton of a dog wrapped in human skin.

My late husband did not treat you with disrespect. How can you now come out with such:

Language fit only for a dog or a horse?"

Yün Li-shou only laughed at this and then, stepping forward to embrace Yüeh-niang, said to her, "Lady, you were residing in a home of your own. What did you come to my place here for? It has always been true that:

It is easier to do business when the

customer comes to your door.⁸²

I don't know why it is, but I no sooner set eyes on you than you captivated by soul. There is no alternative. For better or for worse, you must marry me."

So saying, he brought over some wine to share with Yüeh-niang.

"Go up front and call in my younger brother," said Yüeh-niang. "There is something I need to say to him."

Yün Li-shou laughed at this and said, "Your younger brother and your servant Tai-an have already been killed by me."

He then said to his attendants, "Bring those things here to show to the lady."

In no time at all, by the light of the lamp, they brought in the two heads of Wu the Second and Tai-an, dripping with blood. This so perturbed Yüeh-niang that:

Her complexion turned the color of dirt,

and she:

Fell to the floor in tears.

Yün Li-shou responded by:

Stepping forward and lifting her up,⁸³
saying as he did so, "Lady:

There is no need for you to be upset.⁸⁴
Since your brother is already dead, you can become my wife. I am a regional commander, so such a marriage:
Would not dishonor you in any way."⁸⁵

Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "Since this lousy character has already slain my brother and my servant, if I don't go along with him, I am likely to forfeit my life as well."

Thereupon, she pretended that:

Her anger had changed to joy,
and said, "You will have to agree to my conditions before I will consent to be your wife."

Yün Li-shou responded, "No matter what your conditions may be, I will agree to them."

"If you first formalize my son's marriage," said Yüeh-niang, "I will then agree to become your wife."

"That's no problem," responded Yün Li-shou.

So saying, he proceeded to call his daughter out and pushed her over to Hsiao-ko so they could:

Share a loving cup,
Tie a nuptial knot,⁸⁶

and become man and wife. Only after that did he pull Yüeh-niang over to him and propose to engage in the game of clouds and rain together; but Yüeh-niang resisted him and refused to comply.

Yün Li-shou was enraged at this and cursed her, saying, "You worthless woman! You tricked me into consummating the marriage of my daughter to your son, and now presume that I would not dare to kill your son."

So saying, he went to the head of the bed, where he:

Picked up a sword and brought it down in a sweep,
Scattering blood for a distance of several paces.

Truly:

When the three feet of sharp blade
struck the neck,
The flood of fresh blood inundated
everything around.

When Yüeh-niang saw that he had hacked Hsiao-ko to death, she couldn't help uttering a loud cry, which caused her to:

Wake up with a jerk,
revealing it all to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch.

She was so perturbed by this that:

Her whole body was covered with sweat,
And her entire anatomy oozed moisture,

as she cried out, "How strange! How strange!"

"Mistress," asked Hsiao-yü, who was lying at her side, "what are you crying about?"

"Just now, I had an inauspicious dream," Yüeh-niang responded and then went on to tell her all about it.

"I was unable to sleep a little while ago," said Hsiao-yü, "and got up to go and spy surreptitiously on what that monk was doing through a crack in the door. It turns out that he has been communicating with ghosts the whole night long. Just now, my late master, the Fifth Lady, the Sixth Lady, Brother-in-law Ch'en, the commandant Chou Hsiu, Sun Hsüeh-o, Lai-wang's wife Sung Hui-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all came to speak to him and then went their separate ways."

"Many of them are buried in the graveyard behind this temple," said Yüeh-niang. "It is not surprising that:

The stranded souls of the unjustly dead,
should manifest themselves during the quiet of the night."

Mistress and servant were unable to go back to sleep, and before they knew it, it was the fifth watch, and the cocks crowed. Wu Yüeh-niang hastily got up, washed her face, and went into the meditation hall in order to pay obeisance to the Buddha and burn incense.

Whom should she encounter there but Master P'u-ching, who was sitting on his meditation platform and addressed her in a loud voice, saying, "Lady Wu, have you achieved enlightenment now?"⁸⁷

Yüeh-niang then knelt down and made him an obeisance, saying, "Permit me to inform your reverence that your disciple, née Wu, with her:

Fleshly eyes and mortal body,⁸⁸

did not recognize you to be the incarnation of an ancient Buddha. But thanks to the dream from which I have just awakened, I am now enlightened."

"Since you have already achieved enlightenment," the Master responded, "there is no need for you to continue on this journey. Should you do so, things will turn out the way they did in your dream, and all five of you will lose your lives. The fact that you and your son encountered me is something that was:

Both ordained and fated to happen to you,⁸⁹

because in days past you planted the seeds of your good fortune. Were that not so, it would have been difficult for you to

avoid:

The splitting up of your flesh and blood.⁹⁰

Initially, your deceased husband Hsi-men Ch'ing committed evil deeds and was anything but virtuous. This son of yours was reborn into your family in order to dissipate your wealth and destroy your property and would have ended up with:

His body and his head in different places.⁹¹

I will now undertake to lead him to salvation as my disciple. As the saying goes:

Should a single son leave the home to be ordained,

Nine generations of one's ancestors will be saved.⁹²

This will also have the benefit for your late husband of:

Compensating for his evil karma,

so that he too may achieve salvation. If you don't believe me, follow me, and I will allow you to see for yourself."

Thereupon, he strode into the abbot's quarters, where they could see that Hsiao-ko was still asleep on the bed. The Master raised the staff in his hand and touched him on the head with it, while telling Yüeh-niang and the others to take a look. All of a sudden, he turned over, and they could see that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing:

With a heavy cangue around his neck,⁹³

And iron chains enclosing his waist.⁹⁴

The Master then touched him again with his staff, and just as before, he appeared to be Hsiao-ko asleep on the bed. When Yüeh-niang saw this, without knowing it, she began to weep out loud, concluding that Hsiao-ko was a reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long, Hsiao-ko woke up, and Yüeh-niang said to him, "You must now follow the Master to leave home, take the tonsure, and be anointed as a priest before the Buddha."

In a piteous state, Yüeh-niang embraced him and wept bitterly, feeling that she had raised him in vain in the expectation that upon reaching the age of fifteen he would be able to inherit and perpetuate the ancestral line; and never having anticipated that on meeting this Ch'an Master he would be spirited away into a celibate life. Wu the Second, Hsiao-yü, and Tai-an were also overcome with grief.

Thereupon, Master P'u-ching took charge of Hsiao-ko, conferred the religious name of Ming-wu upon him, and bade farewell to Yüeh-niang; saying to her on the way out, "You do not need to proceed any further. Before long, the barbarian army will withdraw; the territory will be split between two separate dynasties; one to the south and one to the north; and the Central Plain will have a ruler of its own. In no more than ten days:



Ch'an Master P'u-ching Spirits Away Hsi-men Hsiao-ko

The armed troops will be withdrawn;
 And the territory will be pacified.
 You can thus return to your home and:
 Spend your days with peace of mind."⁹⁵

"Master," Yüeh-niang responded, "once you have accomplished my son's salvation:
 On what day of what year,
 will mother and son ever be able to see each other again?"
 So saying, she instinctively took hold of Hsiao-ko and began to weep out loud.
 "Lady," said the Master, "stop your crying. Another Master is arriving over there."
 This fooled them all into swiveling their necks to look in the direction to which he pointed, whereupon, along with
 Hsiao-ko, he:
 Transformed himself into a gust of clear breeze,⁹⁶
 and disappeared from sight. Truly:
 Having thrice descended to the mundane world
 where he was not recognized;
 All of a sudden he flew away over the summit

of Mount T'ai's Eastern Peak.

We will say no more here about how Master P'u-ching spirited Hsiao-ko away.

To resume our story, after this event Wu Yüeh-niang, Wu the Second, and the others continued to stay at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. In less than ten days time, sure enough, the Great Chin regime set up Chang Pang-ch'ang as a puppet emperor in the Eastern Capital, with a hierarchy of civil and military officials. The two Sung dynasty emperors, Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung, were subsequently taken to the north in captivity. The Prince of K'ang:

Escaped across the river on a clay horse,⁹⁷
and assumed the throne in Chien-k'ang. This was Emperor Kao-tsung of the Southern Sung dynasty, who appointed Tsung Tse as general-in-chief and succeeded in retaking parts of Shantung and Hopei from the Chin invaders. The country was thus split into two regimes, the Chin dynasty in the north and the Southern Sung dynasty in the south. As a result:

The realm under Heaven was once again at peace,⁹⁸ and

The people were able to resume their vocations.

When Wu Yüeh-niang returned home and opened the gate to her residence, she found that nothing of the family possessions or the household furnishings had been lost. Later on, she changed Tai-an's name to Hsi-men An and allowed him to inherit what was left of the family property. Henceforth, people addressed him as the Honorable Young Hsi-men, and he supported Yüeh-niang during her old age. She lived on to the age of sixty-nine before dying a natural death, which was the reward she had earned by doing good deeds and reciting the scriptures during her lifetime. There is a poem that testifies to this:

An idle glance at this transmitted text leaves
one with confused feelings;
Who fully understands the extent to which the
Way of Heaven is cyclical?⁹⁹
Hsi-men Ch'ing's wealth and corruption made it
hard to continue his line;
Ch'en Ching-chi's licentious cavorting ensured
his eventual annihilation.
The goodness of Meng Yü-lou and Wu Yüeh-niang
vouchsafed them long lives;
The wantonness of Li P'ing-erh and Ch'un-mei
led to their early deaths.
It is not strange that P'an Chin-lien should
meet with an awful fate;
And her ill repute last for a thousand years,¹⁰⁰
perpetuated in fiction.

CHIN P'ING MEI

